

What to Know About Sexting

Objective

To understand the risks of sexting, reflect on personal values, and develop skills to protect yourself in relationships.

What to Know

Sexting involves sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photos, or videos through digital devices. While it may feel harmless or playful, sexting can have serious consequences. Here are some reasons you might be tempted to sext:

- Peer pressure or wanting to impress someone
- Believing it's a way to express affection
- Exploring romantic or sexual feelings
- Wanting to strengthen a relationship or feel closer to someone
- Believing it's necessary to prove love or trust

These reasons can backfire. Even trusted friends or partners may share private images with others, and once shared, these images are no longer under your control.

There are many risks to sexting, including:

1. Loss of Privacy

- Even if you send a photo to someone you trust, they could share it with others without your consent.
- Photos and videos shared online can exist forever, even if deleted from one device.

2. Legal Consequences

- In many places, sending or receiving explicit images of minors (even of yourself) is illegal and could lead to criminal charges.
- You could face consequences from parents, teachers, or law enforcement if caught.

3. Emotional Impact

- Being exposed can lead to shame, embarrassment, and anxiety.
- Victims of leaked photos often feel betrayed and socially isolated.

4. Relationship Damage

- Sexting might seem like a sign of trust, but pressuring someone to send explicit images is a form of emotional manipulation. Healthy relationships are built on respect and mutual boundaries, not coercion.

Here are some practical ways to stay safe.

- **Delete Unwanted Images Immediately.** Saving explicit images can land you in serious trouble, even if you didn't ask for them.
- **Say No to Requests Firmly and Clearly.** If someone asks you to send an explicit image, say no—and stand by your decision. A healthy relationship involves respect for your boundaries.
- **Use Technology Wisely.** Block and report anyone who makes you uncomfortable. Use privacy settings on social media to limit who can contact you.
- **Ask for Help.** If you feel overwhelmed or unsafe, reach out to a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, or school counselor.

It's okay to set boundaries. Saying no is an important **skill** that shows you respect yourself and others. Here are some ways to respond if someone asks for explicit pictures.

1. **Humor:** "Sorry, my camera's allergic to bad decisions."
2. **Direct:** "No, I don't do that. Let's talk about something else."
3. **Confidence:** "If you really care about me, you wouldn't ask for that."
4. **Distract:** "Hey, did you see that new TikTok trend? It's wild!"

Keep your privacy and protect your self-worth!

- You are not obligated to share explicit images or nudes with anyone.
- Healthy relationships are built on care and respect, not pressure.
- You have the power to say no, block someone, and seek help when needed.

What to Do if Your Photo Gets Shared

If an explicit image of you gets shared without your consent, it's not your fault—but there are steps you can take:

1. **Reach Out for Help.** Tell a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, or school counselor.
2. **Report the Image.** Many platforms (like Instagram or Snapchat) allow you to report inappropriate content.
3. **Talk to a Friend.** It's okay to feel scared or upset. Talking to a friend can help you process your emotions.
4. **Block the Person Who Shared the Image.** Remove them from your contacts and social media.

What to Do

First, answer these questions.

Why might someone ask for explicit pictures?

How would you feel if your private images were shared without your consent?

What are some healthy ways to show affection without sending explicit pictures?

What are your boundaries around sexting?

What values do you want to uphold in your relationships?

What would you do if someone violated your trust by sharing a personal image?

How would you handle these tricky situations? Write down your ideas.

A new friend texts you and says, "I'll stop asking you to hang out if you don't send me a nude."

You hear a rumor that an explicit photo of your classmate is being shared. How would you respond?

A romantic partner says, "If you love me, you'll send me nudes!"

Someone sends you a nude picture. How can you respond responsibly?

Identify each behavior as a red flag  (unhealthy) or a green flag  (healthy).

_____ Pressuring someone to send private images.

_____ Respecting boundaries when someone says "no" to sending pictures.

_____ Blocking someone who makes inappropriate requests.

_____ Sharing someone's explicit image without permission.

_____ Asking how someone feels when they seem uncomfortable with a conversation.

_____ Sending an explicit picture without asking for permission.

_____ Changing the subject if someone feels uncomfortable.

_____ Sharing a nude photo with friends as a joke.

_____ Asking for pictures, even after you've said no.

_____ Trying to make you feel bad for not sending nudes ("If you loved me, you'd send one.").

_____ Keeping you from talking to other people about it.

_____ Ignoring your "no" or laughing it off.

Expressing feelings without sexting is safer and more meaningful. Here are some ideas for showing affection without taking risks:

- Send a heartfelt message or meme that makes them smile.
- Write a note about why you appreciate them.

- Create a playlist of songs that remind you of them.
- Plan a fun activity together, like a walk, game night, or a movie marathon.

What will you do? _____

Use these affirmations—or create your own—to remind yourself that your worth isn't tied to your appearance or someone else's approval.

"I am valued for who I am, not how I look."

"I deserve to be respected, no matter what."

"My privacy matters."

"I am in control of my boundaries, and I can say no."

Write down more ideas.

Before you send anything that you're questioning if it's appropriate to share, ask yourself:

1. Do I trust the person I'm sending this to completely?
2. Would I be okay if others saw this picture or message?
3. Is this aligned with my values and how I want to be treated?

Bonus Challenge: The 'Grandma Test'

Think of a picture you might want to send someone. Now, ask yourself: "Would I be okay if my whole school (or my grandma!) saw it?"

If the answer is no, it might be best to keep that picture private.

Make a Safety Plan

Here's how you can protect yourself:

1. **Set Personal Boundaries:** Decide in advance what feels right for you—before you're in a tough situation.
2. **Control Who Can Contact You:** Use privacy settings on apps to limit unwanted messages.
3. **Be Ready to Walk Away:** If someone doesn't respect your boundaries, it's okay to end the conversation—or the relationship.
4. **Report Problematic Behavior:** Speak up if someone makes you feel uncomfortable online.

Write down your own safety plan:

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
