

# Safe and Responsible Social Networking

## Strategies for keeping yourself safe online



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Social networking web sites such as **twitter** and **facebook** are useful Internet tools to keep in touch with friends and family, and can be utilized to meet new people with similar interests. These sites have become very popular among teens as they seek to explore/define who they are and connect with others like themselves. If used responsibly, these sites can be a positive and beneficial resource for youth. Too often, however, adolescents include too much personal information, discuss inappropriate behaviors that could get them into trouble, or otherwise place themselves at risk by what they share on their online profiles. We have heard a number of stories of youth who have been cyberbullied using information found on social networking web sites. Follow these guidelines to use social networking web sites safely and responsibly:



- **Assume that EVERYONE has access to your profile** (parents, teachers, future employers, and law enforcement) even if you have your profile restricted to “friends only.” Don’t discuss things you wouldn’t want them to know about. Don’t use language you wouldn’t use in front of your parents. Finally, make sure you set your profile to “private” so that you can control who has easy access to your information.
- **USE DISCRETION when putting pictures (or any content for that matter) on your profile.** Your friends might think that picture of you acting silly at the party last night is hilarious, but how will your parents or a potential employer react? Also remember that when your friend (or a stranger) takes your picture it may end up on their profile for all to see.
- **Assume people WILL use the information on your profile to cause you harm.** Don’t put anything online you wouldn’t want your worst enemy to know. Also, don’t add people as “friends” unless you know them in real life. Even if you think you know them, be skeptical. Kids often think it is cool to accumulate and have thousands of “friends.” Just remember that these people have open access to all of your posted content and information.
- **Assume there are predators out there trying to FIND YOU** based on the information you provide on your profile. Think like a predator. What information on your profile identifies who you are, where you hang out, and where you live? Never post this kind of information anywhere online. Your friends know how to find you.
- **You may be held responsible for inappropriate content on your profile** that is in violation of the Terms of Service or Acceptable Use Policies of the Internet Service Provider or web site(s) you use. Moreover, school districts across the country are revising their policies to allow them to discipline students for online behavior that can be linked to a disruption in the classroom environment – even if you wrote or posted the content at home from your own computer.

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The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents. For more information, visit <http://www.cyberbullying.us>. © 2009 Cyberbullying Research Center - Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin

# Sexting: Advice for Teens

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*Sharing pictures with romantic partners is a natural part of any relationship. It's important, however, that you are doing so safely, responsibly, and appropriately. Exchanging explicit (nude) images is not only uncool, it's illegal. It can get you in trouble with your parents, your school, and even the police. Think twice before taking an explicit picture of yourself, or sending one of yourself—or someone else—to another person. You never know where it could end up or what kind of trouble you could find yourself in. Follow these basic principles to keep your privates private.*

**1. Delete any explicit images sent to you.** Even having these images on your phone could land you in a heap of trouble.

**2. Do not distribute explicit images.** If someone sends you an explicit image of themselves or someone else, do not pass it on to anyone else. Try to think about how you would feel if someone sent similar pictures of you to someone else that you didn't know or wouldn't want to see.

**3. Ignore or flat-out reject any requests from others for inappropriate images.** It is just not worth it, no matter how much you like the other person—even if you think you can trust them. The potential risk is just too high. If they really care about you, they will understand.

**4. Block individuals who make you uncomfortable with how they talk to you (or what they send to you).**

**5. Distract the person requesting inappropriate pictures from you.** Engage them in conversation about something else, or direct them to a cool YouTube video you just saw, or an app you think they would like. If they continue to ask about the pics, let them know that they should just chill out.

**6. Don't support your own objectification.** You are not a piece of meat. You don't want people to like you because of your body, but because of your mind and heart. Giving in and sending explicit images just feeds their appetite for more, and continues to devalue your worth.

**7. Sexting doesn't define a healthy, functional romantic relationship.** Sure, it's fun, flirtatious, and

risqué, but remember that these images could be seen by a wider audience (including your parents, teachers, or the police).

**8. Send images that are *suggestive*, but not *explicit*.** Keep private parts covered at all times. It's fine to send your partner a picture, just make sure it's PG-13 and not X-rated. Even so, realize that these too may be broadcast to others. If you wouldn't be concerned if your whole school (or grandma!) saw it, it's probably ok.



**9. If you receive (or someone shows you) an explicit image of someone you know, contact that person to tell them that their images are being circulated.** You would want someone to tell you if an image of yours like that was going around.

**10. Inform an adult you trust if you are concerned about the well-being of the person in the image.** If you are worried about the person who is in the picture, whether they are a friend or not, you may need to get help from an adult.

# Standing up to Cyberbullying

## Top Ten Tips for Teens

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Don't be a bystander—stand up to cyberbullying when you see it. Take action to stop something that you know is wrong. These Top Ten Tips will give you specific ideas of what you can do when you witness cyberbullying.



**1. REPORT TO SCHOOL.** If the person being cyberbullied is someone from your school, report it to your school. Many have anonymous reporting systems to allow you to let them know what you are seeing without disclosing your identity.



**2. COLLECT EVIDENCE.** Take a screenshot, save the image or message, or screen-record what you see. It will be easier for an adult to help if they can see—and have proof of—exactly what was being said.



