

SEXTING AND TEENS

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



Sexting — sending sexually explicit messages or images via text — has become a regular occurrence for many young people. Young people may be unaware of the serious consequences that sexting poses.

'Sexts' are often sent under pressure and/or coercion. Sexualized images widely circulate on social media and gaming platforms. Many sexts are distributed without permission — more formally called “nonconsensual intimate image abuse.”

1 in 4

teens report that they have sent or received a sext.¹

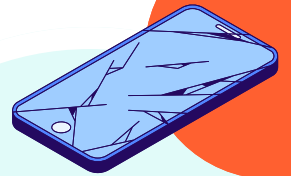


Sexting among adolescents is associated with:

- Higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress,² as well as lower self-esteem³
- Increased likelihood of victimization⁴
- Increased likelihood of drug/alcohol use⁵
- Self-injury⁶
- Low academic performance⁷
- Negative impacts on sleep⁸
- High risk sexual activity⁹
- Bullying (victimization and perpetration) and behavioral problems¹⁰
- Abusive and controlling behaviors in relationships^{11,12}
- Greater risk of victimization by adult groomers¹³

Some young people may be more prone to engage in or become victims of sexting:

- Adolescents with depression and anxiety are more prone to being pressured by others into sexting.¹⁴
- Adolescents preoccupied with FOMO, or 'fear of missing out' on peer activities, also tend to have higher rates of sexting.¹⁵
- Adolescents who view pornography are more likely to engage in sexting,¹⁶ especially with strangers.¹⁷
- Girls and non-binary adolescents are often more pressured to sext.¹⁸



Sexting by minors may be considered the distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), a criminal act.

Talk to your kids about sexting

- Having open, honest, and regular conversations early with kids about the online world, consent, and healthy, safe relationships is critical.
- Discuss and model safe and respectful behaviors. A great way to start is to ask permission before taking, sharing, and/or posting photos and videos.
- Remind them that there is no foolproof guarantee that what they share will remain private.
- The best way to protect young people from the harms of sexting is to help them understand the potential consequences. Sexting by minors may be considered the distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), a criminal act.
- This may result in sanctions, fines, or lead to felony charges and require Sex Offender Registration. Those who pass on pictures of others are more likely to face legal consequences.
- Adults sending sexts to or requesting them from minors below the legal age of consent is never okay and should be reported to police and/or child protective services.
- Emphasize that it's ok to say no and that they can always talk with you!

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More Resources:

- To learn more about sexting and how to start these critical conversations, [explore Culture Reframed's free online course for Parents of Teens](#).
- See also Culture Reframed's report, [The Harms of Sexting](#).
- Learn how to [respond to pressure](#) to send nudes.

Note on Sextortion:

Sextortion, or digital blackmail, is one of the fastest-growing forms of child sexual exploitation. It can happen even if your child has never sent a photo to anyone, so it is crucial to talk with young people about this, too. Please [see here](#) for more information.



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References:

¹Herbenick, Slone, & Supler (2023).

²Aubrey et al. (2024); O'Connor et al. (2024); Knipschild (2025).

³Sciacca et al. (2024); Galanis et al. (2023).

⁴Marcum, et al. (2022); Finkelhor et al. (2024); Brighi et al. (2023).

⁵Howard et al. (2023); Ng et al. (2021).

⁶Lan et al. (2022); O'Connor et al. (2024).

⁷Barrense-Dias et al. (2022).

⁸Ganson et al. (2024).

⁹Falconer, Kauer & Fisher (2022).

¹⁰Dowdell et al. (2022); Froyland et al. (2024); Mariamo et al. (2024).

¹¹Huntington & Rhoades (2021); Soto et al. (2023).

¹²Matud (2024); Ruvalcaba (2022).

¹³Almeida & Barreiros (2023); Wolbers et al. (2025).

¹⁴Wright and Wachs (2024).

¹⁵Morelli, Rosati & Cattelino (2024); Weisskirch (2025).

¹⁶Aubrey et al. (2024); Giordanno, Schmit, & Graham (2022).

¹⁷Molla-Esparza, Najera, & Losilla (2023).

¹⁸Isotalo & Antfolk (2024).