

Sexting

What to know



- “Sexting” is the sending and receiving of sexually explicit images, messages or videos by text or using social media. The images sent in sexting are often referred to as “nudes”.
- At least one in four Canadian teens have received a nude and at least one in seven have sent one.
- Sexting is less common among preteens, but worthy of addressing because of the damage that can be caused when a nude is shared without consent.
- Teens report that they sext for many reasons: to get attention, to show interest in someone, to prove commitment, to build intimacy and as the result of pressure (among others).
- *Common Sense Media* reports that sexting is associated with other risk-taking behaviours such as using drugs or alcohol, having more sexual partners and not using contraception.
- *MediaSmarts* reports that equal numbers of boys and girls send, receive and share nudes. But the harm and damage to a person is unequal and falls much more heavily on girls.
- The majority of sexts remain between the sender and recipient.
- Between consenting adults, sexting can be a positive and healthy way to express one’s sexuality or build intimacy. But because of the potential harm it may cause among younger people, the response of a preteen or teen to a request for a nude should always be “No”.





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What to do

- Start the conversations earlier than you think you might need to.
- Talk about consent (all day, every day!). Explain that consent can only be given when it's free of coercion or pressure. And that if someone consents to something once, they're not obligated to do it again. Also, if someone is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they're not capable of consenting. Period.
- Teach your preteen that sending a nude without consent from the recipient is sexual harassment. If they receive a nude without consent, they should delete it immediately.
- Help your preteen understand that if a person consents to sexting, it doesn't mean they're giving up their right to privacy, respect or control over who sees the image sent. But when they send a nude, the recipient takes control.
- Remind your preteen that the internet is the most public space there is, while our bodies and sexuality are the most private things we own. Once a photo is "out there", it's out there forever. Even on Snapchat.
- Teach your preteen that sharing a nude without consent is against the law in Canada (and many other countries).
- Talk about healthy relationships. Stress that, online or offline, it's never ok to pressure, coerce or blackmail someone to do something. Someone who truly cares about you would never do this. It's also important to express your boundaries to others honestly.
- Teach your preteen that, online or offline, it's never ok to ask someone to do something you wouldn't be comfortable doing yourself.
- Stress the value of taking the time needed to make a thoughtful decision before responding to a request for a nude. Sending a nude as a "knee-jerk" reaction is never a good idea.
- Discuss gender roles and stereotypes. Do boys feel pressured to get nudes from girls and share them with their friends? Do girls feel pressure to send them? How does this impact young people?
- Discuss the "double standard" of sexting. If a boy shares a nude that was sent to him, he's a stud. There are no repercussions for requesting it, even if it was obtained through coercion. But the girl who sent the nude could be branded as a slut, regardless of her reason for sending it.
- Be proactive. Brainstorm ways to respond to requests for nudes before it even happens. Teach them that it's their right to say no.
 - ➔ "Dude, that's gross/not OK/not cool/offensive."
 - ➔ "Not right now." (buys time to think of a "real" response)
 - ➔ "I'm not into that."
 - ➔ "Stop harassing me."
 - ➔ "No. And please don't ask me ever again."
- The pressure on preteens to share a nude that's been sent to them is real. Teach your preteen to resist this pressure because of how damaging, disrespectful and embarrassing it can be for the sender. And if someone shows your preteen a nude that's been sent to them, tell them to walk away. It doesn't matter how many people have already seen it, it's not ok. And it's never "just a joke".
- Let your preteen know that if they run into trouble when it comes to sexting (whether they are the sender, recipient or sharer), that you want them to come and talk to you so you can help. Remind them that everyone makes mistakes, and there is no shame in that. You will deal with the situation together.





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What to say

Smart things to *not* say:

- “If a nude you sent gets out, it’ll ruin your reputation.”
- “You’d never sext, right? I know you’re not that type of girl.”
- “You did WHAT?! Wait until your Dad hears about this.”
- “You should have known that photo would get around.”

Smart things to say:

- “Have any of your friends asked someone for nudes? What do you think made them want to do that?”
- “Have any of your friends been asked for nudes? How did it make them feel?”
- “Do you think many kids your age feel pressure to request, send or share nudes?”
- “If you wouldn’t feel comfortable with your whole school seeing a photo, it’s not a good idea to send it to someone. “
- “Let’s brainstorm some possible responses for when/if someone asks you for a nude. I hope it never happens, but I want you to be prepared just in case.”
- “I trust you would never ask someone for a nude, knowing how disrespectful and offensive it can be.”
- “I trust you to treat yourself, others and your body with respect online and off.”
- “I trust you to make smart decisions online and off.”
- “If you run into trouble when it comes to sexting I’m here to help. I want you to come to me so we can deal with the situation together.”