**3. REPORT TO SITE/APP/GAME.** All reputable online environments prohibit cyberbullying and provide easy tools to report violations. Don't hesitate to report; those sites/apps will protect your identity and not "out" you.



**4. TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT.** Develop relationships with adults you can trust and count on to help when you (or a friend) experience something negative online. This could be a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, or family friend.



**5. DEMONSTRATE CARE.** Show the person being cyberbullied that they are not alone. Send them an encouraging text or snap. Take them aside at school and let them know that you have their back.



**6. WORK TOGETHER.** Gather your other friends and organize a full-court press of positivity. Post kind comments on their wall or under a photo they've posted. Encourage others to help report the harm. There is strength in numbers.



**7. TELL THEM TO STOP.** If you know the person who is doing the cyberbullying, tell them to knock it off. Explain that it's not cool to be a jerk to others. But say something—if you remain silent, you are basically telling them that it is ok to do it.



**8. DON'T ENCOURAGE IT.** If you see cyberbullying happening, don't support it in any way. Don't forward it, don't add emojis in the comments, don't gossip about it with your friends, and don't stand on the sidelines.



**9. STAY SAFE.** Don't put yourself in harm's way. When your emotions are running high, resist posting something that may escalate the situation. Don't hang out online where most people are cruel. Never physically threaten others.



**10. DON'T GIVE UP.** Think creatively about what can be done to stop cyberbullying. Brainstorm with others and use everyone's talents to do something epic!

# Cyberbullying Warning Signs

## Red flags that a child is involved in cyberbullying



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Cyberbullying impacts at least one out of every five middle and high school students. Many of those who experience it don't tell anyone. If a child displays any of these signs, he or she might be involved. However, not all youth who are cyberbullied or who cyberbully others will display these signs, and some who do show these signs may have other issues in their lives that should be addressed. Take the time to investigate further if you see any of these red flags among the youth you care for.

### A Child May Be a Target of Cyberbullying If He or She:

- unexpectedly stops using their device(s)
- appears nervous or jumpy when using their device(s)
- appears uneasy about going to school or outside in general
- appears to be angry, depressed, or frustrated after going online (including gaming)
- is oversleeping or not sleeping enough
- becomes abnormally withdrawn from friends and family members
- shows an increase or decrease in eating
- seems regularly depressed
- makes passing statements about suicide or the meaninglessness of life
- loses interest in the things that mattered most to them
- avoids discussions about what they are doing online
- frequently calls or texts from school requesting to go home ill
- desires to spend much more time with parents rather than peers
- becomes unusually secretive, especially when it comes to online activities

### A Child May Be Cyberbullying Others If He or She:

- quickly switches screens or hides their device when you are close by
- uses their device(s) at all hours of the night
- gets unusually upset if they can't use their device(s)
- laughs excessively while using their device(s) and won't show you what is so funny
- avoids discussions about what they are doing online
- is increasingly withdrawn or isolated from family
- seems to be using multiple online accounts or an account that is not their own
- is dealing with increased behavioral issues or disciplinary actions at school (or elsewhere)
- appears overly concerned with popularity or continued presence in a particular social circle or status
- demonstrates increasing insensitivity or callousness toward other teens
- starts to hang out with the "wrong" crowd
- demonstrates violent tendencies
- appears overly conceited as to their technological skills and abilities



## Resources for Cyber Safety/Sexting

- ✚ A Thin Line  
<http://www.athinline.org/>
- ✚ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html>
- ✚ Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.ccasa.org/>
- ✚ Colorado School Safety Resource Center - CSSRC  
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc>
- ✚ Common Sense Media  
<https://www.common Sense Media.org/>
- ✚ Connect Safely  
<https://www.connectsafely.org/>
- ✚ Cyberbullying Research Center  
<https://cyberbullying.org/>
- ✚ Digital Futures Initiative  
<http://www.dfinow.org/>
- ✚ Division of Criminal Justice - Sex Offender Management Board (DCJ SOMB)  
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dcj/sex-offender-management-board>
- ✚ Enough is Enough  
[www.enough.org](http://www.enough.org) (Rules 'N Tools Checklist)
- ✚ FBI Safe Online Surfing
- ✚ Futures without Violence  
<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>  
<https://thatsnotcool.com/>
- ✚ Google  
[https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us](https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us)
- ✚ Instagram Abuse  
<https://help.instagram.com/519598734752872>
- ✚ I Love U Guys Foundation  
<http://iloveugays.org/>
- ✚ Love is Respect  
<http://www.loveisrespect.org/>
- ✚ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
<http://www.missingkids.com/home>  
<https://www.kidsmartz.org/>
- ✚ NetSmartz  
<https://www.netsmartz.org/Educators>
- ✚ OJJDP National Center for Missing & Exploited Children  
<https://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/ProgSummary.asp?pi=10>
- ✚ Safe2Tell  
<https://safe2tell.org/>
- ✚ Snapchat Abuse  
<https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/a/report-abuse-in-app>
- ✚ Smart Social - Learn how to shine online  
<https://smartsocial.com/>
- ✚ Thorn  
<https://www.thorn.org/>
- ✚ Tik Tok Abuse  
<http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/report-inappropriate-content>
- ✚ Twitter Abuse  
<https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/report-abusive-behavior>
- ✚ [Webwisekids.org](http://www.webwisekids.org)