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## Sexting and Tweens - A Guide for Parents

As parents, we sometimes discover conversations or image exchanges on our tweens' devices that border on sexting. This behaviour often begins in 5th or 6th grade and is typically an early form of flirting. Nowadays, kids use videos and texts to communicate with their peers, but harmless flirting can quickly escalate. Therefore, it's crucial to discuss this topic with your child, covering consent, sharing intimate images, the law, and respectful relationships.

A great place for these conversations is in the car during one-on-one drives. Your child may try to avoid the conversation, but they can't escape it, and eventually, they'll engage. Start by asking questions such as "What would you do if" or "What happens if"

### Here are some suggestions:

- Do you know anyone at school who has sent or received a nude or nearly nude image?
- Was it their idea to send the photo, or did someone convince them?
- How did you find out about it? Was it shared, or was everyone gossiping?
- What would you do if you received a nude image from someone?
- Have you learned about the law regarding sexting at school?
- Do you have any questions about what you've heard or learned?

Answer your child's questions honestly and openly. Teaching them about happy, healthy, and respectful relationships early on is essential. Encourage open communication and assure them that they won't get in trouble for discussing this topic.

As you continue to talk about sexting, it will get easier. The younger you start, the better. Tweens should understand the risks of sexting, such as images being shared, gossiped about, or used against them in sextortion cases. Sextortion is a severe crime that involves threats to distribute private material unless the victim provides sexual images, favours, or money. It can easily happen to this age group, especially when they interact with strangers online.

Help your child understand the legal consequences of sexting and the importance of respectful relationships and trust. Explain that sexting is a sexual activity, and all sexual acts, including sexting, must be consensual. At Safe on Social, we advocate for "Enthusiastic Consent," which means all parties are excited about participating and do not feel pressured.

Breaching consent by sharing a sexting message is never acceptable, nor is sending unsolicited nudes or sharing someone else's sexts.

Teach your child that they have the right to say "no" and that it's never okay to pressure someone into any sexual activity. Encourage them to practice saying, "No, I don't send nudes," to normalize this response.

Ensure your child feels comfortable discussing this topic with you or another a trusted adult they can talk to. Get to know other parents at your child's school to foster open communication if issues arise between tweens.

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