

LESSON: Sexting

Overview

“One in five all teen girls (22%) –and 11% of teen girls ages 13-16 years old—say they have sent electronically or posted online, nude or semi-nude images of themselves, according to survey results announced by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in 2008. In addition, it’s very important to note that teens’ photos are getting passed around. The survey also found that one third (33%) of teen boys and one-quarter of teen girls said they have had nude/semi-nude images passed to them even though these images were originally meant to be private.

In work conducted by Teen Futures Media Network, University of Washington, teens have been well aware that sexting is occurring, although they are not always familiar with the name for this behavior. They also seem to have little or no idea that both sending and receiving these types of messages is considered a felony. The general feeling seemed to be that as underage minors they were pretty much exempt from any consequences and besides, “it’s happening all the time” with no real consequence as far as they could tell. Teens in our focus groups felt that teens everywhere would benefit from hearing about actual cases and the consequences that have happened to teens. They also felt it was very important, since most people would most likely “never get caught,” to discuss the personal consequences that might result from this behavior. Videos such as “Everybody Knows Your Name” seemed to resonate with many teens.

This lesson is designed to create awareness of the consequences of sexting and encourage students to think before they press the “send” button!

Objectives:

- Create awareness about the consequences of sexting
- Encourage critical thinking about information and images students decide to send or post
- Develop their own set of guidelines for other teens about things to consider before hitting the “send” button

Level: Middle / High School

Time: 1 class session to discuss sexting and brainstorm guidelines
2 sessions or homework to develop presentation
Additional Time: If Delivery of Presentation Is Included

Preparation and Materials:

Background Info

- National Campaign for Preventing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy Sex and Tech
- 50 Sexting Acronyms Parents Should Know
- National Campaign Video clips featuring 5 teens talking about sexting
- National Campaign Guidelines

Legal Issues

- Sexting Could Land Kids In Trouble with Law from Spokane, Washington’s KXLY TV. Learn what Spokane police are doing.
- Washington State Sexting Consequences
- Sexting Heats Up Policy Debate in Some Washington School Districts
- Sexting Laws in the United States
- Conviction of Florida Teen in 2009
- Sexting: New Technology, Old Problem provides an overview and references

Personal Consequences

- Textual Harassment Video
- Everybody Knows Your Name
- Today Show, MSNBC. Com, Sexting and Suicide

Procedures

Discuss the meaning of the word “sexting” and share some of the statistics from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Unplanned Pregnancy website

Ask students to give some of the reasons people offer for sexting. Discuss how the issue of “trust” enters into this (e.g. I trust that the person I’m sharing this with knows that this is for their eyes only.”)

Raise the issue that sexting is considered a felony. Some issues that students may want to have clarified include:

- Both sending and receiving this material is considered illegal. (Students may be surprised to learn that the person receiving this material is considered in possession of pornographic material.)
- Some are surprised to learn that just taking and sending a photo of themselves is still considered illegal.
- A person under the age of 18 is still considered to be breaking the law.

To clarify how the police can deal with sexting and discover if you have been involved, show the clip from KXLY-TV in Spokane, WA. This video features members of the police force explaining some of the things that they are able to do when they look at a phone in the attempt to determine if its owner has been sending sexually explicit material.

Discuss some examples of legal consequences teens have experienced and the ways in which some school districts are handling this issue: (Try to find out your own district’s policies on sexting, if possible)

- Washington State Sexting Consequences
- Sexting Heats Up Policy Debate in Some Washington School Districts
- Conviction of Florida Teen in 2009: (Note: Convictions and their severity are being debated across the U.S.
- Sexting Laws in the United States
- Sexting: New Technology, Old Problem provides an overview and references

Focus on personal consequences that people experience. Personal consequences are extremely important for everyone to consider. Choose some examples as appropriate for presentation to your particular class:

- The Jessica Logan Story, Today Show, MSNBC. Com, Sexting and Suicide
- Textual Harassment video; discuss how this might be related to sexting. (Note: The teens in our groups had a lot to say about this subject.)
- Everybody Knows Your Name gives the “Think before You Post” message. This is a powerful video that really resonated with the teens in our groups

Activities

Tell class that they are now going to take the lead in sharing what they’ve learned about sexting with other people. Their task is to:

- First select an audience to inform about sexting and its consequences. Choose a group of middle or high school students and specify where you will reach them (e.g. go to another class in your school or another school, set up a booth/display in the hallway, hold an assembly, present to an after-school or faith based group.)

- Develop your own set of guidelines for dealing with what a person should do in order to “think” before they hit the “send” button. Include your rationale for specifying these particular guidelines.
- Now determine an engaging way to present information about sexting and your set of guidelines to people in the audience you have targeted. What will you do to get their attention and make them stop and think?
- Develop your presentation with the “think before you hit send” message, using your preferred medium. (e.g. a PowerPoint presentation, video, brochure , podcast).
- Decide how you will know if you reached your audience with your message (e.g survey, interviews, etc.)
- If possible, present to the target audience you have chosen.
- If possible to carry out #6 above, evaluate the results.

Assessment

The steps students follow in developing and implementing their presentations may be used as a basis for assessment. When developing their set of guidelines, students will, for instance, need to include their rationale for their selections. Also students will need to do some analysis and synthesis of information as they develop their own presentations. Further, the ways in which students specify how they will evaluate the response of their audience can be another means of examining their performance.

If students are actually able to give their presentations, then these presentations can of course be assessed by the teacher. In addition, the students will be able to administer the survey or other evaluation tool they have devised and analyze the results they obtained. This analysis will provide the opportunity to involve students directly in the assessment of their own performance.