

Photo sharing can be fun, but how much is too much?

When you want to keep your friends up-to-date on your latest amazing experiences, what do you do? If you're like a lot of people, you share photos or videos. It's so easy, and it really helps you and your friends feel like you're part of each other's lives.

But in recent years, some young people have engaged in some unhealthy sharing. The most extreme form of this is sexting, when people use technology to share images of themselves or others wearing little or no clothing, often in suggestive poses.

Studies show that among

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12–17-year-olds, nearly 1 in 6 have sent sexts and more than 1 in 4 have received them. And those numbers are increasing over time.¹

So, does someone just wake up one day and say, “I think I’ll start sexting”? Doubtful. It usually begins with people’s desire to feel good about themselves or fit in, which is a

normal thing—but easily misdirected.

They start sharing photos of themselves—some muscle flexing here, a new outfit there, a new pose. Likes and comments come. The validation feels good. But the more they thrive on the attention, the further their standards can slip.

This is how Satan often tempts us: he

starts small and gets people to ignore the Spirit’s warnings as they go down the path until they’ve gone further than they thought they would. When they’re sharing immodest photos, it’s gone too far. Time to stop and rethink. And that goes for people who deliberately follow accounts that share these kinds of photos, too.

PRINCIPLES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Latter-day Saints who share their own immodest photos or view others’ immodest photos have unfortunately lost sight of some basic principles taught by modern prophets in *For the Strength of Youth*:

- **“Your body is sacred.** Respect it” ([2011], 6).
- **“Never lower your standards of dress.** . . . When you dress immodestly, you send a message that is contrary to your identity as a son or daughter of God. You also send the message that you are using your body to get attention and approval” (6–7).
- **“Guard your safety and the safety of others** by taking great care about what . . . images you share through technology. Do not communicate anything over the Internet or through texting that would be inappropriate to share in person” (13).
- **“Treat others with respect,** not as objects used to satisfy lustful and selfish desires” (36).

WHAT TO DO

If you or anyone you know has been involved in sexting or has been tempted or invited to do so:

1. Talk to a trusted adult about it. You may feel uncomfortable doing this, and other young people involved may not want you to do it, but if you have the courage to talk to someone, you will help bring about the best outcome for everyone. Hiding this activity will only make things worse.
2. If a trusted adult encourages you to do so, talk seriously with those involved about how wrong it is. Show love and concern, but be firm.

A CLEAR PICTURE

Whether or not you’re involved in these kinds of activities or know someone who is, it’s important to be very clear about where you stand. Here are a few points to consider:

- **Sharing immodest and suggestive photos is wrong.** We should learn to “bridle all [our] passions” (Alma 38:12), not fuel them. Asking for these kinds of pictures, taking them, sending them, or looking at them violates the standards the Lord has set.
- **It shows a lack of respect.** Sexting shows a lack of respect for yourself, for others, and for God, who gave us the gift of our bodies. Keep the Lord’s high standards, and have the confidence to let others know you will not break them.
- **It is dangerous.** Once you’ve sent someone these kinds of pictures, you don’t control them anymore. You never know who else might somehow get their hands on them and do something with them that could threaten or harm you. Also, sending or storing these kinds of photos of minors is illegal in many places.
- **It will not increase feelings of true self-worth.** Sexting doesn’t make a person more desirable; it demeans them. And deep inside, that person knows that it demeans them. True self-worth comes from knowing you are a precious child of Heavenly Father. True confidence comes from virtue and the influence of the Holy Ghost in your life (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46).
- **Anyone who would ask for such a thing is not a true friend.** Anyone who would ask someone to take an explicit picture of themselves does not have their best interests at heart and should probably be avoided. Such a person is being selfish and carnally-minded and needs to apologize and repent. **NE**

NOTE

1. See Madigan S., and others, “Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis,” *JAMA Pediatrics*, vol. 172, no. 4 (Apr. 2018), 327–335.