

## **Be aware of the dangers of “sexting”**

### **Sexting: the exchange of sexually explicit photos through text messaging**

**You think sexting is a joke? Think again. Sexting can be a crime and can potentially be dangerous. Let’s face it, most teenagers we know have a cell phone and use it constantly. Many cell phones are equipped with digital camera and video features. In a disturbing trend, kids are using their cell phones to take sexually explicit photos of themselves and then sending the photos to other kids via their cell phones.**

**Most students, parents and teachers do not realize that when sexually explicit photos of kids under 18 are sent from cell phone to cell phone, serious crimes are being committed. In Pennsylvania, the photographing of a child under 18 engaged in a prohibited sexual act is against the law, as is the dissemination of such a photograph. Photos that depict a lewd exhibition of the genitals or photos depicting nudity in a sexual manner are considered prohibited sexual acts.**

**Here’s an example: 14-year-old Sally thinks it would be cool to send some nude photos of herself to her 15-year-old boyfriend Jim-for his eyes only. Jim and Sally break up. Jim then sends Sally’s nude photos to all his friends with cell phones. Jim’s friends send them to their friends in other schools. Soon Sally’s nude photos are all over school, all over town and have even made their way onto the internet. Sally and her parents are humiliated. A child sexual predator has even seen Sally’s photos on the internet and has taken an interest in her.**

**Everyone who has possessed Sally’s nude photos on their cell phone has committed a felony offense. Every person who has sent Sally’s nude photos to someone else has committed a felony offense. These crimes can lead to arrest, prosecution, court appearances, adjudication, conviction, fines and costs, probation, placement in a juvenile facility and even jail. A juvenile record can negatively affect a student’s ability to attend college, receive financial aid or get a job. Sexting is no joke.**

#### ***Tips for parents:***

- Talk to your kids about the legal consequences and potential dangers associated with sexting**
- Set limits and rules for the use of your child’s cell phone and/or computer**
- Periodically view the contents of your child’s cell phone and/or computer**
- Be engaged in your child’s life**

*Tips for students*

- **Don't take photos of yourself that you wouldn't want your parents or grandparents to see**
- **Don't let anyone talk you into sending a nude or explicit photo of yourself**
- **Keep in mind that once a photo is sent to a cell phone or computer, you cannot control who will see it or how many people will see it**
- **If someone sends you a photo containing sexually explicit or nude images, erase it immediately**

**District Attorney Francis J. Schultz**

**\*Crawford County Juvenile Probation Officer Sam Pendolino contributed to this article**