



Survey: Chances are, your teen isn't sexting

By Cory Hatch
[MyHealthNewsDaily](#)

Sexting -- the phenomenon of teens using phones or computers to send each other sexual photographs -- is not as widespread as once thought, a new study suggests.

University of New Hampshire researchers conducted a telephone survey to ask 1,560 Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 whether they'd made, sent or received sexual photographs in the past year.

Only about 1 percent of kids were sexting sexually explicit photographs.

"It's somewhat reassuring," said study author Kimberly Mitchell, an associate professor of psychology at the University of New Hampshire. "The media ... has portrayed it as a big problem."

But chances are, your children are not sexting, Mitchell said.

Researchers asked questions such as "Have you ever taken nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of yourself?" and "Has anyone ever sent you nude or nearly nude pictures or videos of kids who were under the age of 18 that someone else took?"

A related study showed that law-enforcement agencies respond to about 1,750 cases of sexting each year in the United States.

Both studies were published today in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Defining sexting

Kids' answers during the interviews depended upon how the [researchers defined sexting](#). When researchers asked if children had created or appeared in nude pictures or videos, 2.5 percent said yes. However, only 1 percent of children said the photos were sexually explicit, showing bare breasts, genitals or bottoms.

More than 7 percent of children said they had received nude or nearly nude photographs of others, while nearly 6 percent said they'd received sexually explicit photographs.

Children's answers included: "This boy had four pictures of a naked girl — he was showing everyone in the classroom," and "I was just dating a boy and he wanted a picture and I just sent him my picture."

Other studies debunked

The findings debunk other, less rigorous studies of teens and sexting, the researchers said. For instance, one study used an Internet panel and included 18-and-19-year-olds. Some studies also didn't distinguish between nearly nude photographs and sexually explicit photographs.

"Often times, [the photographs] weren't sexually explicit," Mitchell said. "We find, across the board, that [kids are pretty smart about using technology](#)."

When sexting was considered serious enough for legal action, two-thirds of the cases involved an aggravating circumstance such as an adult being involved, or nonconsensual or malicious behavior, according to the study of law-enforcement agencies.

[Story: Poll names 'sexting' most annoying tech word](#)

Researchers mailed surveys to a sample of 2,712 law-enforcement agencies and found 3,477 cases involving sexting during 2007 and 2008.

About 36 percent of cases involved adults, and 19 percent involved criminal behavior beyond creation of the sexual image.

About a third of the cases were considered "experimental," meaning that the children involved were in a romantic relationship or were engaged in attention-seeking behavior.

Police made arrests in 62 percent of cases involving an adult, 36 percent of cases where a youth was engaged in aggravated behavior and 18 percent of experimental cases.

The study advances the current understanding of sexting by delving further into the details than any other research to date, said Amanda Lenhart, a senior research specialist with the Pew Research Center, in Washington, D.C.

[Story: More kids 'cyberbaiting' teachers](#)

"The researchers have been able to ask very specific questions to target a narrow definition of sexting ... as well as a more-detailed understanding of how the images were created, shared and received," Lenhart said. "Their research findings also closely match my most recent work on this topic, where we found 2 percent of teens 12 to 17 say they have sent a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude image of themselves to someone else, and 16 percent of all [teens say they have received them](#)."

Mitchell acknowledged that her study involved only [children who use the Internet](#), while saying nothing about the small percentage (about 5 percent) of kids who don't. "To be involved with sexting you don't have to be an Internet user," she said. "I don't think we're missing many kids, but we could be missing some."