

Talking to Your Kids about Sexting

— Tip Sheet

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

SENDING SEXTS

FORWARDING SEXTS

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Sexting is most likely to have negative consequences when the person sending the sext has been pressured into doing it.

- **Talk about the characteristics of a healthy relationship:** Ask your kids if they think it's ever appropriate to harass, embarrass, isolate or control their partner. Make sure they know that these behaviours are **never** okay.
- **Teach and model healthy emotional habits:** Encourage them never to post or reply to something in anger, but "walk away" from the situation and wait until they've cooled down.
- **Talk about gender roles:** Explain how girls and boys may feel they have to act in certain ways because of established gender roles. For example, boys may feel pressured by friends prove their masculinity by sharing sexual photos that their partners have sent them.
- **If you think your child is in an unhealthy relationship:** Be clear that you think the relationship is unhealthy but don't try to push them into leaving it. Instead, encourage him or her to spend more time with family and friends. Talk to your child's friends to see if they have similar concerns.

SENDING SEXTS

Don't just talk to girls about sexting. MediaSmarts' research shows that boys are just as likely to send sexts as girls, and boys' sexts are more likely to be forwarded.

- **Talk about how uncommon this kind of behaviour is:** Youth may be motivated to engage in sexting if they believe "everybody is doing it", so it is important for them to understand how rare these activities really are. (In our research, fewer than one in ten students who had access to a cellphone said they had sent a sext.)
- **Talk about digital permanence:** Whenever kids are sharing personal things about themselves they should keep in mind that these could easily end up being seen by people they didn't want it sent to.
- **Encourage your child/teen to ask themselves the following questions about what they are sharing:**
 - Is this how I want people to see me?
 - Could somebody use this to hurt me? Would I be upset if they shared it with others?
 - What's the *worst* thing that could happen if I shared this?
- **Discuss appropriate ways of showing you care for someone:** Kids may think that sharing a nude or sexy photo with a girlfriend or boyfriend – or someone they hope will be their girlfriend or boyfriend – shows they love or trust them. Remind them to ask the questions above before sharing something this personal.
- **Remind them they shouldn't do anything they don't want to:** Tell your kids that if somebody asks them to send something they are not comfortable doing, they have the right to say no. No one who loves or respects someone will pressure or threaten them.

FORWARDING SEXTS

MediaSmarts' research suggests that sexts that are forwarded reach a fairly wide audience, so it's important that kids understand how big an impact sharing sexts can have.

- **Encourage your child/teen to ask themselves the following questions when someone shares a sext with them:**
 - Did the person in this picture mean for it to be shared?
 - If it came from someone other than the original sender, did they have permission from the person who's in it?
 - How would I feel if somebody shared something like this with me in it?
- **Tell them if what they received makes that person look bad, would embarrass them, or could hurt them if it got around, don't pass it on!** The person who sent it may have meant it as a joke, but jokes can be a lot less funny when something is seen by the wrong person. They shouldn't assume that "everybody's already seen it!"
- **Tell your kids it's okay to say no:** A lot of people – boys especially – get pressured by their friends to share nude photos of their girlfriends or boyfriends. It can be hard to stand up to this pressure, but you have to think about how much giving in could hurt you and your girlfriend/boyfriend.
- **Treat everyone with respect online:** MediaSmarts' research suggests that youth who forward sexts don't think of it as being wrong. Talk about ethical decision making and how to respect others online.

(Some of the content in this tip sheet has been excerpted from the [Think Before You Share](#) guide by MediaSmarts and Facebook.)