Fact sheet

Self-generated sexual content or personal image sharing

ℹ️ This fact sheet includes information for parents and carers about self-generated sexual content and how to get help.

What is self-generated sexual content?

Self-generated sexual content includes content of a sexual nature that is taken by a person of themselves. Depending on the circumstance, it may be referred to as personal image sharing, sexting, sending a 'selfie', or sending a 'pic'.

Content depicting a person **under the legal age can be considered child sexual exploitation** or abuse material, and it can be considered an offence to produce, store or distribute under your country's relevant legislation.

How does it work?

Self-generated sexual content can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Experimental reasons** such as consensual 'sexting', romance or curiosity
- **Exploitative or criminal reasons** such as online grooming, coercion or other abusive elements.

Self-generated content is a complex issue and there are **many reasons why young people may send images**, videos or messages ranging from peer pressure to feeling good about themselves, being flirty, exploring their sexual feelings and identity.

In some cases self-generated sexual **content is innocently and unknowingly created** by children. They may be curious about their bodies or 'playing' in their environment with no knowledge of the fact they are using a connected device to share images online, or the implications.

In more serious cases, **children may be being exploited by an adult in a trusted position**, a person of similar age or someone they know. This kind of activity usually involves threats or coercion for children to produce content of themselves.

An international survey of police officers investigating online child sexual exploitation (netclean.com) found that the most common type of child sexual abuse material is images that have been voluntarily self-produced by children or adolescent for other purposes, but have made their way into the collections of child sexual abuse material.

Where does it happen?

Self-generated sexual content can **be sent via image, video and message** through various chat apps, social media platforms and on any connected device.

Some apps have a disappearing content feature which allows users to send material to each other for a set time, after which it disappears from the device.

There are also vault apps which can allow for the secret storing of image. **They may look like an ordinary app** on a device such as a calculator, however they can only be accessed by entering a password. This feature is also being built into the features of some video and image sharing apps.

Tips for staying safe

- **Start an open discussion** with your child about the content they are sharing online.
- **Talk to your child about tactics they can use** if they are pressured to share personal sexual content, including saying no, deflecting the conversation or explaining they aren't comfortable.
- Encourage your child to **apply critical thinking skills** to online interactions, such as questioning suspicious behaviours or 'friend' requests from unknown or random users online.
- **Supervision is recommended** for young children, including monitoring their online activities.
- Create a **Family Online Safety Contract** to start a conversation with your children about appropriate uses of technology.

What to do if you need help

If you discover your child is involved in creating or sharing self-generated sexual content:

- **Use your judgement and discretion** and try to find out as much about the issue as you can through open and non-judgemental conversations.
- It is essential that your child is supported, **seek advice from wellbeing and support services** to help manage any emotional impacts.
- Consider **seeking support for yourself while managing the situation**, there are a variety of parent/carer resources to help you with this.

- If you or your child discovers content of themselves has been posted online, your local police can assist with having it removed, and has a range of resources and advice on what to do in this situation.
- If you become aware of a young person being exploited to produce content, make a report to **your local police**.

If you need to make a police report, collect screenshots or photos of the interactions and the user's profile. It is important to do this before blocking or deleting the user or you may lose the chat content.

Getting help

Online child sexual exploitation, including **grooming** and **extortion**, can be reported to **your local police.**

If a child is in immediate danger, call your local police emergency number.

If you become aware of explicit content that has been posted online, including child sexual abuse material, report the site to **your local police**.

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