



# Five Lessons on Sexting

## The Naked Truth about Sexting

by Phoebe Uy

### LESSON 2: THE INTERNET IS NOT WITHIN YOUR SPHERE OF CONTROL.

As soon as your content hits the web or goes mobile, it becomes public property. Online, people can store and distribute anything you share. Website services, third party advertisers, your exes and old friends can reproduce, alter or publish your personal files without your consent or knowledge, for a range of purposes. There's also the issue of sexual predators exploiting children's images and adding it to their catalogue of child pornography. In 2006, a 13-year-old girl was coerced and threatened into taking explicit images via webcam by a New York man whom she met in a chat room. He later posted the photos on the social networking site MySpace.

### LESSON 3: THE INTERNET IS VIRAL.

Things spread exponentially over the Internet. All it takes is text-message forwarding or a popular online social platform like Twitter to make racy photos go viral in a matter of hours. From there, people can pass on the photos to other sites and other contacts. Soon enough, those photos could come up as the number one search result when someone Googles your name. For 18-year-old Jesse Logan of Ohio, all it took was a break-up for her nude photos to reach hundreds of students. It all started when Jesse's ex-boyfriend sent nude pictures of her to other female schoolmates. After months of shame and harassment from classmates, Jesse decided to take her own life.

Kids need to understand that privacy and trust end with the relationship. There is no insurance that secrets or the risqué photos or videos shared within the privacy of a relationship won't ever leak out to the public. According to Parry Aftab, an Internet security expert, "44% of the boys say that they've seen sexual images of girls in their school, and about 15% of them are disseminating those images when they break up with the girls."

### LESSON 4: WHAT GOES ON THE INTERNET STAYS ON THE INTERNET.

After uploading your content to the Internet, the first download marks a point of no return. Your original content now nests on the hard drives of other computers, where it can be shared with other users. File sharing and storage are what makes it virtually impossible to completely remove your personal files off the web. And while most social networking sites offer the option to delete posts, there is that period of time when the posts were publicly available and possibly carried away in the charge of online friends and surfers. Consider High School Musical's Vanessa Hudgens. In 2007, the star emailed a nude photo of herself to actor Drake Bell which later surfaced on numerous blogs across the net. Her lawyer demanded that the blog sites remove the photo as it exposed an underage Vanessa and infringed on several legal rights. Two years later, despite her lawyer's attempts, the photo is still making rounds on the web.

### LESSON 5: NEGATIVE PUBLICITY ON THE INTERNET CAN COST YOU.

Anything posted or distributed online, can come back to haunt you in the future, even if it was from over a decade ago. Your online reputation can now cost you a career opportunity or university entry down the road. According to a recent CareerBuilder survey, the Internet has become a referral base for employers, where 45% report using social networking sites like Facebook to screen job applicants. College admission officers are also turning to the Internet using Facebook and MySpace to scope out prospective students. In 2006, Becca Manns, a former student at the University of Louisville, became notorious after sexually explicit photos of her were discovered online. She was then kicked off the cheerleading squad and expelled from the university.

This nuisance we call "sexting" is a perfect educational opportunity to introduce the topic of online privacy. Sexting prevention, education and intervention should involve an open dialogue with youth. The goal is to eliminate poor judgment and help them make the most informed decisions possible when they are using the Internet. Kids need to be the voice in their own heads and understand that what they do online always has impact and influence offline.

Phoebe Uy is a staff writer for KiwiCommons.com, an Internet safety resource dedicated to providing teachers and parents with the most informative late-breaking news, tips, product reviews and downloads. Kiwi Commons is proud to be the content partner of educators across the province of Ontario, including the York Catholic District School Board. 🍁

Kids are sexting in class, in the hallways, at lunch and after school. It is the high-tech way to flirt with boyfriends, girlfriends, crushes and online strangers. In concept, sexting is nothing new to previous generations—think of Seven Minutes in Heaven gone digital. It involves the electronic transmission of sexually suggestive messages or images using cell phones or the Internet. With one click, kids' sexual antics, which were once relegated to the privacy of their bedrooms, can be made available to households and classrooms across the globe.

According to a survey by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy ([www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org)) in 2008, 20% of teens have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves, while 48% say they have received such messages. However, pigeonholing it as a teenage fad is misleading. Children as young as 11 are engaging in the practice, making it a safety issue across elementary and high schools.

For school officials, sexting on school grounds has become a legal headache and liability. For teachers, it is a classroom distraction and a significant risk to the emotional and psychological health of a child. And to authorities, the act is neither benign nor innocent, landing kids in court on charges of child pornography in some jurisdictions.

The moral panic over the sexting craze has kids writing off adult concerns as overblown fears. All the safety spiels and headlines claiming sexting as "the newest epidemic facing parents and children" and "a dangerous sex crime" register as mere sensationalism to many kids. So how can parents and teachers effectively discourage the practice without coming off as being uncool and overdramatic?

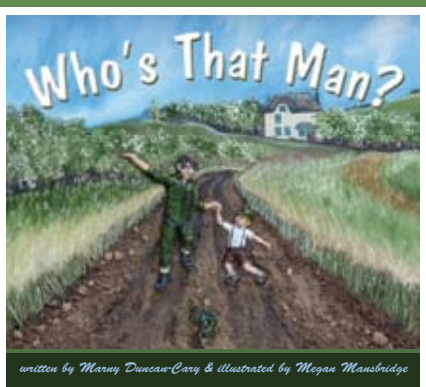
The aim is to get kids informed on how the Internet operates, the implications of sexting and how to manage their online privacy. Real-life cases of sexting misadventures will help drive home the connection to their own actions. The first step to sexting prevention is to go over the five lessons on Internet privacy.

### LESSON 1: THE INTERNET IS PUBLIC.

This states the evident, but do kids know who can access the sexually charged photos or videos they plan to share or upload? With over 1.5 billion web surfers worldwide, people's photos and videos have the ability to go global within thirty seconds. Clicking "send" can virally land them on computer or mobile screens of pretty much anyone—parents, teachers, bosses, peers and pedophiles. Case in point: Lily Allen—a singer and the latest victim of celebrity sexting scandals. After accidentally sending one of her contacts a topless picture of herself on the beach via cell phone, the photos made its way into headlines and gossip blogs across the Internet.

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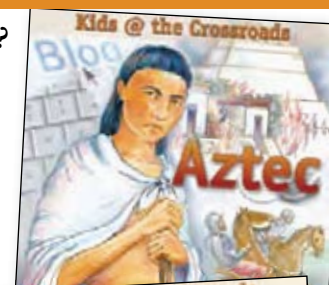
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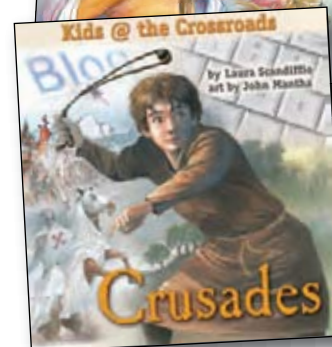
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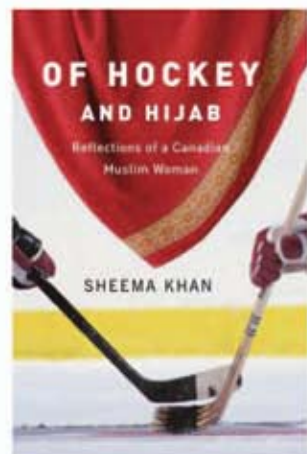
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