 Young people, technology and sexuality

Suggested duration: 40-45 minutes

Through this activity, students explore the appropriateness of materials and the role of technology as a medium for its distribution.

This activity has been adapted from the activity “Young people, ICT and sexuality”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Course outcomes

**3.1** Evaluate how contextual factors influence attitudes, values and behaviours.

**3.2** Analyse the positive and negative implications of technology and digital media on self-concept, independence, relationships and health behaviours.

**5.1** Critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence independence, health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts.

**5.2** Recognise and respond appropriately to situations which may be limiting or harmful to self and others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Understand the implications of sexting and the use of other technology on the health and wellbeing of young people.
* Explore, analyse and question what an appropriate or inappropriate image is to share with others via technology.
* Increase awareness of the implications and consequences of using mobile technologies and online spaces as a forum for self-expression and sharing personal material.
* Develop skills in becoming a critical consumer of images.
* Develop positive decision making skills regarding the appropriate sharing of images.

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Independence  Focus: Building self-concept and independence | Personal values and beliefs   * influences on values and beliefs, e.g. technology, social and cultural norms, media, family, relationships * influence of values, attitudes and beliefs on decisions and actions in various contexts * self-concept |
| Relationships  Focus: Challenging and changing attitudes and beliefs about gender, assault and relationship violence | Valuing and advocating for the rights of self and others   * changing perspectives and challenging stereotypes * respect for others   Power and influence in relationships   * power in relationships, e.g. positive use of power, situational power * different values and beliefs |
| Sexuality and sexual health  Focus: Safe and ethical behaviour | Safe and ethical behaviour   * respect for self and others * standards of behaviour   Influences on behaviour   * values and beliefs, e.g. culture, social pressures, double standards * explicit imagery, e.g., sharing, distribution, challenging norms * critical media literacy, e.g. challenging perspectives, stereotypes and media portrayals * technology and media, e.g. sharing information and images, online communities * policy and law, e.g. codes of conduct, online terms of agreement, confidentiality, consent, discrimination, harassment |

Teaching notes

In a youth culture where exposure to sexual content, sending and received images through mobile phones and email, and posting images on social networking sites are thoroughly normalised, we need to engage young people in discussions about setting appropriate boundaries on the images that they take and that they choose to send on.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is imperative to educate young people and increase awareness of the potential challenge they may face and the implications and consequences of using mobile technologies and online spaces as a forum for self-expression and sharing personal material. Young people need to become critical consumers of online material, to consider the material they see and whether it is appropriate to share with others or more appropriate and ethical to report to an authority.

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* Making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* Being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* Enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the Life Ready website.

Learning experiences

Activity one – Sharing images, what is appropriate? (20 minutes)

1. Create an imaginary line in the room to use as a continuum from least offensive to most offensive.
2. Students work in pairs or small groups with a set of the sexting and texting cards. These cards describe a wide range of images/videos that may be shared via digital media (phone, email, instant messaging and apps, social networking).
3. In pairs or small groups, students discuss each card and determine where they would place that image/video in relation to the continuum (most offensive to least offensive).
   1. Students should consider the position of the card if the image/video was sent digitally.
   2. Students will have differing opinions. For some students it may be offensive to send all of these images/videos using digital media.
4. As a large group take some time to review the placement of cards from other groups.
5. Facilitate a group discussion raising issues relating to culture, use of social media and sharing apps, public and private spaces, consent, consequences, risks, bullying.
   1. Invite pairs/groups to nominate the placement of one or two cards. Encourage students to explain reasons for the placement and the discussion and thought process for the group when placing the cards.
6. As a group discuss:
   1. what card positions did the pairs/groups agree upon?
   2. what card positions did the pairs/groups disagree on?
   3. was it easy for the pair/group to come to a shared position?
   4. did males and females have different ideas?
   5. were there any other factors that influenced where people wanted to place the cards, e.g. culture, values, family background, personal experiences?

Activity two – What’s the risk? (15 minutes)

1. In small groups, students explore one of the real life scenarios.
2. Within their group, students discuss and record:

* what options does the young person have?
* what factors are influencing this individual’s decision? Consider the internal and external pressures.
* what are the risks or consequences of each option? Consider both the positive and negative consequences.

1. As a whole group, invite each group to share their scenario and the discussions that took place in their group.

Teacher notes have been provided to guide discussions for each scenario.

