

# Nothing shameful about sexting?

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"Confusion around current laws deters some young people from reporting threatening or unethical behaviour" - Dr Kath Albury.

The legal penalties associated with sexting are too harsh, and adult reactions can increase young people's sense of shame and stigma, according to a UNSW-led report on the practice of sending nude or semi-nude photos via text.

*Young People and Sexting in Australia: ethics, representation and the law*, aims to inform Australian legal, educational, and policy responses to sexting. The research has been led by Dr Kath Albury from UNSW's Journalism and Media Research Centre (JMRC) and Dr Kate Crawford

from US Microsoft Research New England and JMRC.

"Young people don't view all naked or semi-naked pictures as inherently shameful and prefer to use general terms like 'pictures' to 'sexting'", said Dr Albury.

The research is the first to focus on young people aged 16-17 years who are over the age of sexual consent, but could face legal penalties for texting photos or video considered to be pornographic by law.

"Young people and adults are surprised to learn what the [legal implications](#) of sexting are. If you are under 18 you can be charged with producing or distributing child pornography if you take, or share, a naked photo of yourself," said Dr Albury. "Confusion around current laws deters some young people from reporting threatening or unethical behaviour - they are afraid they will be blamed, or even charged, when they confess to taking, or sending a naked picture."

The report's findings draw on small focus groups conducted with young people in Sydney, and consultation with [academic researchers](#) and representatives from education, health care, law enforcement and youth support services.

### **Key findings of the Young People and Sexting in Australia report:**

- Young people are offended by the adult tendency to bundle all naked or partially naked user-generated pictures into the category of sexting. Terms like "taboo" and "dirty" were used to describe adult reactions to sexting.
- Young people were uniformly surprised by the legal penalties applied to sexting, describing the application of child pornography laws as "excessive", "hyped" and "overdone".

- Adults working with young people were also uncertain about the laws that apply to [sexting](#), and expressed a need for clearer legal guidelines, and better educational resources to help them support young people.
- Adults want resources to help them understand and respond to young people's use of digital technologies in the broader context of friendships and relationships.

"We need law and policy reform that clarifies young people's rights and responsibilities in relation to producing and sharing digital images and adults need better resources to help them support [young people](#) to make ethical decisions around online and mobile media," said Dr Albury.

**More information:** [jmrc.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/Final\\_Sexting\\_Final.pdf](http://jmrc.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/Final_Sexting_Final.pdf)

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