

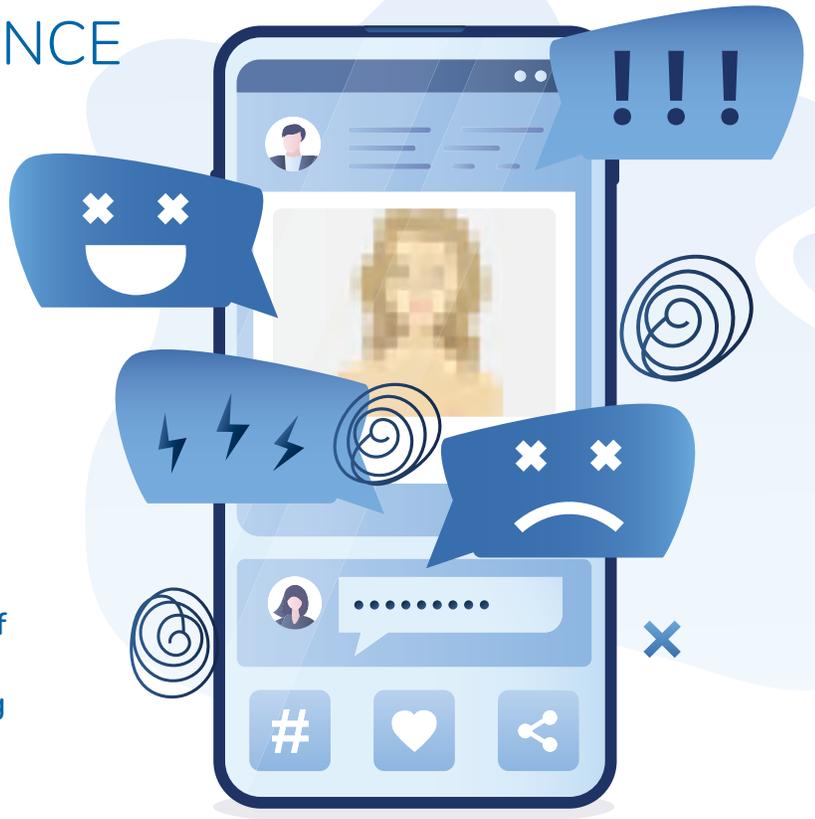
SEXTING

DURING ADOLESCENCE

To guide school staff interventions

Sexting among adolescents can be defined as the production, distribution and redistribution of sexual content (photos, videos, etc.), among themselves, via information and communication technologies.¹

The content shared is often intended for a single person or a small number of people, but it may be shared with a wider audience than intended, resulting in a breach of privacy.



There are many reasons why adolescents start sexting. These reasons can be divided into three categories:

- Voluntary: to explore sexuality, to show interest or love, or to meet a challenge
- Coercion: sometimes a young person is threatened, intimidated or even forced to produce and send sexual images
- Without their knowledge: for example, at a party, in the locker room or during an intimate moment

It is important for those involved in the school network to intervene appropriately when such a situation arises or is reported. It is important to be receptive and empathetic.

¹ Cadre 21: <https://www.cadre21.org/groupe-de-cours/trousse-dintervention-sexto/>

MYTHS ABOUT TEXTING

1 Most adolescents are sexting.

FALSE

Sexting **is not a universal practice**, but it is also not uncommon among young people.

In a study conducted in Québec by groupe SEVEQ² in 2019, secondary students were asked, among other things, about exchanging suggestive photos and videos. The results were as follows:

- A greater proportion of girls than boys receive this type of request, particularly those aged 14 or older.
- 43.7% of boys and 16.4% of girls agree to send them.
- 36.5% of requests for suggestive photos or videos come from people the young people do not know, 36.2% from other students and 27.4% from other people they know.
- Girls who send unsolicited photos or videos of a sexual nature mostly do so on an occasional basis, while more boys send them on a regular basis.



According to a study published in 2018 by Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy³ (MediaSmarts) and conducted among 800 young people aged 16 to 20, more of them had received sexts than had sent them, and participation in sexting activities increases with age:

- Among 16-year-olds, 26% had sent a sext, whereas 53% had received one.
- Among 17-year-olds, 24% had sent a sext and 56% had received one.
- Among 18-year-olds, 45% had sent a sext and 70% had received one.
- Young people are more likely to sext when solicited.

