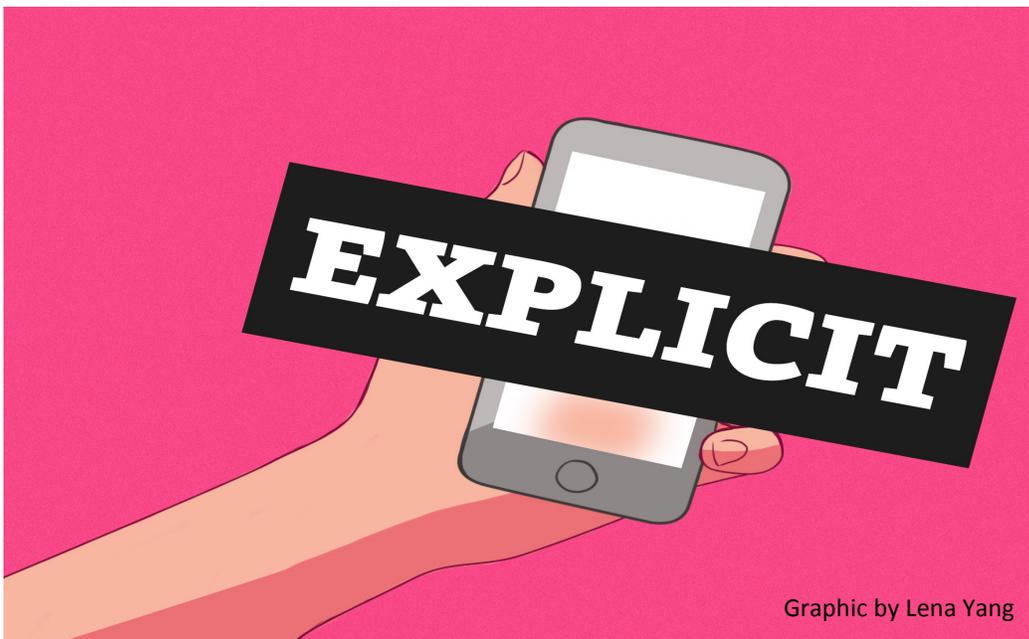




reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

Sexting and the College Student



Graphic by Lena Yang

Sexting (sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages or photos electronically, usually by cell phone) is a relatively new phenomenon, as the technologies that allow for it didn't exist a couple decades ago. However, people wanting to express or publicize their sexuality and communicate with others in sexy ways is nothing new. Sexting can be used as a form of flirting or foreplay or a way to show that one is a sexual being.

It is hard to determine the exact prevalence of sexting among teens or adults, as many people keep this activity secret. However, one study of college students and sexting by Allyson Dir, a doctoral candidate in psychology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, shows that about 80% of students had received a sexy text message, about 70% had sent one, about 45% had received a sexually explicit photo, and about 65% had sent one.

Is sexting a healthy form of sexual expression, or is it a problem? There is no simple answer—like a lot of things, the answer is “it depends.” According to Dir, male students and people in relationships are more likely than female and single students to find sexting positive and to engage in it. Dir also found that females have more negative “sexexpectations” because of society’s double standard for women. Women, especially sin-

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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!

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gle ones, reported that they felt they were taking more of a risk when sexting because they believed there was a greater chance their messages would be made public or that they would be rejected by the recipient. However, most participants in the study denied having had any negative consequences from sexting.

It is important to consider that if you send explicit stuff to someone, you can't control what happens to it. That person may seem trustworthy, but can you guarantee they wouldn't show your message or photo to someone else or post it online? Unfortunately, some people have bad judgment and may share sexts without meaning to do harm, but these actions certainly can do a lot of damage. Also, when relationships sour, some people act in vengeful and hurtful ways, which may include publically sharing messages or images (including screen shots from video chats) that were meant to be private (also known as "revenge porn").

Another important factor to consider is that California law prohibits producing, possessing, or distributing obscene matter of a person under 18 and also prohibits anyone 18 and older from sending lewd

materials to someone under 18. These crimes have potentially serious penalties (including having to register as a sex offender). State laws about sexting vary. In California, there are no specific laws for teen sexting, which means that an 18- or 19-year-old who sends or receives explicit photos of a minor or sends explicit photos to a minor typically faces the same charges as an older adult. Depending on the circumstances, sexting may also be a crime under federal law.

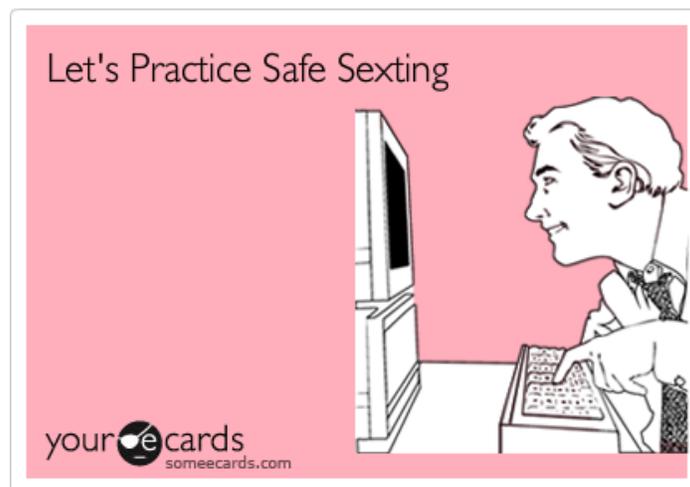
Thus, it would be smart to avoid sexting if you are under 18 and/or the person you want to "sext" with is under 18. It's also advisable to delete any explicit photos you send or receive, as keeping the photos can result in harsher penalties than not keeping them.

