

Sexting and revenge porn

Two new pieces of legislation have recently changed what it means to look at and share images online. Revenge porn relates primarily to adults, while the new law on sharing of sexual images concerns children – but they have implications for everyone. So what's new?

Sexual communication with a child

It is now a criminal offence for an adult (over 18) to communicate sexually with a child. This includes sending sexual texts or asking for explicit images.

Previously, adults who *sought* sexual images of children could avoid prosecution if police couldn't prove they had *received* anything illegal. The new offence was introduced to close this loophole (what the NSPCC called the 'flaw in the law').

One issue for young people is that an 18 year-old boy with a 15 year-old girlfriend could potentially be criminalised for asking (just asking...) for a naked picture of her. The government says the intention is not to criminalise young people – but the message is, as ever, that young people should be careful – about asking, as well, now, as sending and receiving.

Revenge porn

You may have seen an advertising campaign highlighting the new criminal offence of 'revenge porn'. The new law covers images shared by adults (over 18s) on social media and websites, via email or offline. Sometimes this material is sent to family members. The aim is to embarrass, shame and cause distress. The law is designed to counter the idea that the images are the fault of victims and to encourage them to come forward.

What parents need to know

The sharing of images of children is already a criminal offence. Someone who distributes a sexual image of a person aged 18 or over might also now be acting illegally.

Some revenge porn sites boast that they feature teen revenge porn, despite the fact that sharing sexual images of under-18s has long been illegal. The sites attempt to blur the distinctions between over-18s and under-18s, reflecting the



fact that there is a market for images that are intended to shame young people. It is as well to be aware that this market exists.

Talk to your child

These legal changes provide an opportunity to talk to your children about respect and safety online. You might want to:

- Open a conversation about when it's OK to share images without permission and when it isn't.
- Ask them to think about whether it's wise to create sexually explicit images.
- Remind them that sharing sexual images of under-18s is illegal, with or without their consent.
- Talk about how horrible it is to pass on embarrassing or upsetting pictures of someone without their permission.
- Remind them where to report inappropriate, unwanted or illegal content online.
- Stress that victims of revenge porn or sexual abuse are not to blame – perpetrators are.