

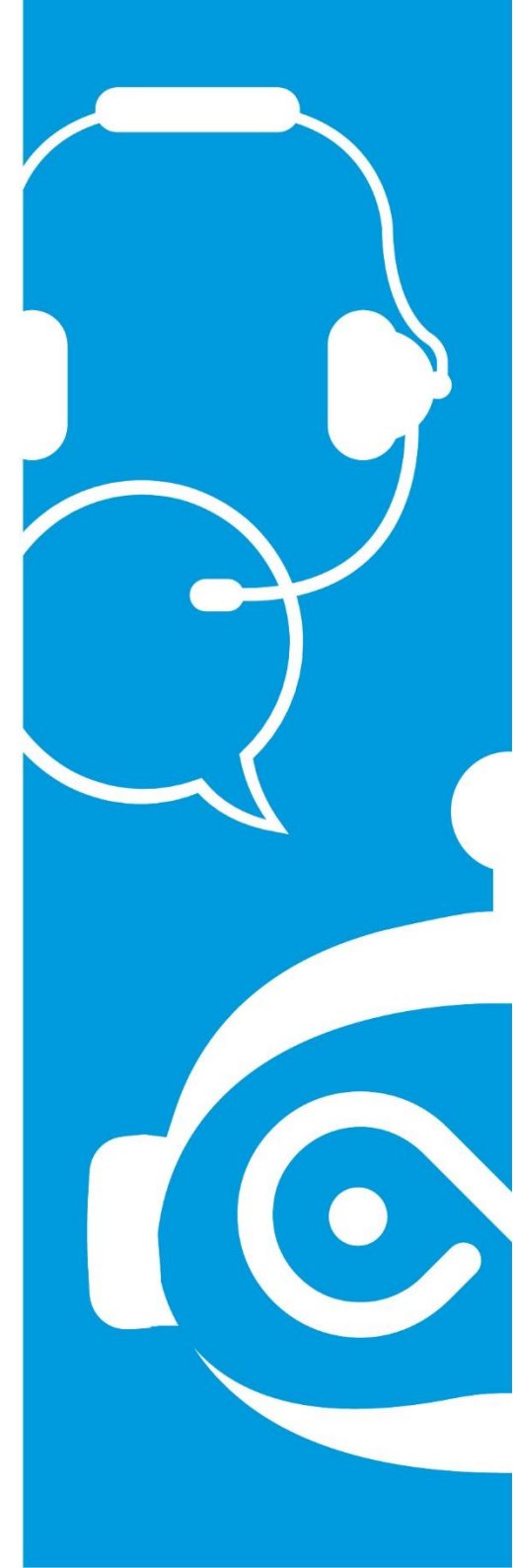


SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT: SEXTING

What is it?

Sexting is a **digital phenomenon** which entails the exchange of texts, audio, images or videos, especially through smartphones or social network chats with a sexual or sexually explicit connotation. The most frequent form of sexting today is the exchange of nude or semi-nude images. Sexting has become widespread in recent years, even among minors.

Sexting can be classified under exchanges of images and texts between two subjects, who may or may not be in a relationship, or exchanges of images and texts that not only involve two partners but are shared with other subjects outside the relationship.



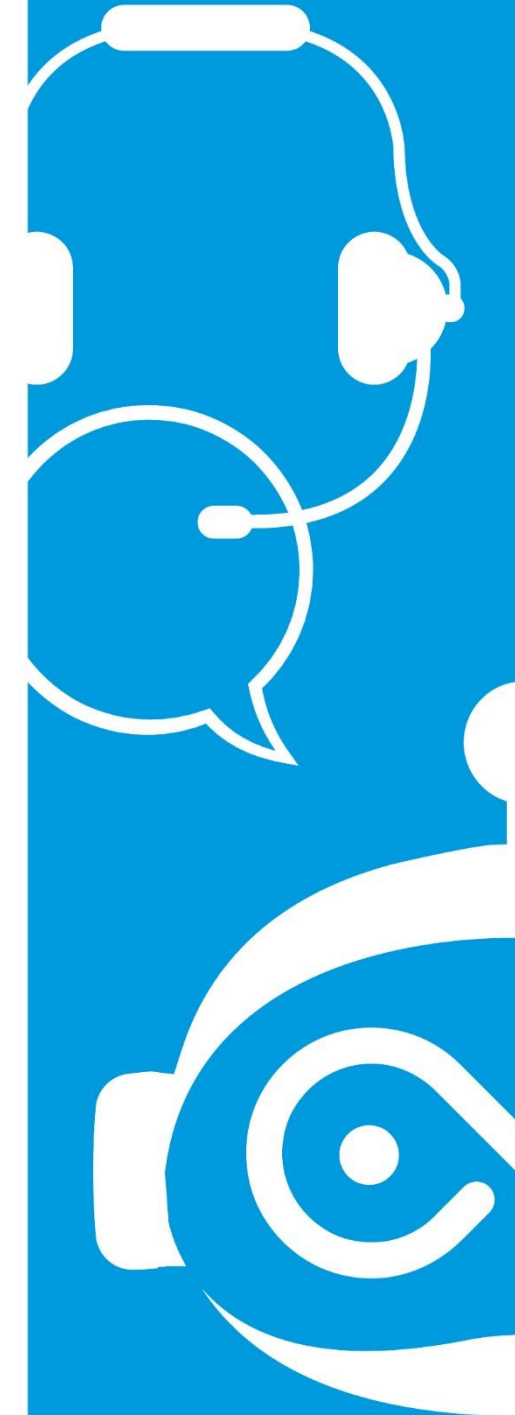
How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Sexting on its own needn't be considered a problematic practice, if exchanged between two consenting individuals of the same age group. Sexual desire is normal, as is experimenting with one's sexuality, because it is linked to psycho-physical well-being and growth.