What are some of the positives of sexting for adults? It can be fun! Also, it is a way to explore your sexuality without the risks of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. It can spice things up with a current sexual partner. And, it can be a way to feel things out with a prospective sexual partner before having in-person sexual activity. Like anything, sexting can have pros and cons.

Sexting Advice

1. Don't sext if you or the other person is under 18. The consequences can outweigh any pluses!
2. Be careful sexting with someone you don't know. Take some time to get to know them first.
3. Don't save any sexual messages or images you send or receive.
4. Avoid sexting while drunk or high—you are more likely to make decisions you'll regret or get taken advantage of by someone.
5. Take the high road and avoid sharing or posting sexual messages or images of someone else without their knowledge or permission.
6. Avoid including your face in sexually explicit photos.

Women's Health offers some [advice about what to do](#) if someone does post sexual images of you online without your consent.



Dear CAPS,

I've been feeling down—what can I do to feel better?

—*In the Dumps*

You're not alone—everyone feels down at times. Stress or difficult life events can cause a bad day—or even a bad week. These short-term low moods are normal. But, when you feel down all day every day for two weeks or longer, with changes in sleep and appetite, you may have clinical depression. If so, it's important to talk to a mental health professional (such as us at CAPS), especially if you have thoughts about hurting or killing yourself.

Whether you are stressed out, temporarily down, or clinically depressed, there are some things that can help you to feel better.

Stay Social

Even if you don't feel much like it, being around supportive people can

boost your mood. Having someone to listen or to spend time with can make a difference. Even being in a study group can help you feel less isolated. Volunteering can connect you with people and also make you feel good about helping out. However, don't overdo it when being around people is draining. Try to find the right balance for yourself.

Move Your Body

Regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress and boost mood. Yeah, it can be hard to motivate yourself to exercise or fit it into your schedule, but even some short bursts of aerobic exercise can make a difference. What's more, research shows that students who take breaks from studying to exercise are more productive than those who just study nonstop.

Plan for the Positive

Schedule time for socializing, fun activities, and self-care (e.g., exercise, relaxation time, meals). Ensur-

ing that you have some rejuvenating things planned into your day is just as important as scheduling classes, study time, work, and other responsibilities.

Laugh

Humor can be a great antidote for the blues. See a funny movie, talk to a friend who makes you laugh, or watch silly YouTube videos.

Express Your Feelings

Find ways to acknowledge and express your feelings, such as journaling, doing artwork, or talking to a friend or mentor. Just remember that talking too much about your problems without looking at the positive can be counterproductive.

Be Grateful

Finding ways to focus on things you're grateful for rather than on worries and problems can boost your mood. One way to do this is to start a regular gratitude practice (see below).

Practices to Build Gratitude and Boost Mood

For many of us, it's easier to see the negative than the positive, especially when we're feeling down. There are ways to help our brains focus more on the positive and build different neural pathways. Doing these things regularly makes them a habit with lasting benefits.

1. Every night, take 10 minutes to write down three things that went well that day and why they went well. Alternatively, write three things you like or appreciate about yourself and why they matter.
2. Post photos, drawings, or quotes in your room that remind you of things for which you are grateful.
3. Write a letter expressing gratitude to someone who has made a difference in your life, then send them the letter or read it to them in person.
4. Incorporate gratitude into exercise: When you are running or at the gym, notice things around you for

which you could be grateful, such as a song you like, a pretty tree, a nice day. You could also focus on good things about yourself, such as "I am doing something good for my body by exercising."

5. Recognize one "ungrateful" thought a day (e.g., "Being in school sucks") and transform it into a grateful thought (e.g., "School's tough sometimes, but I am grateful I have the opportunity to be in college").



Upcoming Events

See our [website calendar](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more upcoming events.

STRESS LESS WORKSHOPS: Hour-long interactive, relaxing, resource-filled workshops led by CAPS' trained Peer Educators to help you identify areas of stress and make a plan for immediate (and long-term!) stress relief. Remaining workshops this quarter are Thursday and Friday, March 9th and 10th, noon to 1 pm at the CAPS Central Office. Just drop in—no sign-up required. Free food!

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS offers a different drop-in workshop every Wednesday this quarter when

classes are in session from 3:30 to 4:30 pm at our central office to provide info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thoughts, how positive psychology relates to academic success, and improving focus. Read more on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page. Just drop in—no sign-up required.

LET'S TALK: Let's Talk is a drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential one-time chat with a professional CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! Let's Talk is held four afternoons a week at different locations around campus this quarter when classes are in session. All registered UCSC students are welcome at all locations. Read more (including the schedule) on our [website](#).

Top Study Tips for Finals

Need some tips studying for finals? Read [this](#) article to get 25 helpful and practical ways to prepare yourself. But, in case you don't have time to read all 25, here are CAPS' favorite 5:

1. Just get started—don't wait until you *feel* like studying to begin. Often, once you get the ball rolling, studying seems easier.
2. Create a master to-do list and a daily schedule that includes everything you need to get done before finals, then break those tasks into smaller sub-tasks.
3. Reward yourself for getting a study sub-task done (e.g., watch an episode of your favorite show, eat a cookie, call a friend).
4. Stay healthy—get sleep, eat well, and avoid too much caffeine. Easier said than done, but taking care of yourself makes a difference in focus and concentration.
5. Study in a distraction-free zone: Find a quiet place and turn off your phone.