Conclusion (5-10 minutes)

1. As a whole group, ask students to reflect on the following questions:

* is this type of technology use common among young people?
* are these scenarios reflective of what has happened among your friends or peer group?
* would any of these scenarios be considered illegal activities?
* to what extent are young people aware of the laws around technology and sexual images?
* what impact can inappropriate use of technology have on the wellbeing of the young people involved?
* what are some strategies young people can use to protect themselves and others and ensure technology is used for appropriate and positive action?

Teacher fact sheet – Young people, technology and sexuality

Socially, the current generation of young people who has grown up in a world with constant access to mobile technology and online communications, has different ways of communicating from previous generations. With the increased availability of internet and mobile technologies, media users have progressed from passive viewers of media content to active contributors.

Mobile phone providers, social networking websites (e.g. Facebook), personal blog websites and video posting websites (e.g. YouTube) see young people aged 14-34 as the greatest proportion of this consumer market. Furthermore, the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) reports that use of information and communication technology (ICT) for social networking purposes far exceeds the hours spent on homework[[3]](#footnote-3).

The internet, technology and media resources can be used to enhance young people’s social experiences and connections through safe and supportive environments. Online technology offers the potential to engage with young people who are hard-to-reach through more traditional forms of communication. Many young people feel more confident and empowered online, and are able to discuss sensitive topics such as mental health and sexual health, and receive immediate feedback.

Technology and ICT have become an important part of social life and a forum for the exploration and presentation of their identities including their sexual identity[[4]](#footnote-4). Sexting can be generally described as “the practice of using a mobile phone to take and send nude (including semi-nude) photographs to other phones or Internet sites.” [[5]](#footnote-5)

The [National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/576661/ARCSHS-SSASH-2013.pdf) found that nearly a third (31%) of students who are sexually active had used social media for sexual reasons. Just over one quarter had sent a sexually explicit photo of themself. While misuse of social media clearly has the potential for harm, it has been found that behaviours such as ‘sexting’ were largely an adult concept that young people did not feel adequately reflected their everyday experiences of creating and sharing digital images.[[6]](#footnote-6) (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0004/576661/ARCSHS-SSASH-2013.pdf)

There are concerns that young people, particularly females, are increasingly expected to engage in creating and sharing semi-nude and nude images as part of healthy sexual relationships. When an image is shared, it has the risk of being circulated widely without consent. Sharing images through social media can place pressure on young people to fit a certain image, and open themselves up to be judged by others.

Critical literacy skills are increasingly important for young people to access, validate, synthesise and respond to information to make informed choices about their health, safety and wellbeing. Young people need to become critical consumers of images, to consider the images they see and whether they are appropriate to share with others or more appropriate and ethical to report the image to an authority. It is equally imperative to educate young people and increase awareness of the potential challenge they may face and the implications and consequences of using mobile technologies and online spaces as a forum for self-expression and sharing personal material.

Texting or sexting cards

A photo of a women dressed in a burqa

A video of someone being bullied

A photo of a group of friends water-skiing at the dam

A private photo that a girl shared with her partner

A video of a group singing happy birthday to a friend

A photo of males getting changed at the local pool

School photos

A photo of a new student crying which has been shared around the school

A photo up a skirt taken as a girl climbs some stairs

A video of a couple kissing at a party without them knowing

A video of a boy in his underwear from the PE change rooms, taken without him knowing

A selfie of someone in their underwear found on a friend’s phone accidently

A photo of person in traditional ceremonial dress (e.g. body paint)

A video of people competing at a swimming carnival

Real life scenarios

Scenario 1: My new boyfriend has asked me to send him a naked photo of myself. I really like him and he has promised he will not show it to anyone else. I think I trust him. Surely it can’t be that big a deal.

Scenario 2; I am male and I am being bullies at school for not having sexual images of girlfriends on my mobile phone to share with my mates.

Scenario 3: One of the guys snuck into the girls change rooms, took a photo on his phone of them getting changed for PE and is sending it to all his mates.

Scenario 4: One of my so-called friends took some private photos off my mobile phone and sent them around the playground. He says it’s my fault because I didn’t have a password on my phone.

Scenario 5: Without my consent, somebody has posted a photo of me on Facebook in my swimmers. I am devastated, as people are not posting horrible comments about my appearance.