However, this practice can become problematic for a number of reasons. If both parties do not have the same level of interest in exchanging images or texts of a sexual nature, the sending of media of a sexual nature can then be classified as sexual harassment. Conversely, one of the two parties may feel obliged to send sexual contents due to an insistent request from the other user: an apparently innocent practice slowly evolves into sexual coercion in this way.

Another harmful side of sexting is the permanence of the contents on the internet and the ease with which they can be forwarded and copied. If subject A receives content, he or she can potentially forward it to X number of people, who, in turn, can do the same, and so on. In this way, the copies that will be created of this content are countless and they become impossible to control.

The unconsented and unlawful spread of someone's nude images, also known as revenge porn, can have severe negative impacts on one's life. Victims may suffer humiliation, anxiety, and depression, leading to a loss of self-esteem, relationships, and job opportunities. The images can also be used as a form of blackmail, coercion, or harassment. Victims may feel violated, ashamed, and powerless, with long-lasting effects on their mental health.



What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

If a young person feels pressured to engage in sexting, they can be advised to:

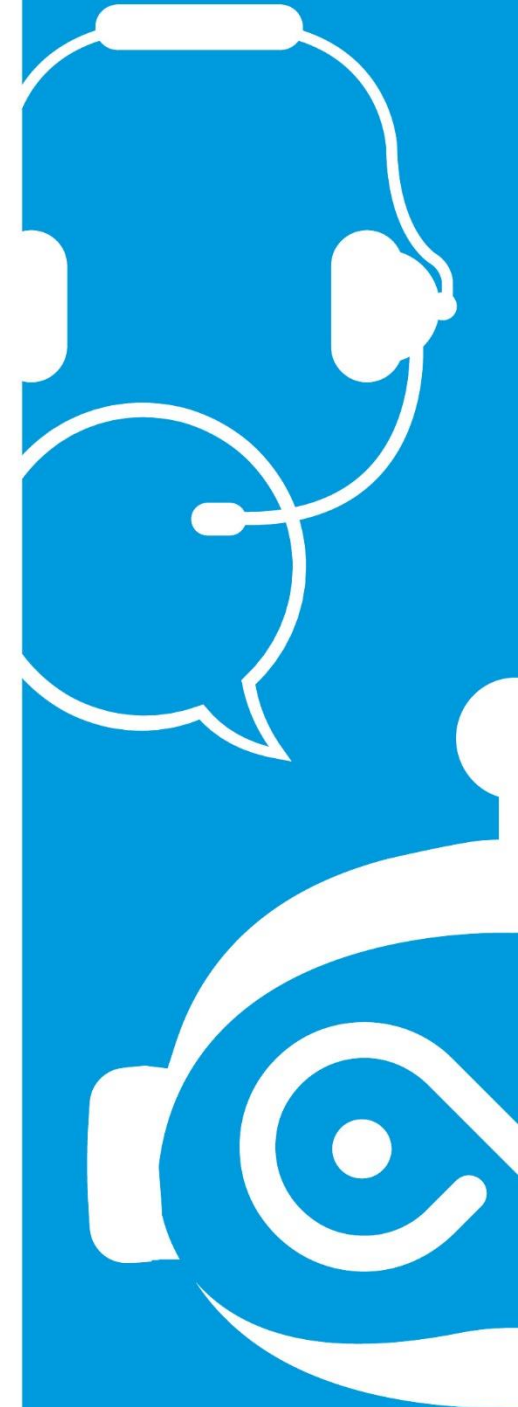
- Steer the conversation in a less sexy direction
- Offer a simple refusal
- Refer to a parent for help
- Educate themselves on the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships

If, on the other hand, they are aware of the risks and would like to continue sexting, advise them only to use a use encrypted messaging apps like Signal or Telegram or apps that are made for private exchanges of explicit content such as [Dust](#) and [Confide](#).

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Apps: Mental and sexual well-being
- Cyberbullying: Catfishing
- Sexually explicit content: OnlyFans



Further reading:

- Davidson, Judith. *Sexting: Gender and Teens*. Sense Publishers, 2014.
- Walrave, Michel, Joris Van Ouytsel, Koen Ponnet, and Jeff R. Temple, eds. *Sexting: Motives and Risk in Online Sexual Self-Presentation*. Palgrave Pivot. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71882-8>.

