

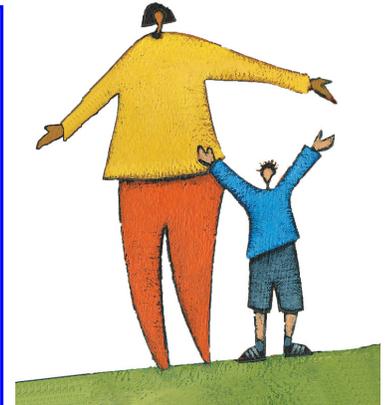
# CHILDREN ARE GIFTS FROM GOD

DIocese OF SACRAMENTO – SAFE ENVIRONMENT OFFICE

## PARENT FACT SHEET

Safe Use of Technology

OUR LORD HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN HIS HEART FOR ALL CHILDREN. IN THE GOSPELS, HE ILLUSTRATED THE CAPACITY OF ADULTS TO SHOW “THE LITTLE ONES” A PATH TO HIM. PART OF THAT CAPACITY INCLUDES THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP ALL CHILDREN SAFE. AS THE PRIMARY EDUCATORS OF YOUR CHILDREN, HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOU TO ENSURE THEIR SAFETY.



### **KNOCK, KNOCK... WHO'S THERE MAKING SERIOUS CHOICES ABOUT WHO HAS ACCESS TO YOUR FAMILY**

BY: JOAN VIENNA, MA - SAFE ENVIRONMENT COORDINATOR, ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

Picture the following scenario: Your family is just sitting down to dinner when suddenly you hear a loud “knock, knock” at your front door. On your doorstep is a stranger who demands to come into your home and spend some time with you and your family. The stranger wants to have a sexual encounter with his girlfriend in your living room, or a violent shootout in your family room, or may even want to talk to your children about sex and arrange to meet with them outside your home.

What would your reaction be? Would you think it was a joke? Would you be stunned, afraid and angry? Would you turn the lock and open the door so that this stranger can have access to your family? Or would you instead slam and lock the door, call the police and protect your loved ones?

This may sound melodramatic, but this is virtually what is happening in homes every day. Whenever you or a family member turns on the television, you are potentially allowing such images to invade your home. When anyone in your family clicks on a computer or uses a cell phone, a “virtual door” to your home opens and you are inviting in a world of strangers and images that are potentially harmful to your children and family life.

**Are you stopping to ask, “Who’s there?”** Chris Hansen from ABC Dateline has done eleven dramatic hidden camera investigations that have exposed over 250 men who target young teenagers over the Internet. Yet teens and parents alike are still in denial that this can happen to them.

This phenomenon was first addressed by Mary Pipher, Ph.D. in her 1996, New York Times bestseller, *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families*, in which she wrote about the rise of the “electronic community” and its effect on family life. She very astutely pointed out, “Any one invention probably wouldn’t do that much damage. The problem is the whole pile. It’s the cumulative effect of all this technology that has changed the very ways we live in families. Eventually the quantity becomes quality and the integrity of our lives is altered.”

Do you know who is virtually in your home right now, in your family room or even your child’s bedroom? Technology is here to stay; however, we must be aware of the effects it has on our lives. It is up to each of us to make responsible and conscious choices, and it is up to parents to protect and guide their children. What will you do the next time a sexual or violent image appears on a TV or computer in

For Additional Resources Visit the Sacramento Diocese website at [www.diocese-sacramento.org](http://www.diocese-sacramento.org)

- Parent Fact Sheets
- So There is No Doubt
- What has the Catholic Church Done?
- Sex and Cell Phones
- Practical Advice for Parents on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

## WHAT IS "SEXTING" AND WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

BY: MARY ELLEN D'INTINO—  
DIRECTOR SAFE ENVIRONMENT, DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER, NH

"Sexting" means sending nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of oneself to others via cell phone text messaging. According to recent surveys, 20 percent to 25 percent of teens admit that they have electronically sent or posted such photos of themselves and approximately 28 percent of teens say that they have received this type of message. Sexting is not only inappropriate, it is illegal and dangerous. As concerned adults we must do all we can to educate teens about why it is a bad idea.

Sexting can easily lead to child exploitation. Although most teens do not intend for their photos to be widely distributed, it is a fact that electronic messages of all kinds are often forwarded to others. Those in receipt of risqué pictures or videos can do with them what they wish, such as post them on a Website or alter them. Media reports have shown teens who have become the victims of harassment from peers after sending out inappropriate pictures of themselves that were in turn forwarded to others. One Ohio teen, Jessica Logan, spoke about her experience publicly and warned others not to repeat her mistake. She ultimately took her own life in the wake of bullying and isolation by peers.

Most adults are concerned about sexting but are not sure what can be done. Caring adults need to communicate with teens about this topic. It can be a continuation of discussions you have already begun with them about morality, values, personal boundaries, and modesty.

Here are some points to mention:

**Anything you text can be forwarded to others.** This can result in extreme embarrassment as well as harassment.

**Once a text message is sent, it cannot be taken back.** You no longer have any control over it. Think: Do you want this photo showing up on Facebook? Do you want future employers and co-workers to see this photograph?

**You could be in trouble with the law.** If inappropriate photos involve underage teens, those who send—and even those who *forward* them—could be charged with possession and distribution of child pornography, a very serious crime.

**Other consequences may include disciplinary action at school or work.** Often, if a school learns that students have been involved in sexting, the teens are expelled from sports teams and honor societies. This can impact a student's future.

**Parents need to keep abreast of technology.** This means trying out texting, social networking, and other potentially intimidating electronic options so you can have informed conversations with teens.

**Pay attention.** Let teens know that you will check their cell phones periodically to monitor what is being sent and received.

**Consider installing blocks** on your children's cell phones so that pictures and/or Internet links cannot be viewed.

**Keep the lines of communication open.** Encourage teens to tell you or another trusted adult if they receive any electronic messages or photos that make them feel uncomfortable.



## KNOCK, KNOCK (CONTINUED)

your home? Do you know who your child is text messaging or what information they are posting on "My Space?" Will you recognize a teachable moment with your child when they or someone in their class is being bullied over the Internet?

There are many excellent online resources such as: [www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org), [www.kidsafenetwork.com](http://www.kidsafenetwork.com), [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org) as well as other free resources from your local police department and agencies that can help to increase your knowledge and awareness as well as give you the tools you need to control access to the "virtual door" of your home. Learning to make the right choices can make a profound difference in protecting yourself and your children.



## CYBERTIPLINE REPORT



Has your child ever been sent inappropriate material by someone he or she met online? Has your child ever inadvertently encountered inappropriate material? These are all types of child sexual exploitation. Make a report at [CyberTipline.com](http://CyberTipline.com) or by calling 1.800.THE.LOST if you have information that will help in our fight against child sexual exploitation.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mary Hastings, Safe Environment Coordinator  
916-733-0227

Yvette Espinoza, Background Check Coordinator  
916-733-0237

Cathi Fisher, Pastoral Care Coordinator  
916-733-0142

Diocese of Sacramento, Safe Environment Office  
2110 Broadway, Sacramento, CA 95818  
[www.diocese-sacramento.org](http://www.diocese-sacramento.org)