



Overexposed: Sexting and Relationships

Essential Question

What are the risks and responsibilities when you share online in a relationship?

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Lesson Overview

Students explore the risks and responsibilities of carrying out romantic relationships in the digital world. They watch a video about a girl who sent a “sext” message to her boyfriend, which he then shared with others. After discussing the video, students create an ending to a story about a girl who is pressured to “sext.” They brainstorm ways to avoid sexting and to use digital technologies responsibly in romantic relationships.

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grades 9-10: RI.1, RI.2, RI.3, RI.4, RI.8, RI.10, W.3a, W.3b, W.3c, W.3d, W.3e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

grades 11-12: RL.1, RL.2, RL.7, RL.8, RL.10, RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.10, W.3a, W.3b, W.3c, W.3d, W.3e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

NETS•S: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2d, 4a, 4b,

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- explore the role of digital technologies in romantic relationships.
- analyze risky forms of self-disclosure and their possible consequences.
- identify strategies for avoiding sexting while enhancing positive relationships.

Key Vocabulary –

self-disclosure: sharing private, sensitive, or confidential information about oneself with others

reciprocate: to give in return

sexting: sending or receiving sexually explicit photos or videos by text message or other digital technologies

Materials and Preparation

- Copy the **How Should It End? Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Preview the video, “**Ally’s Story – Second Thoughts on Sexting**,” an abridged version from MTV’s *Sexting in America: When Privates Go Public*, and prepare to play it for students.
- **Note:** This video addresses the topic of sexting and does not constitute an endorsement of MTV. If you do not feel comfortable showing this material, watch the video, describe the scenario to students, and then have your class complete the lesson based on your description.
- **Optional:** Review the **Over the Line? Student Handout** with vignettes from MTV.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Digital Relationships Family Tip Sheet (High School)**.

Note: This lesson deals with sexting, a sensitive topic that can be difficult for both teachers and students to discuss openly. Depending upon your class’s comfort level with the topic, you may wish to have students write down their responses to questions throughout the lesson, and invite volunteers to share with the class.

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

ASK:

How do people in romantic relationships communicate using digital technologies?

Sample responses:

- Video chat, text, and IM each other
- Post messages on their blog or profile
- Upload pictures and video of themselves

How do people in relationships communicate differently online than they might face-to-face?

Sample responses:

- They can share things online anytime, which makes them feel closer, even when they're apart
- They might have misunderstandings because they can't see one another's facial expressions or hear tone of voice

Do you think the Internet and cell phones can have a positive impact on people's romantic relationships?

Students may say that cell phones, online messaging, and video chatting make it easier for people to keep in touch, even when they are apart. Also, people may feel more comfortable getting to know someone they are interested in over text, email, or instant messaging first. You have more time to think about what you want to say, and how you want to respond.

TELL students that you'll be exploring the risks and responsibilities associated with using technology in romantic relationships.

teach 1

Self-Disclosure in Relationship (10 minutes)

DIVIDE students into groups of three to five.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **self-disclosure**.

INSTRUCT students to work in groups to answer *one* of the questions below. Have one student from each group volunteer to be a scribe. (Note: In setting ground rules for the group discussion, tell students that they should be respectful of each other and never use real names or identifying details.)

ASK:

What are examples of self-disclosure?

Examples include telling a secret about one's self, or sharing information about one's family, childhood, hopes, dreams, fears, and feelings.

Can people deepen their relationships by self-disclosing?

Self-disclosure can bring people closer because it helps them learn about one another while also signaling trust.

Are there types of self-disclosure that people should be careful about sharing with others?

Self-disclosure about very private and personal things can make students feel exposed, especially if someone else doesn't reciprocate. There is a risk in self-disclosure because even if they trust someone, he or she might share that information with others.

INVITE the scribe from each group to share the group's responses with the class.

ASK:

How might self-disclosing using digital technologies be even more risky than face-to-face?

Explain to students that when they self-disclose something using digital technology – whether it is a text, message, photo, or video – it is even more risky, because another person now has a record of what they shared. They can copy, paste, forward, alter, tag, or share this information with others, even if you believe they wouldn't.

teach 2

Sexting: Risky Self-Disclosure (10 minutes)

KEEP students in groups.

ASK: *Have you heard about sexting? What is it?*

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **sexting**, building off of students' responses.

