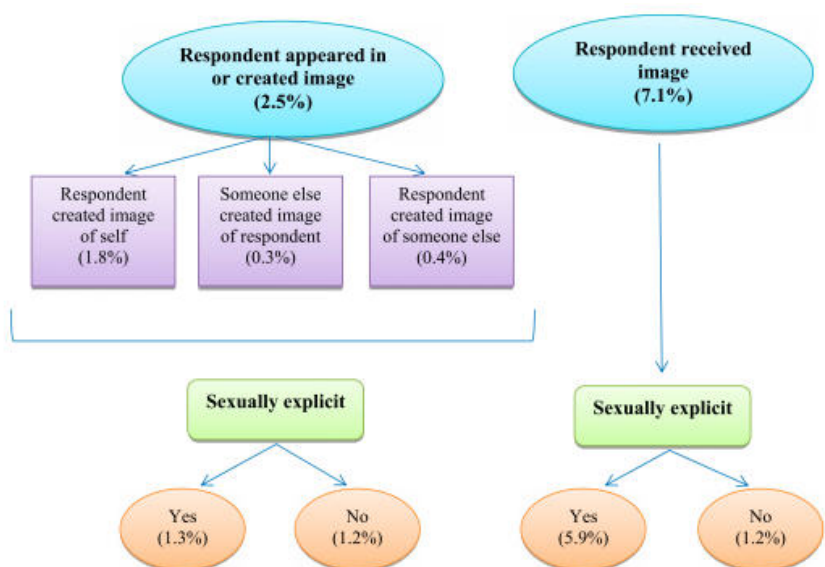




# Sexting far less prevalent than previously reported

by [Larry Magid](#) December 5, 2011



A new study shows that 2.5 percent of teens appeared in or created a nude or nearly nude image but only 1.3 percent appeared in a sexually explicit image

(Credit: Pediatrics)

A study published in the January, 2012 issue of [Pediatrics](#) asked teens whether they had sent or received sexually suggestive, nude or nearly nude images of themselves--a practice commonly known as "sexting."

What they found is that 2.5 percent of the 10- to 17-year-olds in the survey said they had appeared in or created images that depicted themselves nude or nearly nude. But, when the researchers asked if the images "showed breasts, genitals or someone's bottom," only 1.3 percent said they had appeared in or created such images. The "nude or nearly nude" category included youth wearing underwear or bathing suits or even fully clothed but in sexy poses.

These percentages are in striking contrast to the results of a widely cited [study](#) (PDF) from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy that reported that 20 percent of teens had sent or posted nude or seminude picture of themselves. That study included 18- and 19-year-olds who are adults. Aside from maturity issues, when it comes to sexting, one important difference between adults and minors is that a nude or sexually explicit picture of a minor could be considered child pornography, which is a serious crime that can result in a prison term and being listed on a sex offender registry, potentially for life.

The Pediatrics article is based on a study conducted by the University of New Hampshire's [Crimes Against Children Research Center](#). Researchers interviewed 1,560 10- through 17-year-olds by phone.

The study also found that older teens are much more likely to appear in such images than younger children. Just under three quarters (72 percent) of the 2.5 percent who appeared in or created nude or nearly nude images were 16 or 17. Only 6 percent of that 2.5 percent were between 10 and 12. About 7 percent of the youth had received a nude or nearly nude picture, but only 1 percent reported forwarding or posting the image. Of those who received such images, 56 percent were girls and 55 percent were 16 or 17. Just under 6 percent reported receiving sexually explicit images.

The study found that some--but far from most--youth engaged in sexting were emotionally upset as a result. For example, "21 percent of respondents appearing in or creating images reported feeling very or extremely upset, embarrassed or afraid as a result, as did 25 percent of the youth receiving images."

Less than three in 10 (28 percent) of those who sent or received images reported the indecent to an authority such as a parent, teacher or police but that's not alarming considering that it's actually higher than the percentage of those troubled by the incidents

### **Why this study is important**

This study shows that sexting is not the norm. The vast majority of kids are not involved in this type of behavior. And the reason this is important is because of evidence from other studies that show that people are more likely to engage in behavior that they consider to be "normal." There are lots of studies, for example, that show that people are more likely to smoke or engage in other unhealthy behaviors if they think that their friends or those around them do and there was even a [study](#) (PDF) by David W. Craig and H. Wesley Perkins that shows that kids who perceive that their friends bully are more likely to bully others.



Kimberly J. Mitchell

(Credit: UNH)

For more, see [Norms Approach Beats Fear & Exaggeration for Motivating Behavior](#), a slide show based on a presentation I gave this fall at the International Bullying Prevention Association conference.

**Interview with study's lead author**

To learn more about the study and its implications, I spoke with the study's lead author, [Kimberly Mitchell](#), who is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the Crimes against Children Research Center, at the University of New Hampshire.