

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 widespread use of digital communication has resulted in sexting becoming increasingly common. 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 people involved need to be able and willing to give permission to sending and receiving any sexual content. This includes consent on sharing texts or images with anyone other than the person they sexted.
- 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 used against us 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**.
 - 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
 - A 2024 study found that **1 in 20** youth reported experiencing sextortion, usually done by people they knew.²
- 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.³
- 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.

A 2024 nationally representative study of people aged 18 to 28 found that:

- **23%** have sexted before the age of 18.
- Of those who sexted, **37%** reported image abuse.
- Sexting also led to higher risk of other types of sexual abuse.³

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 Justin W. Patchin, Sameer Hinduja, Addressing Youth Sexting Through Rational Legislation and Education, Journal of Adolescent Health, 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.07.001, 75, 4, (530-532), (2024). Retrieved October 7, 2024 from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bsl.2667?af=R>

³ David Finkelhor, Samantha Sutton, Heather Turner & Deirdre Colburn (08 Mar 2024): How Risky is Online Sexting by Minors?, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, Retrieved October 24 2024 from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2024.2324838>