A white line-art illustration on a dark blue background. A hand is shown holding a smartphone. Above the hand is a thought bubble containing the text '4 RULES OF THUMB' and 'Tender's Guide for Parents & Carers'. The number '4' is stylized with diagonal hatching. The text 'RULES OF THUMB' is in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below it, 'Tender's Guide for Parents & Carers' is in a smaller, regular sans-serif font. The smartphone screen shows several circular icons, possibly representing social media or messaging apps.

# 4 RULES OF THUMB

Tender's Guide for  
Parents & Carers

## TALKING ABOUT SEXTING

# INTRODUCTION TO TALKING ABOUT SEXTING

Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp... in today's world, social media is so heavily integrated into young people's interactions, its influence on their relationships is unquestionable. This, coupled with earlier and easier access to sexualised media and porn, has inevitably changed both how young people negotiate their first sexual experiences and what they expect from them: with the knock-on effect of popularising a certain activity in particular: sexting.

## DEFINITION

Sexting refers to the sharing of explicit or sexually suggestive images, either on social media or via other forms of digital communication, e.g. text, WhatsApp, Snapchat, other instant messaging services. It should be noted that many young people themselves don't always refer to this activity as 'sexting'; they may instead refer to it as 'sending nudes'

Whilst for consenting adults sexting can be part of a healthy relationship, the sharing, posting or possession of explicit images of someone under the age of 18 are all classed as 'indecent images of a child' and is a criminal offence. This applies even if the person taking, sharing or receiving the images is themselves Under-18, or over the age of sexual consent (e.g. 16-17 years old).



# TIPS FOR APPROACHING THE TOPIC

Tender believes that all young people deserve the right to explore relationships in a safe and informed way, however, conflicting messages from peers and the culture they are surrounded by can make this a confusing process. The ingrained nature of technology into young people's social lives means that confiscating phones or banning their accounts simply isn't realistic: nor does it solve the actual issue of why young people sext, or how aware they are of the risks involved in it.

However, we recognise that for many parents, the thought of speaking to their child about sexually related topics is at best uncomfortable and at worst terrifying. If you find yourself unsure of where to start, this booklet hopes to help by suggesting four themes you could weave into everyday conversations with your child.

## SOME STARTER TIPS

- **Be patient and don't force the topic**
- **Allow your child to go at their own pace**
- **Keep an open mind: discussion and debate is far more effective in changing minds than lecturing**
- **Ask open questions and avoid making assumptions**
- **Adopt the little and often approach: try and incorporate the following into every-day conversations**

# 1

## EXPLORE PRESSURE AND RISKS...

If your child feels that you understand – or are attempting to understand – the pressures they feel and face from the culture around them, this can help them respond more openly to a conversation about the very real risks involved in asking for or sending someone an explicit image.

- **“IF YOU TRUST ME, YOU’LL DO IT”** Healthy relationships are built on equality and respect, where both partners feel comfortable to communicate what they do and don’t feel comfortable with. No one should feel pressured or coerced to do or send things they don’t want to, or fear how their partner might react if they don’t.
- **“EVERYONE ELSE DOES IT”** Adolescence can be a very self-conscious time for young people. Some young people may use sexting as a way to delay other sexual activities they feel pressured to engage in. Explain to your child that other people’s ideas of what is ‘normal’ or ‘expected’ in a relationship might be different to theirs and that’s okay. If they are uncomfortable, it doesn’t matter who else is doing it – they have the right to say no.
- **“BUT IT’S SEXY”** It’s natural for young people to be excited about or want to experiment with intimate relationships, but this is more fun when it’s consensual and safe. Sending images may seem exciting, but the excitement should be weighed against the risks of breaking the law and/or them getting into the wrong hands.
- **THE LAW** It helps to be aware of the laws around sexting between those under 18: those found to possess, create or share explicit images of Under-18s can end up being prosecuted or put on the sex offenders register.

## ...BUT DISCOURAGE VICTIM-BLAMING

In the face of peer pressure, excitement, or the simple ease of posting on social media, it can be all too easy for teenagers to jump on the bandwagon of spreading an explicit image of someone, or shaming the person in the photo. Blaming the person who is exposed, rather than the person who pressured them to take the images or chose to expose them without their consent is unfair and unrealistic: this is known as “victim-blaming”.

