



Young texters urged to think before sending

August 18, 2010 by [Lailani Mendoza](#)

A not-so-innocent trend in cellphone texting is on the rise. Sexting, the practice of sending nude or half-nude erotic photos or messages to another person's cellphone or online, is quickly catching on among teens and young adults despite dangerous repercussions.

While texting is an easy and convenient technology, it needs to be used properly, said Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association spokesperson Marc Choma.

"Text messaging is hugely popular among Canadians. In 2009, Canadians sent 35.3 billion text messages. As with any technology, it needs to be used properly," said Choma. "We think it's very important that at a young age, people are taught to be respectful with technology. It's great, it's fun and it's easy, but you still have to use it properly."

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy sponsored a survey among teen and young adults in 2008 and found that 20 per cent of teens (13 to 19 years old) and 33 per cent of young adults (20 to 26 years old) have sent or posted risqué videos or photos of themselves.

In Canada, 400 schools participated in the TextEd pilot program to educate Grades 7 and 8 students in issues surrounding the proper use of texting. The TextEd website contains lesson plans that teachers can use to initiate in-class discussion with students. Topics include building and identifying healthy relationships, dealing with stress or identifying the benefits and risks of texting. The website also contains guidelines for safe texting, a Q&A section, an iChoose declaration (document urging teens to commit to respectful online and texting conduct) quizzes and games.

"They're really about kids experimenting," Noni Classen, director of education of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, on why teens send explicit material through their cellphone. "Majority of these cases have to do with kids wanting to be in a relationship, curious about sexuality, wanting to experiment . . . and not knowing how to do it," she explained. "They're testing limits in a way that is very normative. The problem is, they're using technology to facilitate it. They don't truly realize the consequences of that."

While sending racy texts or images may not seem like a big deal to those who do it, consequences can come back to haunt the sender. Once it's sent, it's permanent. When relationships change, images that were meant to be private can easily be misused. Worst of all, the sender no longer has control over the material. Photos could be posted or sent without the sender's knowledge. Not a lot of young people know this, but sexting is considered illegal in Canada.

Co-sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and the CWTA, the program will be launched nationwide in September.

For parents who aren't tech savvy, understanding text jargon can be difficult. Text messaging literally uses a whole new language that evolves almost as quickly as you can make up words or acronyms. The TextEd website includes an acronym dictionary, a growing list of common acronyms used in texting. Red flag chat terms that parents may find useful include [NetLingo's Top 50 Acronyms Parents Should Know](#). NoSlang.com also has a similar list.

While texting is great because it's fast and efficient, it must also be used with caution. Sexting has long-term consequences. Think before hitting that send button. For more information, visit www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech or www.texted.ca.

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