

The Issue

As children grow and develop, they become more interested in relationships and sex. One way they do this is through sexting. Sexting is the sharing and receiving of sexually explicit messages and nude or partially nude images via cellphone. SEXTS may be sent as regular text messages or through apps, like Snapchat, and WhatsApp. [Teens may sext for a variety of reasons](#). They may be trying to establish intimacy with a boyfriend or girlfriend, impress a crush, or be funny. Others may feel pressured into sexting by boyfriends or girlfriends who may threaten to break up with them if they don't send a picture. Teens may not believe or be able to foresee a situation in which the person they send a sext to chooses to share that image with others. However, it does happen and the consequences can be academically, socially, and emotionally devastating.

Teens that sext may [get in trouble at school](#), be [bullied](#) or harassed, or, in extreme cases, get in [legal trouble](#).

Additionally, those who engage in sexting may also become victims of [sextortion](#). Sextortion is a type of blackmail used by offenders to acquire additional sexual content from the child, coerce them into engaging in sexual activity, or to obtain money from the child. NCMEC analyses have found that children who are victims of sextortion are often targeted and blackmailed by an individual they met online who had obtained the initial sexual image from the child through deceit, coercion, or another method.

To learn more about sextortion, visit [NCMEC's Sextortion page](#), or [download the report](#).

By the Numbers

The average age of children in CyberTipline reports of sextortion was **8-17 years old**.
78%

of offenders' primary goal in the extortion was to acquire increasingly more explicit sexual content from the child.

4%

Of all sextortion reports indicated the child had engaged in self-harm, threatened, or attempted suicide as a result of the experience.

How to Talk About It

Children and teens may not take the first steps in disclosing to you an uncomfortable online interaction. If during this discussion you hear something that is startling to you, try to react calmly and continue listening. Remember, it is not the child who is at fault. Together you can report any inappropriate incident to the [CyberTipline](#).

Ask

- Has anyone ever sent you a sext?
- Has anyone ever asked or pressured you to sext?
- Do you think it's OK to forward "sexy" images? Why?
- What could happen to you if you send or forward a naked picture?
- What are some ways a private photo sent to one person could be seen by others?

Reinforce

- Expectations and family values regarding sex, relationships, and technology usage.
- The characteristics of a healthy relationship. Explain that any person pressuring them to sext isn't someone they should trust.
- The rate at which information spreads. Emphasize that once an image is shared, it is out of their control and can stay around forever.
- The consequences they could face for sending or forwarding images.
- The importance of not asking for or forwarding sexts. Make sure they understand that forwarding sexting images is a major violation of trust and

explain the risks that it poses to the person in the picture.