

Sexting (sex + texting)

The act of electronically sending or receiving sexually explicit photos, texts, or video messages

FACT SHEET

Advances in technology have created countless ways for us to stay in contact with one another. The advent of digital communication has resulted in sexting becoming increasingly common. A quick Google search generates millions of results for “how to sext.” As with all sexual behaviors, consent is necessary and required when sexting.

Are there concerns associated with sexting?

Sexting is only okay if it is **CONSENSUAL**.

- All parties involved need to be capable of and willing to consent to sending and receiving any sexual content. This includes consent on sharing texts or images with anyone other than the intended recipient.
- Since images and other sexual content sent electronically can be impossible to control once they are sent, there is a risk that they will be exploited or publicly shared.
- Someone threatening to distribute your private and sensitive material if you don't provide them with images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money, is called **sextortion**. Sextortion is not consensual. A 2017 study of sextortion survivors found that younger victims were more likely to experience sextortion via an online offender and be threatened for explicit imagery. 1 in 4 participants were 13 years old or younger when threatened.¹ **Coercing someone into sending a sext, or blackmailing them with sexual images and videos, is a crime.**

How does sexting impact youth?

- Most teens in the U.S. have access to a cell phone, and researchers suggest consensual sexting between teens is an increasingly common form of sexual interaction between youth.²
- For youth, sexting behavior may be a natural part of sexual exploration and development.
- Relationships among youth may not be long-lasting. This can make young people more vulnerable to non-consensual forwarding of sexts.
- Young people can also be at high risk for sextortion.

A 2018 study published in [JAMA Pediatrics](#) analyzed survey data from more than 110,000 teens.² The study found:

- **27.4%** of teens reported receiving a sext.
- **14.8%** reported sending a sext.
- **12.6%** reported forwarding a sext without consent
- Older teens sext more often than younger teens.

To learn more, visit **Thorn** (<https://www.thorn.org/sextortion>) and **Planned Parenthood** (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/bullying-safety-privacy/all-about-sexting>).

¹ Sextortion: Summary findings from a 2017 survey of 2,097 survivors (2017). Thorn. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sextortion_Wave2Report_121919.pdf

² Madigan, S., Ly, A., Rash, C.L., Van Ouytsel, J., & Temple, J.R. Prevalence of multiple forms of sexting behavior among youth: A systematic review and meta-analysis (2018). JAMA Pediatrics. Retrieved October 26, 2021 from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29482215/>