Text Sex

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But really, what’s the big deal? Sure, it might be risky to send provocative photos or texts—known as sexting—if you’ve just met someone. But when you’re in a committed relationship, you should be in the clear, right? Think again.

In mid-September, the Iowa Supreme Court upheld the criminal conviction of Jorge Canal, who sent illicit pictures of his groin with the words “I love you” to his girlfriend in May 2005. Canal was 18 years old at the time, and though his girlfriend requested he send the photos, she was underage, making it illegal regardless of the fact she requested them.

When the girl’s mother discovered the photos, she showed them to her husband, a former reserve police officer. They turned the photos into the authorities, and Canal was subsequently charged with knowingly disseminating obscene material to a minor. Upon his conviction, a judge granted him a deferred judgment, which included a $250 fine, one year of probation and a requirement to register as a sex offender. In Iowa, sending illicit photos to minors is considered a serious misdemeanor punishable with a fine ranging between $315-$1,875 and a maximum one-year prison sentence.

“A teen sexting versus a couple in a committed relationship using it to enhance their relationship are two totally different things,” Amy Popillion, Ph.D. CFLE, says. “Obviously with the teen I would not be in favor of sexting, but with the latter situation see absolutely nothing wrong with it.”

As one of the professors who teaches the popular human sexuality class HD FS 276, Popillion sees things from a societal perspective. While she doesn’t advocate any illegal activity, she can see the benefits sexting can have on a relationship.

“It is a form of flirting. Anytime there is something that youth can do that is a taste of the adult world they are going to be exposed to in the future, they will want to do it. The challenge is not to say they can’t do it, but how can we educate them to do it responsibly.”

Thanks to text messaging, I’ve seen Pete Wentz’s penis and could probably pick Paris Hilton’s breasts out of a lineup. OK, so those messages weren’t exactly sent to my Blackberry, but therein lies the problem with sending naughty texts: you never know where they’ll turn up.
“Once you send something, it is out of your hands and out of your control... There’s a line—and if you cross the line, you’ll regret it.”

to try it,” Popillion says. “Also, they see it modeled for them all the time in the media and there is a ton of peer pressure to do it, so all of those factors combined lead to doing it. It’s a way for them to explore their sexuality.”

But don’t get confused—Popillion isn’t advocating you run home to start shooting nude photos of yourself on your iPhone. But, she sees sexting as a tool that can sometimes strengthen a couple’s level of intimacy—used appropriately, of course.

“I’m not saying that is a good thing, but I think that’s a factor in why they do it,” she says. “Another thing to consider is the immediate gratification that comes from it. There’s less embarrassment because it isn’t a face-to-face contact. Studies show that people will often say things online or via texting that they wouldn’t have the nerve to say in face-to-face communication. Sometimes couples are nervous to share their fantasies or sexual wants and needs with each other, but when they can share them via text, it seems less embarrassing. Then they find once they’ve just texted it, it actually turned their significant other on and it opens up the door for them as a couple to explore new sexual interests together.”

But while it can help spice up a couple’s relationship, it can also pose problems if the sexting is unwarranted. The most important thing, according to Popillion, is to let the proper authorities deal with it.

“First, ask the person sending the messages to stop. I always encourage people to document this,” Popillion says. “They can always contact their local law enforcement department to file a report, again providing the unwarranted messages as evidence.”

But what if you don’t exactly remember sexting? If you cringe at the thought of checking your inbox—or worse, your outbox—after a night of heavy partying, make sure you know what you’re getting yourself into. When taking your affection virtual, Popillion urges you to consider some of the long-term effects it may have on you and your relationships.

“You may later regret that you sent the messages, especially if you did so while you were under the influence of alcohol or drugs,” she says. “You might also have regrets if you later end the relationship with the person you sent messages to. If the person you send messages to is not 100 percent trustworthy, he or she could choose to do various things with those messages, from something like showing them to his or her buddies to something bigger like posting them online. This could impact your reputation, your future career, relationships, etc.”

But the dangers aren’t limited to what happens if the
According to Teenage Research Unlimited, 22% of teenage girls admitted to sharing nude or semi-nude photos (11% of whom were between 13 and 16 years old).

Now that you know the facts, are you still feeling adventurous enough to send a dirty little text or take a risqué photograph? Be careful and be smart about it—the most important thing is that you feel comfortable.

“Make sure there is a strong trust factor,” Popillion urges. “Realize that once you send something, it is out of your hands and out of your control. Do it when you are sober. I know that last point is going to fly past many because it can be so much more fun to be ‘sexy’ when you’ve had a few and your inhibitions are down, but there’s a line—and if you cross the line, you’ll regret it.”

texts or photos get into the wrong hands. If you do decide to sext your significant other, it’s important to make sure it isn’t taking the place of interpersonal communication.

“If one person got to a point where they were wanting to only meet their needs through technology and lost interest in face-to-face interactions, then this would be something to discuss and deal with,” Popillion says. “However, if there is still balance and something like sexting or use of a webcam is used to supplement their sexual relationship, then it can complement an already healthy sex life.”

DID YOU KNOW?

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