



MIDDLESEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Andrew C. Carey
County Prosecutor

25 Kirkpatrick Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
732-745-3300

prosecutor@co.middlesex.nj.us

Christopher L. C. Kuberiet
1st Assistant Prosecutor

Gerard P. McAleer
Chief of County Detectives

Deputy 1st Assistants

Christie L. Bevacqua
Brian D. Gillet

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to warn you about the dangers of the internet, particularly sexting, and I seek your cooperation in keeping all of our children safe. Some parents may be unfamiliar with sexting. It is generally defined as the sending, sharing, viewing, receiving or possession of indecent visual depictions of oneself or another person using a cell phone, tablet, computer or other electronic device. Sexting can take place on countless messaging and social media sites.

Discussing sexting and its legal and social consequences with your children is imperative and may prevent and reduce incidences of it at school and elsewhere. A recent survey revealed that about 20 percent of teen boys and girls have sent "sext" messages. Engaging in this behavior can result in long term social, emotional and legal consequences. Children who share nude or suggestive photos depicting people younger than 18 (even if it is a picture of themselves) can be convicted of crimes under the state and federal child pornography laws.

A person "Endangers the Welfare of a Child," a crime of the second degree (subject to punishment of up to 10 years in New Jersey State Prison), if they knowingly distribute an item depicting the sexual exploitation of a child. Those who photograph or film a child in a prohibited sexual act or simulation of such an act using any device, including a computer or cell phone, etc., to reproduce or reconstruct the image of a child are subject to the same laws.

As an example, a juvenile could be prosecuted for sending nude images of themselves to another juvenile. Additionally, anyone who receives that image and forwards it to just one other person or more can be charged with the Distribution of Child Pornography. Individuals engaging in such conduct face varying degrees of punishment, including, but not limited to, incarceration, detention, sex offender registration, court imposed supervision and restrictions, community service, fines, and counseling.

Living in a digital age is a double-edged sword. The ability to quickly send and receive information can make our lives incredibly convenient. It can also make us and our children incredibly vulnerable. I want to make clear to you and ask that you make clear to your children that once they distribute digital content to the World Wide Web it is impossible to eradicate. It is out there forever. Admissions officers and employers increasingly review the internet to be sure that nothing in a person's past may overshadow a potential acceptance or hire. When something is captured in the digital world, from the past, it may come back to haunt your child, or it can at least be twisted to cast them in a negative light.

Please make sure your child understands the seriousness of exchanging nude photos, and spell out what is, and is not appropriate to send. Please tell your child that under no circumstances should they be taking nude photos of themselves. If someone asks them to create such a photo, video, etc., they should say no and report the same to a trusted adult. Additionally, you should educate yourself on the dangers of the internet and the vulnerabilities your child faces with regard to predators and other persons or businesses looking to exploit your children and their innocence.

I suggest you establish boundaries for appropriate versus inappropriate use of the internet, work with your child to establish consequences if they send inappropriate messages or misuse the internet, and let them know you will randomly monitor their browser history, texts, emails and social media sites. If you come across something that raises a flag regarding the safety of your child or other children, please report any situations that you are aware of to either the local authorities or school administration. Our students should know that we are having common conversations between law enforcement, home and school when it comes to sexting, cyberbullying, and internet use.

I am grateful for your cooperation and support as we all work together to keep our children safe.

Sincerely,



ANDREW C. CAREY
Middlesex County Prosecutor

ACC/sk