



NEWS RELEASE

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**Teens Learn Dangers of Sexting in Diversion Program
in Adams and Broomfield Counties**

Most teens don't know that sending a sexually explicit photo is against the law.

In fact, in Colorado you can be charged with a felony for sexual exploitation of a child if you send or receive naked pictures of someone who is under 18 years of age.

The six juveniles who graduated Monday night from a special diversion program offered by the 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office geared to prevention of sexting know all about that law.

Facing charges of sexual exploitation of a child, the juveniles participated in this special diversion program in which they learn about the ramifications of sexting, setting boundaries and using online technology wisely.

Monday's class was the second group to graduate from the six-week program.

"The group began in June as a response to numerous sexual exploitation of child cases by juveniles which are Class 3 felonies," said Levon Hupfer, director of juvenile and adult diversion for the 17th Judicial District Attorney's Office. "Rather than file these cases, our office made a decision to divert the appropriate cases and offer a comprehensive program to help juveniles make better decisions in the future."

"Cell phone technology in the hands of teenagers can be a very dangerous thing," said District Attorney Dave Young. "When they send these images, they can be charged with a Class 3 felony, and they can be labeled as a sex offender for the rest of their lives. This is an educational program that teaches them the impact of what they do so that they can avoid having this charge on their record and hopefully we never see them again. We hope they also will spread the word to other teenagers so they also realize the consequences of doing this."

Parents attend three of the sessions along with their children, learning about the law, technology safeguards and strategies for parenting. Four of the six sessions are facilitated by a licensed counselor addressing past sexting conduct, current attitudes and feelings, learning about consent and boundaries and determining how to make better future decisions.

They also learn about the permanence of images sent online. Once a message or photo is sent or posted, it can never be completely deleted or removed.

The 17th Judicial District is one of only a few that offer a sexting diversion program. Participants learn that if they committed their offense in another jurisdiction, they could be required to register as a sex offender for the rest of their lives.

A class 3 felony is a serious charge," Hupfer said. "They learn how their sexting impacted the victim. There are teenage girls who have killed themselves over crimes like this."

The first class of six juveniles graduated from the program in June. At the graduation, each juvenile gives a presentation to the group about what he did and what he has learned during the program.

Common themes are sending texts to impress friends, not realizing the images would be widely disseminated and ignoring the harm sexting does to the person in the photo.

One of the juveniles said he had shared naked pictures of a girl with his friends. "I thought it was cool but I didn't think about its effect on her," he said. "If I knew, I would never have done it."

Another teen said he had no idea his sexting was a criminal act. "I'm so thankful for the opportunity to give me a second chance," he said. "I've definitely learned my lesson and will never do anything like this again."

"I didn't realize the consequences of what I did," said one teen. "I regret everything I did. I was just trying to fit in with my friends and let down my family."

Another teen called his actions "a dumb teenager decision. I disrespected her and how she would feel. I realize I made a mistake and things could have gone way worse. I don't want to get in trouble ever again."

The teens appreciated that they were given a second chance and avoided having a sexual exploitation charge on their juvenile records.

"This impacted me a lot," said one participant. "It really showed me that what I did is wrong. It makes me want to do better and help prevent others from making the same mistake I did. I can take a lot from this class and pass it on to help put a stop to this crime."

Parents also were grateful for the program. "The classes for the parents also were awesome," said one parent. "Most parents have no idea how serious this is for kids. I am thankful for this program. These charges could have ruined lives."

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