



UNION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BEHIND THE STAR

SHERIFF MALCUM J. "JAMIE" PATTON



Why is Sexting a Problem?

We are all getting too familiar with the number of news stories about school age children being charged with sexting or some kind of sexting scandal in local school districts. "We need to educate our youth", said Sheriff Patton. "With so many kids having cell phones, they need to know what the dangers are when it comes to using them."

Current laws were not written with sexting in mind, this provides little guidance to the Prosecutors who are seeing a number of sexting cases. As we have seen on the news, Prosecutors are charging kids with felonies which can label them as a sex offender and carry mandatory registration requirements. Now there are times youth might be charged with a misdemeanor, but this still could have been prevented if they were educated on the laws about sexting.

So many of our youth do not understand what can happen to an elicited picture they have sent to a boyfriend or girlfriend. These adolescents do not understand the pictures being sent out are being passed around for other kids to see. Once the picture is sent there is no getting it back. The pictures are being used for blackmail to get other things from them. The reason most kids do not want to report anything is because they are too ashamed and worried about getting in trouble for sending the picture. Also, our young people don't understand they can be charged with a crime even if they did not ask for the picture. Just having it on their phone is a crime; and if they forward it on the seriousness of the crime escalates.

Youth today have so many different social media sites they use to send pictures, but the most popular seems to be Snapchat. When using Snapchat a video or picture disappears after a few seconds once viewed. What people do not understand is even after the video or picture disappears it's still on the server. In January 2014, it was reported Snapchat was hacked and hundreds of thousands of images which were thought to be deleted are now in the hands of hackers. "It's important our youth understand these images are out there forever and can be viewed, they need to be very careful what they send or post," said Sheriff Patton.

So what is the definition of sexting? Sexting is the sending of sexually suggestive text messages or photographs by cell phone or other electronic devices. The prevalence of teen sexting is unclear. In the latest survey, as many as five teens have sent explicit photos and almost one in three have received such photos.

Among teenagers, sexting is considered a form of flirting, but in addition to serious criminal charges, sexting can result in harassment, school discipline, and lasting harm to a

teenager's reputation. Worst of all, our youth are falling into depression and the unthinkable, *suicide*. "They need to know sexting is not flirting and they need to understand it's a crime. It's important, we as a Community need to help change this behavior by educating our youth," said Sheriff Patton.

For more information on this topic, please contact the Union County Sheriff's Office and speak with Deputy Rich Crabtree, 937-645-4100, ext. 4310.