2 Peer pressure is one of the main reasons why young people sext.

TRUE

Like all adolescent behaviour, real or perceived peer pressure can influence sexting behaviours. If adolescents view this practice as normal, they are more likely to engage in it, especially out of a desire to conform or for approval, validation and recognition from their peers.

Sexting can also be used:

- to please or to win over a potential partner
- as a prelude to sexual behaviours
- as proof of love for a partner or out of fear of losing them
- to explore their sexuality
- to maintain intimacy in a long-distance relationship

2 Claire Beaumont et al., "[Ce que les jeunes disent de leur utilisation des TIC au fil des ans \(2013-2019\): possession, supervision, cyberagression et sextage](#)," (2020): 4.

3 Matthew Johnson, Faye Mishna, Moses Okumu and Joanne Daciuk, "[Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexts: Behaviours and Attitudes of Canadian Youth](#)" (Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2018).

MYTHS ABOUT TEXTING

3

Most young people who receive a sext automatically share it.

FALSE

The majority of young people who receive sexts keep them to themselves. However, boys are more likely than girls to share them with others without consent.⁴ A sext can be shared by showing it to someone else in person and/or forwarding it electronically. Although sharing is not a common practice among adolescents, it is important to pay attention and intervene early when the situation arises.

4

Students are generally unable to understand the dangers of sexting.

FALSE

Adolescence is a time when young people are discovering themselves and their needs and interests, which may lead them to engage in impulsive behaviour. Despite this, young people are capable of critical thinking. It is important to give them opportunities to reflect upon and discuss sensitive issues such as sexting and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, rather than imposing or dictating rules about what they should think or do.

5

School staff do not have the tools needed to intervene when faced with a situation involving sexting.

FALSE

When it comes to interventions related to sexting or the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, staff can refer in particular to the Anti-Bullying and Anti-Violence Plan, which must include both preventive measures and intervention methods. School staff are called upon to analyze each situation and tailor their actions accordingly. Depending on the situation, certain partners, such as the health and social services network and the police force, could help in determining how to proceed.

6

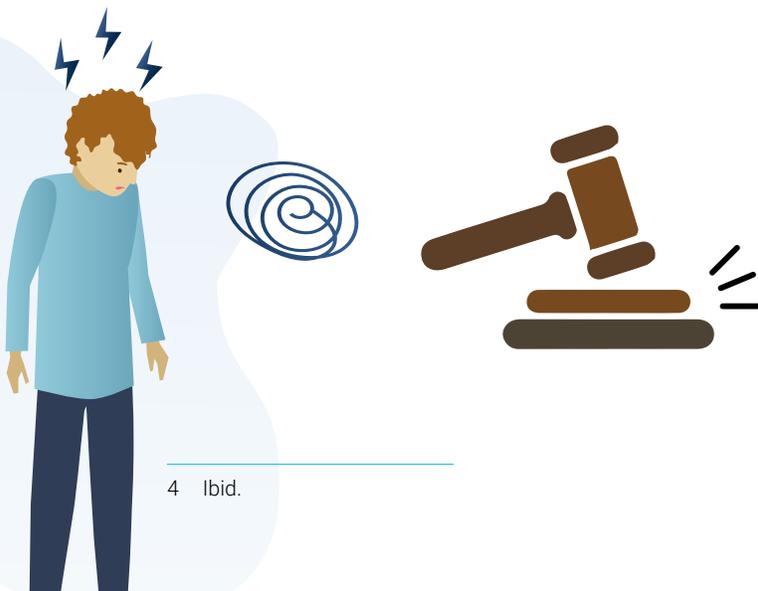
Sexting as an adolescent is illegal.

TRUE

Under the *Criminal Code*, the possession, transmission, publication and sharing of photos, videos or messages of a sexual nature involving a minor is illegal, as this constitutes child pornography.

Legally, the very act of showing such a file to a third party is sufficient to incur criminal liability.

It is important to be aware of the risks adolescents are exposed to if they engage in such behaviour. Significant legal consequences may follow for the young person who engages in this behaviour, in addition to other possible physical, social, psychological, emotional or financial consequences.



BEST PRACTICES

In addition to providing students with information about sexting, non-consensual sharing and the legal implications of both practices, school staff have a role to play in supporting, educating, preventing and intervening with young people. They can be important resource persons for students.