- **TRUST** If you trusted your friend to look after something which was important to you, and they gave it away to their friend without asking you for permission, the fault lies with your friend for passing it on without your consent, not with you for trusting them to look after it. Fancying or trusting someone is not a crime: sharing an image without someone’s consent is.
- **REVENGE** Some young people may believe that exposing someone is a justifiable response to, for example, their partner cheating on them: it’s not. Exposing explicit images of someone with the intention of upsetting or humiliating them is illegal and known as “revenge porn”: this applies regardless of the victim’s age, and is more severe if they are under 18. Being cheated on is very upsetting, but it is not illegal.
- **RUMOURS** Remind your child that spreading rumours and unconsented images online can be just as harmful as physical violence or insults traded in person and are no less “real” just because they happen behind a screen.

# 2

# 3

## ENCOURAGE EMPATHY

Encouraging your child's compassion for others can help them to provide much-needed support for their peers, and prevent them from becoming complicit in bullying or passing on illegal images.

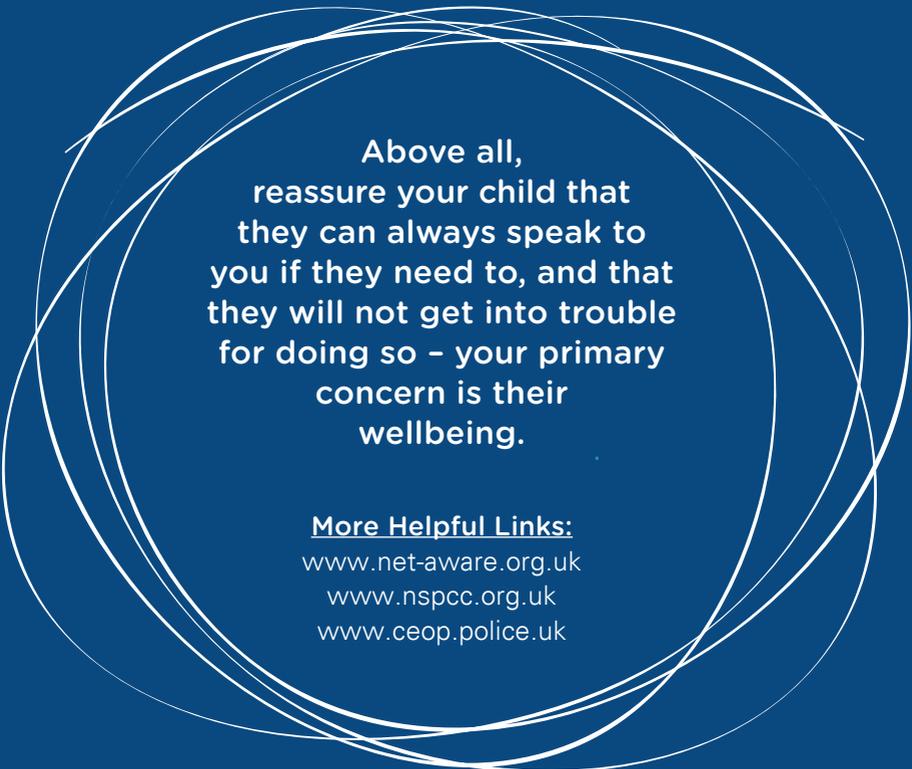
- RECOGNISE** Try to help your child recognise the pressures someone may feel to take an explicit picture and to send it someone else. Perhaps they really liked or trusted the person, perhaps they were copying someone they admire, perhaps they were coerced or forced. Everyone makes mistakes, and if someone has been exposed then the fault lies with their exposor, not them.
- EMPATHISE** Encourage them to consider times when they may have felt shamed or unsupported by those around them, as well as positive memories of when someone showed them kindness and support. Your child may be different to one of their peers, but they can still empathise with how they may be feeling.
- REMEMBER** You are still committing a crime if you "just pass on" explicit images of underage peers.

## PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Much of the culture which both encourages sexting and condemns its victims promotes unhealthy expectations of young men and women's behaviour and sexuality.

- STEREOTYPES** Discuss the influence the media has on our opinions of men and women and what is considered "acceptable" or "expected" behaviour for both genders, and don't feel limited to only discussing your own child's gender.
- PRESSURE** Boys and young men can find themselves under pressure to have multiple sexual partners/experiences, or to collect or pass on explicit images of girls (whether they want to or not).
- SHAMING** Girls can find themselves in a double-bind: pressured by potential or current partners to sext or be labelled "frigid", and fearful of being considered promiscuous, attention-seeking or a "slag/sket" if the images are shared around.
- GENDER** Remind your child that both genders have much more to offer than just sexual and physical attributes, and that neither of these should form someone's sole opinion of them.

# 4



Above all,  
reassure your child that  
they can always speak to  
you if they need to, and that  
they will not get into trouble  
for doing so - your primary  
concern is their  
wellbeing.

More Helpful Links:

[www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk)

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

[www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)



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