Scenario 6: My best friend has told me she is planning to send a sexual image of herself to this boy at school she likes in the hope he may ask her out. She says everyone else is doing it, so what’s the big deal?

Real life scenarios – Teacher discussion information sheet

Source: Ollis, D, Harrison, L & Maharaj, C, 2013, Sexuality Education Matters: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education, Deakin University, Burwood, Vi

Scenario 1 - Naked photo

My new boyfriend has asked me to send him a naked photo of myself. I really like him and he has promised he will not show it to anyone else. I think I trust him. Surely it can’t be that big a deal.

Risks or consequences discussion points

Your boyfriend may send it to other friends, who in turn may also forward it on.

This may lead to humiliation, embarrassment, bullying or harassment, all of which could lead to your self-harm.

It may have ramifications in the future if you begin to date someone else, or you join a new club/sports team, or if you are applying for a job at some stage.

Taking, sending or receiving sexual images of a minor is illegal. If you’re found to have a naked or semi-naked photo of someone under 18 on your phone or your computer, you can be charged with a criminal offence. If you forward the photo to someone else you can be charged with a criminal offence even if you delete it from your own phone. You can be charged even if it is a photo of yourself and you agreed to the photo being sent.

Scenario 2 - Refusing to engage in sexting

I am male and I am being bullied at school for not having sexual images of girlfriends on my mobile phone to share with my mates. They’re calling me gay because I don’t engage in ‘sexting’ and sharing of such images.

Risks or consequences discussion points

Peer pressure can be extremely difficult to resist, however there are many other ways to be yourself, or express your masculinity if you choose to, without having to conform to this pressure. By standing up to them and continuing to refuse to conform you will in fact gain respect from your wider community in the long term although this is very difficult to know in the short term.

Your role as an active bystander in challenging these so-called social norms that promote and condone sexual violence against females is courageous and demonstrates the far greater values and ethics that society needs.

Scenario 3 - Privacy

One of the guys snuck into the girls change rooms, took a photo on his phone of them getting changed for PE and is sending it to all his mates.

Risks or consequences discussion points

This is an invasion of privacy. No consent has been given to take the photo. Furthermore, taking, sending or receiving sexual images of a minor is illegal (see the first scenario).

Scenario 4 - Privacy and security

One of my so-called friends took some private photos off my mobile phone and sent them around the playground. He says it is my fault because I didn’t have a password on my phone.

Risks or consequences discussion points

It is not your fault, your friend has invaded your privacy. No consent has been given.

However, it is better if you have a password on your phone and this should not be shared with anyone.

Scenario 5 - Facebook

Without my consent, somebody has posted a photo of me on Facebook in my swimmers. I am devastated, as people are now posting horrible comments about my appearance.

Risks or consequences discussion points

If you know who it is, consider asking them to delete the photo from Facebook.

If you think it is now out of your control, talk to a trusted adult or contact a Kids Helpline counsellor (1800 55 1800) to work out what you can do. Ensure you speak to a counsellor or trusted adult to help you deal appropriately with the situation.

Scenario 6 - Peer pressure

My best friend has told me she is planning to send a sexual image of herself to this boy at school she likes in the hope he may ask her out. She says everyone else is doing it, so what’s the big deal?

Risks or consequences discussion points

You must be an ethical friend and alert her to the consequences of her actions.

Your intervention may influence her into making a different decision, or a more informed one. As a community citizen we must encourage and model challenging or speaking out against social norms that may be related to gender violence against females. As an honest friend you should feel comfortable offering your advice.

1. Ollis, D, Harrison, L & Maharaj, C, 2013, *Sexuality Education Matters: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education*, Deakin University, Burwood, Vi [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Powell, A, 2010, Sex, Power and Consent: Youth culture and the unwritten rules, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Australian Communication and Media Authority. 2008. Internet use and social networking by young people, no. 1, September 2008, Media and Communications in Australian Families series [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Powell, A 2010b, ‘Safe sext’, DVRCV Quarterly, edn 2, Winter, pp. 1–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chalfen 2009, cited in Albury, K., Crawford, K., Byron, P. & Mathews, B. 2013. Young People and Sexting in Australia: ethics, representation and the law. April 2013. ARC Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation/ Journalism and Media Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Australia [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Albury, K., Crawford, K., Byron, P. and Mathews, B. (2013) Young people and sexting in Australia: ethics, representation and the law, ARC Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation/ Journalism and Media Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Australia. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)