

## ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

# What is sexting?

## KEY WORDS

trust | consent | private photos | online privacy



The word 'sexting' is a combination of the words 'sex' and 'texting'. It, therefore, relates to **sending explicit material** (either suggestive texts, or nude and semi-nude images and videos) through electronic platforms, such as messaging apps. In today's digital age, sexting has become more common, so it's likely that you've heard about your peers engaging in this practice within their romantic relationships.

For some, sexting is a way to express their sexuality and show off their bodies.

**Feeling curious about sexual exploration is completely normal!**

Others may see sexting as a way to fit in with what their peers are doing or expecting from them.

Most sexting occurs within a romantic relationship and the couple engaging in this exchange report the activity as being a positive experience.

However, it's important to know that sexting is **not risk-free**. Your private material sent online can easily be shared with others, either due to an unreliable messaging platform or an untrustworthy partner. This can negatively impact the sender's reputation, self-esteem and open them up to harassment and bullying. Once a sext is out there, it's usually **out of your control**. The person receiving the sext may also use it to blackmail the sender, asking for more photos, money or something else, in order to not spread the material to others.

### **How can you protect yourself from the risks associated with sexting?**

You may have heard about safe sex, but have you heard about safe sexting? Here are a few questions to ask yourself before you send a sext:

- **Do I trust the person I'm sexting?**

Don't send sexts to anyone you've only talked to online, and don't know in person.

- **Is the platform I'm using secure and private?**

Many 'safe' apps still allow others to screenshot messages. Safe sexting means limiting the chance of your privacy being exploited by not taking photos with identifiable markings in them (such as school or city memorabilia, recognisable markings, etc.)



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- **What's my motivation behind sexting?**

Never use sexting as a way to impress anyone you don't trust or know well, or because you feel pressured to do so.

- **Am I sending this of my own free will?**

You should be comfortable saying 'no' to a sext request and engage only in sexting where both the sender and receiver have explicitly agreed, without pressure and with the right to say 'no' anytime.<sup>1</sup> To find out what you can do if sexting is not consensual or has gone too far, check out this infographic.

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No matter your decision, consider reaching out to a trusted adult such as a parent, teacher, or counselor if you receive an unwanted sext or you're worried about an image you've sent.

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about consent, check out our lesson: What is consent? Or if you're interested to know how safe your private material is online, check out: "Can I trust someone with my private information or images?"

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