



Teen Sexting Not the Norm, Says Study

Data Vary on Prevalence of Sexting

By [KIM CAROLLO \(@kimcarollo\)](#)
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Two new studies suggest that [sexting among teens](#) may not be as common as many people think it is.

In the first study, researchers from the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center in Durham telephone-surveyed more than 1,500 Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17, asking whether they engaged in creating, sending or delivering sexually explicit images or videos either through their mobile phones or the Internet.

The study, published in the journal *Pediatrics*, found that 2.5 percent of the young people surveyed participated in some sort of sexting activity in the past year, but only 1 percent admitted activity that included material considered [child pornography](#), meaning images or videos that featured naked genitals, breasts or buttocks.

But if the definition of sexting is broadened to include sexually suggestive images, such as provocative poses with no nudity or appearing almost nude, the number of kids participating in it jumps to nearly 10 percent. Most kids participate in sexting either as a prank or while they're in a relationship.

"One of the takeaway messages is it's good news," said co-author Kimberly Mitchell. "It's reassuring that it's not as prevalent as we thought in past research." Mitchell, also a research associate professor of psychology, said her study is the first one to break down the types of images by the degree of sexual explicitness.

Previous research has yielded very different data on teen sexting.

A 2009 survey by the nonprofit group [National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#) found that 20 percent of teens ages 13 to 19 sent or posted sexually suggestive photos or video of themselves.

But another survey done that same year by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that 4 percent of teens between the ages of 12 and 17 who own mobile phones said they sent nude or almost nude images or videos of themselves, and 15 percent of teens said they received these types of images and videos.

Research presented early last month at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting found that 10 percent of nearly 23,000 Boston-area high school students said they sent a sext message in the past year, and 5 percent said they received a sexually suggestive image.

Dr. Michael Rich, an associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School told ABC News in November that the number of teens who sext seems to be dropping, possibly because they are more aware of the consequences of their behavior.

"In other words, their awareness of the risk is now increased," he said.

The researchers urge better assessment of what's involved in sexting, because they believe it is not an example of extreme risk-taking or sexual behavior.

"Sexting has been greeted in many media portrayals as yet another sign of the hypersexualization of youth and extreme risk-taking," the authors wrote. "In fact, however, many indicators of youth sexual behavior such as [teenage pregnancy](#) and the number of young people with multiple sexual partners have been improving in recent years, in spite of such concerns."

