

## Young teens who receive sexts are six times more likely to report having had sex

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A study from USC researchers provides new understanding of the relationship between "sexting" and sexual behavior in early adolescence, contributing to an ongoing national conversation about whether sexually explicit text messaging is a risk behavior or just a technologically-enabled extension of normal teenage flirtation. The latest research, published in the July 2014 issue of the journal *Pediatrics*, found that among middle school students, those who reported receiving a sext were 6 times more likely to also report being sexually active.

While past research has examined sexting and [sexual behavior](#) among high school-age students and young adults, the researchers were particularly interested in [young teens](#), as past data has shown clear links between early sexual debut and risky sexual behavior, including teenage pregnancy, sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol, experience of forced sex and higher risk of [sexually transmitted disease](#).

"These findings call attention to the need to train health educators, pediatricians and parents on how best to communicate with young adolescents about sexting in relation to sexual behavior," said lead author Eric Rice, assistant professor at the USC School of Social Work. "The sexting conversation should occur as soon as the child acquires a cell phone."

The study anonymously sampled more than 1,300 [middle school students](#) in Los Angeles as part of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Respondents ranged in age

from 10-15, with an average age of 12.3 years. The researchers found that even when controlling for sexting behaviors, young teens who sent more than 100 texts a day were more likely to report being sexually active. Other key findings:

- Young teens who sent sexts were almost 4 times more likely to report being sexually active.
- Sending and receiving sexts went hand-in-hand: Those who reported receiving a sext were 23 times more likely to have also sent one.
- Students who identified as LGBTQ were 9 times more likely to have sent a sext.
- However, unlike past research on high school students, LGBTQ young adolescents were not more likely to be sexually active, the study showed.
- Youth who texted more than 100 times a day were more than twice as likely to have received a sext and almost 4.5 times more likely to report having sent a sext.

The researchers acknowledge that despite anonymity, the data is self-reported and thus subject to social desirability bias, as well as limitations for geographic area and the diverse demographics of Los Angeles. However, the dramatic correlation between students who sent sexts and reported sexual activity indicates the need for further research and summons attention to the relationship between technology use and sexual behavior among early adolescents, the researchers say.

"Our results show that excessive, unlimited or unmonitored texting seems to enable [sexting](#)," Rice said. "Parents may wish to openly monitor their young teen's cell phone, check in with them about who they are communicating with, and perhaps restrict their number of texts allowed per month."

Overall, 20 percent of students with text-capable cell phones said they had ever received a sext, and 5 percent report sending a sext. The researchers defined "sext" in their survey as a sexually suggestive text or photo.

Provided by University of Southern California

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