TELL students that they will watch a video in which a teen sends a sext to someone, and that person sends the private information to others. (Note: There are several reasons teens might sext: as a form of flirting; as a signal that they want to take their relationship to the next level; as a way to show another “what they can get” if that person dates them; as an expression of sexuality; or simply because they are bored and felt like doing something exciting. Keep these reasons in mind as you lead the discussion with students.)

▶ SHOW students the video “**Ally's Story.**”

ASSIGN one or two of the following questions below to different groups.

- *Why did Ally share the nude picture of herself with her ex-boyfriend? (Ally thought they might rekindle their relationship.)*
- *Why do you think Ally's ex-boyfriend forwarded the picture to others? (He might have wanted to show off to his friends, or humiliate and embarrass Ally.)*
- *How might Ally have felt after she found out the photo was sent around? (Even though Ally doesn't say so explicitly, she likely felt embarrassed, humiliated, and betrayed.)*
- *Looking back on the situation, Ally has a different perspective on what happened. What did she later realize? (Ally says sexting was “the biggest mistake of my life.” She reflects on how – when she was in high school – she thought she and her boyfriend would be together forever. Ally didn't expect the picture to be shared, saying, “The picture getting out never crossed my mind.”)*

INVITE a representative from each group to share students' responses.

ASK:

What if the tables were turned, and Ally had forwarded a sext that her ex-boyfriend had sent her. Would people have reacted the same way at school? Would the boy have been called names, the same way that Ally was?

Encourage students to discuss how attitudes about, and experiences with, sexting have a lot to do with gender. Guide students to think about double standards. For instance, a boy caught sending a sexual picture may be thought of as acting stupid or showing off, whereas a girl in the the same situation may be chastised as “easy.”

Do you think that sexting should be against the law?

Point out that, in many states, it is. This is because many states prohibit sending or receiving sexual images of minors (usually under 18). Some states have even prosecuted teens for child pornography or felony obscenity, and as a result, many of these teens are now on a list of registered sex offenders. When people sext, they put both the recipient and themselves at risk. Even if someone were to receive an unsolicited sext, that person could still face charges of child pornography.

teach 3

How Should It End? *(10 minutes)*

DISTRIBUTE the **How Should It End? Student Handout**, one per student.

INSTRUCT students to work individually or in groups to write an ending to the story presented in the student handout. For example, students may decide to write an ending in which Shaila decides not to sext, or one in which she sends a photo to Jake, or an ending where Jake stops pressuring Shaila.

INVITE volunteers to present their endings to the class, encouraging them to discuss strategies the characters used to avoid or refuse sexting, or the consequences that happened based on the characters’ decisions.

ASK:

Can you name at least three consequences that could happen if someone sexted?

Students should be aware that a sexually explicit photo or message might be forwarded to other people’s phones or computers, posted on social networks, blogs or websites, and seen by friends, classmates, teachers, parents, and strangers. As a result, they would likely feel embarrassed and humiliated. Some people also might harass them. They might get in trouble at school and at home. They might feel like they shamed their family. They might be embarrassed if the sext turns up in the future. And, they most likely broke the law.

In the moment – when asked to, or asking someone to sext – why might someone ignore these consequences? Are there worries, pressures, or other considerations that come into play? What would it take to make someone think twice before sexting?

Students’ answers will vary. They may point out that some people might worry about offending or disappointing their partner. They might worry about coming across as prudish, unadventurous, or uncool. Encourage students to recognize that people should never feel pressured into sexting.

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Use the questions below to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives, or you can evaluate the quality and depth of their written and verbal responses to the student handout.

ASK:

Why is self-disclosing using digital technology risky?

Students should understand that any time they self-disclose using digital technology, their self-disclosure can be copied, pasted, forwarded, altered, spread, or used in ways they didn't intend.

Why should someone think twice before asking someone to, or sending, a sext?

Students should recognize that sexts can be copied, pasted, forwarded, etc. They should also recognize that they might regret requesting and/or sending a sext later on. Sexting is also illegal in many states.

Is it ever okay to sext? Is it okay to pressure others to sext?

Encourage students to think of the possible risks and consequences of sexting. Also encourage students to consider how attitudes about gender roles might come into play. Are the risks and consequences the same for boys and girls? Should they be? Students should be aware of the potential damage it might cause to themselves and others – including the legal implications.

