

# 'Sexting' surges nationwide, and it's not just teens doing it

Young people must be careful, experts say

By Stephanie Steinberg  
USA TODAY

Teen "sexting" is on the rise, but teens aren't the only age group sending naked pictures of themselves to others via text message.

In a new survey of 1,017 teens and 1,049 parents nationwide, 28% of the parents say they engage in sexting, including sending texts with sexual content or nude pictures of themselves.

Charles Sophy, a child and family psychiatrist in Beverly Hills, Calif., says many of his patients who are

parents engage in sexting, and not always with their partners.

"It's a new and exciting way, for lack of a better term, to explore and express themselves when marriages are in bad spots," says Sophy, who is on the advisory council for LG Text Ed, a program of LG Mobile Phones, sponsor of the survey.

An increasing number of committed couples also are sexting with each other, Sophy says. And as long as they set parameters, Sophy says, the activity is not necessarily a "bad thing," and it may be a way to "revamp" a relationship.

In the same survey, 43% of people ages 13 to 17 say they "sext" with their peers.

As mobile phone use increases among teens and children, so has

What teens admit to	Texting practices	What parents believe
41%	Sent, received or forwarded a text that said something sexual	11%
52%	Read someone else's texts or had their texts read by someone without permission	8%
43%	Put someone down or insulted someone in a text	10%
45%	Texted while driving	4%

Source: LG Text Ed Survey

sexting, says Joel Haber, a clinical psychologist and author of *Bullyproof Your Child for Life*. Teens usually sext for fun and don't think about the consequences. "That text can go to that one person or 1 million people," he says. "Once it becomes more viral, you can't take it back."

Teens know sexting could affect their future careers and have social ramifications, but they do it anyway, says Bill Albert, spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

"They know that it could be embarrassing if their friends find out, but there still seems to be this careless teenage 'it wouldn't happen to me' attitude," Albert says.

To combat the problem, Sophy says, schools should incorporate les-

sons about appropriate texting in sex education classes. LG Mobile Phones also launched an initiative called LG Text Ed in which parents can find information online about mobile phone misuse (lgtexed.com).

Albert says parents just need to talk to their teens and try to penetrate "that teenage 'it won't happen to me' armor."

"Help them understand that, yeah, it could happen to you," Albert says. "That the guy you thought was your boyfriend and wouldn't share that with anybody — well, guess what? He shared that with five of his friends, and it has gone from private to global."

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