

# Sext education 'vital'

## Teaching 'revenge porn' impacts

BY ROB INGLIS

**T**EACHING children how best to deal with image-based abuse is hard.

But teaching their parents might be even harder.

Commonly known as 'revenge porn', image-based abuse occurs when a person non-consensually shares an intimate image of another person or uses that image to exploit them.

Australian children are increasingly digitally connected, as smartphones and social media become more and more accessible.

Modern technology, however, presents an ethical minefield.

So how do we guide the younger generation through such treacherous terrain?

How do we teach Tasmanian kids to use technology in an ethical way?

That may be the key to mitigating the devastating impact of image-based abuse in the future.

Parents, too, need to have at least a cursory understanding of new technologies, so they can offer strong support to their children in instances of cyberbullying and online harassment.

In September, the Tasmanian Education Department launched its Respectful Relationships resource, the aim of which is to foster a culture of respectful relationships for future generations.

An Education Department spokesperson said Respect-

### IMAGE-BASED ABUSE - EDUCATING KIDS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

#### WHAT EDUCATORS SAY

■ Tasmanian primary schools now dealing with sexting-related cyberbullying;

■ 'Just don't do it' approach has failed;

■ Teaching respectful relationships the new model;

■ Students, parents and teachers need skills to deal with 'revenge porn'

**NEXT GENERATION:** Tasmanian schools are seeing a spike in cyberbullying cases arising from instances of sexting and 'revenge porn'. But sex education providers say it is not just children that need to learn about image-based abuse.

ful Relationships included a section on the respectful use of digital technologies.

Sexuality education service Family Planning Tasmania, which delivers programs at certain Tasmanian schools, believes this is the right way to teach children about maintaining healthy relationships.

Family Planning Tasmania education, training and health promotion manager Christy Measham said the service's discussions around 'sexting' began with upper primary school students.

She said prohibition arguments did not work when talking to kids about sex.

"Including that in cyber safety programs in the past really hasn't reduced the impact of technology and hasn't reduced the harms," Ms Measham said.

"They are victim-blaming messages."

Ms Measham also said it was important that kids



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**Christy Measham, Family Planning Tasmania**

learnt about the ethical complexities of image-based abuse, not just about what was legal and what was not.

"They might be able to parrot back, 'OK, this is what the law says,'" she said.

"But that's not necessarily changing behaviours."

Ms Measham observed that students often asked why those who shared intimate images of themselves did not also "get in trouble".

But she said that some students also commented on the gendered nature of image-based abuse.

"Young people are quite attuned to the fact that if 'nudes' of a young man

are leaked, often the social repercussions are quite different to if nude or intimate photos of a young woman are leaked," she said.

"Really, we need to be normalising that most people who receive private images will keep them private."

Teachers, too, require education of their own in this space, according to Ms Measham.

"I think it's really important that teachers have the skills and the confidence and the knowledge to address these things within the classroom," she said.

Another external provider

that delivers sexuality education programs in Tasmania is the Sexual Assault Support Service.

SASS counsellor Peter Baldwin said he focused on teaching students what the ethical thing to do was when they received an intimate image of another person.

"I'm putting it more on the responsibility of the receiver, which is where most of the problems lie," he said.

"If someone sends you an image that they want you to see, you need to treat that with a lot of respect."

As technology advances further, the children who experience image-based abuse get younger and younger.

Mr Baldwin noted that SASS had recently been getting requests to deliver its programs around sexting to Tasmanian primary schools.

He said one rural primary school had asked for help after it identified that students

in grades 5 and 6 had been engaging in sexting.

At this particular school, the sexting had resulted in cases of cyberbullying.

"We're putting together some information to do some training in primary schools about this stuff," Mr Baldwin said.

When speaking to high school students, Mr Baldwin asks them to think about the ethical ramifications of sharing intimate images.

"I ask young people, high school students, to move their bodies from one side of the room to the other and make one side of the room ethical and one side of the room unethical," he said.

"And in the middle is: 'I'm not sure' or 'My answer's complicated'."

Once the room is divided up, Mr Baldwin asks the students a question.

"Is it ethical or unethical to send your crush a nude?"

Mr Baldwin said the different responses he got were "diverse".

"Some will say, 'If I had a crush and trusted them and I wanted to flirt with them, I probably think it would be OK to do that,'" he said.

"Other young people are like, 'No, it's wrong.'"

Mr Baldwin said young people were not stupid.

"We need to give them the skills to be able to think this stuff through," he said.

The SASS counsellor is himself a father.

"I've got a five-year-old girl, man," he said.

"She's going to grow up in this world and I know my parenting style isn't going to be just burying my head in the sand and saying, 'Don't do it.'"

*'Blame and Shame' was a five-part series from Fairfax Media, seeking to shed light on image-based abuse in Tasmania.*

# Etch's

1/129 Hobart Rd,  
Kings Meadows TAS 7249  
(03) 6344 5185 • 0429 003 766  
info@etchs.com.au

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