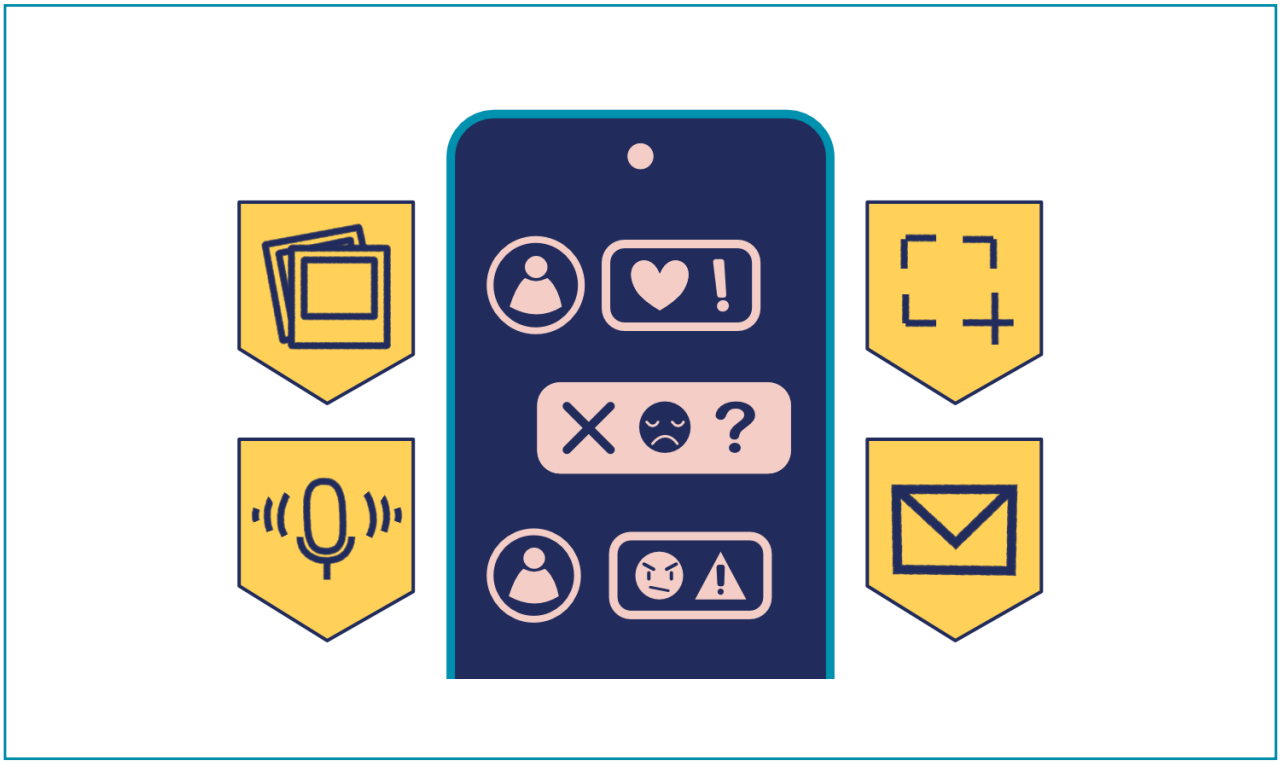
When Sexting Becomes Abuse



Sexting can be a normal part of communication and exploring relationships, but it should always be based on mutual consent, trust, and respect. Choosing to send a private photo, video, or message does not mean you have agreed that it can be shared with anyone else. You have the right to decide what you share, who you share it with, and what happens to your private content. If someone pressures you to send something, threatens to share it, or shares something you sent without your consent, that is not your fault, and you are not responsible for their choice to share it. This is abuse, and it is illegal in Canada.

If you are thinking about sexting, it is important to consider that once you share something digitally, it can be difficult to control where it goes, even when an app says a photo or video will disappear. Someone may save, screenshot, record, or forward content without the sender knowing. This resource shares more information about what sexting is and how to protect yourself. If your image or sext has already been shared, this resource has more information on what steps to take and how to get it taken down.

What is Sexting?

Also see: What is sexting? - Kids Help Phone

Sexting is sending and receiving sexual messages through technology such as a phone, app, email, or webcam. Sexting includes sexually explicit words and nude or semi-nude photos and videos.

In Canada, it is not illegal for two consenting people (including those under the age of 18) to possess or carry a nude photo of one another. This is called the Private Use Exception Rule. It applies only if the image was shared consensually and the person depicted is not being exploited. It is illegal to distribute this image beyond your relationship, to force someone to share an intimate image when they don't want to, or to threaten to share an image they sent you consensually. For more information on the law, see this resource.

Important Considerations

Also see: 2026 Sexting basics: How to stay safe - Kids Help Phone

Sexting is not risk-free. Once you have sent an image or a message, it can be screenshotted, shared, posted, or forwarded without your consent.

- **Permanency:** You can't "unsend" a sext. Some applications may give you a sense of privacy by deleting an image after a short period, but someone can easily take a screenshot when they receive it, or they may not delete the image as agreed. Once an image is sent, it is no longer under your control.
- **Blackmail:** Sexual messages could be used to manipulate you in the future. The person you sent it to could threaten to share your sexts with others to try to force you to do something you do not want to do.
- **Emotional health:** If someone shares your message without your consent, it could affect your mental and emotional well-being. It can be very upsetting and overwhelming to lose control of intimate images or text messages.

How to stay safe



If you do choose to sext, some ways you can protect yourself include:

- Do not include identifiable features in the photo/video (e.g. do not send pictures that include face, scars, birthmarks, tattoos, or piercings)
- Do not include any identifiable information like your name, address, or school
- Avoid wearing identifying clothing such as a school or sports team sweatshirt
- Have a neutral background
- Turn off your location before you take the photo or video
- Lock your phone and apps with a hard-to-guess password

- Do not back up nude images/videos to the cloud as they can be hacked
- Turn off automatic backups
- Do not send photos or videos to people you've never met in person
- Use apps that provide encrypted services when sending images
- Tell the person you're sending the image/video to that you do not want the image/video to be shared

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing technology-facilitated violence, you are not alone. Encourage them to chat with a trusted adult, connect with the Kids Help Phone to create a safety plan, or use ShelterSafe.ca to find a shelter/transition house near you to discuss options and create a safety plan. You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.