

CONSEQUENCES

Obviously, OSBF wants kids to think before they send. As with all adolescent issues, kids need to be informed of the consequences of impulsive behavior. Because sexting and cyber bullying cannot be erased from cyber space, neither can some of the consequences that will plague students for a long time.

Sexting

Once a dirty text message and/or semi naked or naked pic is sent the student is no longer in control of who sees it.

- Friends, classmates, teachers, parents, bosses, and people a student doesn't even know can see the "sext" within seconds. Once control is lost, the student can be embarrassed, humiliated, and even blackmailed by someone who receives the message. One racy picture a 13-year-old girl took of herself and sent to her boyfriend who sent it to five of his friends was on about 1000 screens within a few hours.
- A student's reputation is at great risk. The student becomes the object of gossip and harassment and often cannot fight back because a picture is worth a thousand words. The student can be tagged with a "nickname" for life. Being called "Freckles" is the least of the student's worries.
- Internet and phone companies can cancel services of both sender and receiver of sexts. They can report these messages to the police, if necessary.
- The message and pic can be seen by others who are checking the student out for a job, a volunteer position, a college application, a scholarship, a car loan, an apartment, basically for anything the student may want to apply for in the future. This message can affect a student's ability to get into the military or even be licensed as a teacher, doctor or lawyer.
- Online sexual extortion can occur. Sending nude cell phone photos or posting such pics on the internet can be accessed by pornographers. The pornographers blackmail the students to send more pictures if they don't want to be exposed to their friends and family. Kids can become victims in a vicious cycle of exploitation because they often are easily intimidated and embarrassed to get help.
- It is illegal. The student can be charged with distributing child pornography. The person receiving the message can be charged with possessing child pornography. (See definition of legal consequences) In January of 2009, three teens from Pennsylvania were charged with creating child porn. The three boys who received the pics were charged with possessing it. Other states have done the same.
- It can damage or break a person completely. It's harmful and hurtful. Teens are not immune to suicide because of sexting.

Cyber bullying

Once someone bullies another online the situation can easily get out-of-control.

- Threatening, humiliating, sexual, hateful, or harassing messages on line are not private. Profiles are not private. Everything can be read, copied, and traced. Classmates, teachers, parents, bosses, and people a student doesn't even know, and even the police read and respond to illegal online postings every day. Threatening messages are illegal in person; they are illegal online.
- Including a target's real name or where the target lives can be used by pedophiles or others to track down and pursue that person. It can cause others to stalk, harass or bully that person and can be used to steal that person's identity as well as the identity of the harasser.
- A battle of words can ensue. The target can cyber bully back, and both can get in trouble at home, school, or with the law. Most schools have anti bullying policies that can get students suspended, expelled and/or reported to police officials. What may have started as a skirmish can end up as a battle for one's reputation and freedom.
- As with sexting, Internet Service Providers and phone companies can cancel services of both sender and receiver and report this activity to the police.
- Posing as someone else online to make bullying easier is a serious crime of identity theft. Posting a fake profile by using someone else's real photo, name, or other identifying information such as screen name, username, or password can result in criminal charges. If convicted, fines and/or jail time can be the punishment for something that seems like a harmless joke or prank.
- Nothing good comes of cyber bullying but trouble for the victim and the aggressor. Both parties have lower self-esteem that can feed into depression, isolation, fear, anger, and frustration. Ganging up on another, gossiping, and spreading vicious rumors is a no-win situation leading to serious emotional injury, possible physical injury and even death. It's like vehicular homicide but on the net. One stupid decision and a life is lost. No second chances exist in cyber space.