

## For youth sexting: Public supports education, not criminal charges

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Sexting – sending sexually explicit, nude, or semi-nude photos by cell phone – has become a national concern, especially when it involves children and teens. A new poll shows that the vast majority of adults do not support legal consequences for teens who sext.

Seventeen states have already enacted laws to address youth [sexting](#) and another 13 states have pending legislation in 2012 that focuses on sexting.

The University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health recently asked [adults](#) across the United States for their opinions about youth sexting and sexting legislation.

The poll found that the vast majority, 81 percent, of adults think an educational program or counseling is an appropriate consequence for teens who sext. Most adults also favor similar non-criminal programs: 76 percent of adults think schools should give all students and parents information on sexting, and 75 percent of adults support requiring community service for sexting teens.

In contrast, most adults do not favor legal consequences for minors who sext other minors. About one-half, 44 percent, support fines less than \$500 for youth sexting, while 20 percent or fewer think that sexting should be treated as a sex crime, or that teens who sext should be prosecuted under sexual abuse laws.

"As youth sexting has become more of a national concern, many states have acted to address the issue. However, before this poll, very little was known about what the public thinks about sexting legislation," says Matthew M. Davis M.D., M.A.P.P., Director of the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, Associate Professor in the Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit at the U-M Medical School, and Associate Professor of Public Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

"This poll indicates that, while many adults are concerned about sexting among children and teenagers, they strongly favor educational programs, counseling, and community service rather than penalties through the legal system," says Davis.

The [poll](#) also asked adults who they think should play a role in addressing the problem of youth sexting. Almost all adults, 93 percent, believe parents should have a major role. Many adults also believe that teens themselves, 71 percent, and schools, 52 percent, should have a major role in addressing [youth](#) sexting.

"Across the country, the public supports requiring schools to distribute information about sexting to students and parents. Since adults strongly feel that parents should play a major role in addressing sexting, this is a great opportunity for parents and schools to work together on this issue," says Davis. "Child advocacy organizations could assist in this effort by developing clear educational information that is appropriate for students of different ages."

**More information:** Full report: [www.mottnpch.org/reports-surve ...not-criminal-charges](http://www.mottnpch.org/reports-surve...not-criminal-charges)

Provided by University of Michigan

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