Extension Activity

Have students complete the activity on the **Over the Line Student Handout**. Then have them create a short online, multimedia presentation explaining how they would use social media to teach teens about sexting. Encourage them to use free online tools such as Prezi (www.prezi.com), ShowMe (www.showme.com) or VoiceThread (www.voicethread.com).

At-home Activity

Have students do online research and write a brief report about the legal aspects of sexting by teens. Below are three articles to get them started:

“A Girl’s Nude Photo, and Altered Lives,” *The New York Times*, by Jan Hoffman, March 26, 2011: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/us/27sexting.html?src=mv>

“Weiner Admits He Sent Lewd Photos; Says He Won’t Resign” *The New York Times*, by Michael Barbaro, June 6, 2011: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/07/us/politics/07weiner.html>

“Are ‘Sext’ Messages a Teenage Folly or Felony?” *The Wall Street Journal*, by Nathan Koppel and Ashby Jones, August 25, 2010: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703447004575449423091552284.html>

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Directions

Read the story below, along with the text conversation that follows. Discuss what might have happened afterwards, based on the decisions made by the two characters. Then write an ending to the story.

Sixteen-year-old Shaila and her boyfriend, Jake, have been dating for a month now. Things are going pretty well, and they've been flirting a lot online and through texts. Shaila feels like she's falling in love with Jake, and Jake really cares about Shaila as well. One school night, they stay up late texting each other.

Jake: so...what r u wearing?

Shaila: wouldn't u like 2 know

Jake: hopefully nothing. why don't u show me?

Shaila: ummmm

Jake: if u want me then send me a pic

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Directions

Read the real-life posts from MTV’s “A Thin Line” Campaign below. Vote on whether you think each situation crosses the line. Then brainstorm ways for teens to avoid sexting, and to use digital media responsibly.

Lynn | Female, 15

There is a girl at school and she is constantly upset with me because she thinks I like her boyfriend. She even has her friends texting me telling me to stay away from him. But her bf and I are just friends. What am I supposed to do?

view comments (5) | post comment | share

IS THIS...
 over
 on
 under
 THE LINE?

caleb | male, 16

im 16 my girlfriend broke up with me in a text messag so i posted some nude pictures she sent me all over town and on the internet was this over the line?

view comments (52) | post comment | share

IS THIS...
 over
 on
 under
 THE LINE?

Anonymous

my girlfriend sometimes txts wen around me, i ask her to let me see her phone and she says no. idk what to believe or expect it worries me sometimes that she is cheating on me. a month or two ago she would always let me see it, now she never does

view comments (7) | post comment | share

IS THIS...
 over
 on
 under
 THE LINE?

Anonymous

This girl who tries super hard to be popular posted these skanky pics on facebook so we all texted her anonymously telling her shes ugly.

view comments (27) | post comment | share

IS THIS...
 over
 on
 under
 THE LINE?

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1. The word “sexting” has to do with sharing a specific kind of content. Sexting is:

- a) Getting a text that says you look nice
- b) Sending or receiving a text about going on a date
- c) Sharing any photos by text message
- d) Sending or receiving sexually explicit photos or videos by text message or other digital media

2. Sexting by minors, or kids under age 18, is illegal in some states.

- a) True
- b) False

3. Read the following situations below and circle whether they are risky or safe uses of digital media in romantic relationships.

Hector sends his cell phone number to his crush in a private message on Facebook.	Risky	Safe
Adam asks his girlfriend to say sexually explicit things in an IM conversation.	Risky	Safe
Monica surprises her crush by taking off some of her clothes during a video chat.	Risky	Safe
Ariel’s boyfriend wants her to send him a naked photo. She texts him: “Only if you text me one first.”	Risky	Safe
Cristina texts her boyfriend a picture of her at the Great Wall of China.	Risky	Safe
Jack tweets “I have the best girlfriend ever!”	Risky	Safe

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Answer feedback

The correct answer is **d**. The term “sexting” describes sexually explicit photos or videos sent by phone or by other digital media (social networking sites, email, IM, etc.)

2. Sexting by minors, or kids under age 18, is illegal in some states.

- a) True**
- b) False

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **a**, True. Many states have laws that don’t allow the sending or receiving of sexual images by minors.

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