Prevention approaches

Proactively educate students about sexuality and prevention to help them develop the skills to have healthy and egalitarian relationships, become aware of real and perceived peer pressure, assert themselves, respect their boundaries and make informed choices. Making parents aware of this reality can lead to concerted intervention, both in prevention and in situations involving sexting.

In schools, a comprehensive and positive approach to sexuality and social behaviour is essential. It is important to choose interventions that promote respect for individual rights and the development of students' ability to take charge of their own health and well-being. The following actions illustrate this approach:

- ✓ foster an open-minded and empathetic attitude to encourage dialogue
- ✓ make students aware of the rights and responsibilities involved in privacy
- ✓ teach the ethical use of technology
- ✓ promote the adoption of safe and healthy behaviours concerning sexuality
- ✓ encourage students to respect their boundaries and those of others
- ✓ ensure that students understand the concept and implications of free and informed consent
- ✓ support students in making decisions that enable them to have a positive relationship with sexuality, that is respectful of themselves and others
- ✓ invite students to think of an adult to whom they can refer when needed
- ✓ be open to students confiding in you by listening in a non-judgmental way



Intervention approaches

When a situation involving sexting or the non-consensual sharing of intimate images arises, it is essential to first ensure the physical and emotional safety of the students involved. An attentive and empathetic attitude will foster trust with the students and will have a considerable effect on what happens next.

The educational institution's Anti-Bullying and Anti-Violence Plan can, among other things, guide the staff members as they analyze the situation and plan their actions, depending on the context. When there is evidence to suggest that a student's safety or development may be compromised, external partners can also provide insight and contribute to the analysis of the situation. However, school staff members remain key players, even when situations involve partners. School staff is required to:

- ✓ support student victims, witnesses and perpetrators, and provide appropriate help in a timely manner
- ✓ restore the climate in the classroom and at the school, depending on the situation
- ✓ keep the adults and students involved informed of the status of the case (only necessary and relevant information) while maintaining confidentiality
- ✓ establish and maintain collaboration with the parents of the students concerned
- ✓ check regularly to make sure the situation is resolved
- ✓ record interventions and follow-ups
- ✓ take the opportunity to educate and equip students (teach them about the role of witnesses, consent, egalitarian relationship, etc.), depending on the situation

It is important to remember that each situation is unique and takes place in its own context. A structured, concerted analysis of the situation will make it possible to determine interventions to protect, support and guide student victims, perpetrators and witnesses, as intended in the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan (*Education Act*).⁵

5 <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/i-13.3>

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

An Act to counter non-consensual sharing of intimate images and to improve protection and support in civil matters for persons who are victims of violence

The Act provides a fast and simple procedure to prevent or put a stop to the non-consensual sharing of an intimate image as well as the penalties that may be imposed when an order issued to that effect is disobeyed.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection

This Centre recommends resources for young people, families and schools, including *Self/Peer Exploitation Guide* for schools, education relations officer and families dealing with these incidents.

Department of Justice – Cyberbullying and the Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images

Cyberbullying and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images are discussed on the Government of Canada's Department of Justice website.

Éducaloi

The mission of this organization is to explain the law in everyday language, develop the legal competencies of the population of Québec and inform the public about the law, their rights and their responsibilities, particularly with regard to the sharing of intimate photos.

Kids Help Phone

This 24/7 national support service offers professional intervention, information and resources about sexting, among other things.

MediaSmarts

Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy offers a variety of research findings and teaching resources, including media issues and the use of digital technology.

NeedHelpNow.ca

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection – NeedHelpNow.ca offers its services to help young people stop the spread of sexual pictures or videos and provides them with support along the way.

Québec Government – Sexting, etc.

This site offers a variety of information, some of which is related to sexting.

SEVEQ – Ce que les jeunes disent de leur utilisation des TIC au fil des ans (2013-2019): possession, supervision, cyberagression et sextage

(in French only)

A study conducted in Québec in 2019 aimed to create a portrait of certain aspects of ICT, including receiving and sending of sext messages by adolescents.

Le sextage chez les jeunes – DPCP

(in French only)

This page aims to provide a better understanding of the laws related to sexting among adolescents.

SEXTO Project – Sûreté du Québec

This guide aims to better equip school staff to deal with sexting in schools.

Tel-jeunes – Sexting

This site provides support and assistance services to give young people the tools they need to take greater control of their lives. You will find a wealth of information, including answers to the most frequently asked questions about sexting.