**Sexting in the Ministry** *Why is There a Problem?*

Many think this is a problem with teenagers; however, it has crept into the lives of ministers all across the country.

Introduction of Sexting

**Sexting as a Teenager.** Teenagers have long used texting as a way to communicate among their peers even if they are seating next to them. With the increased need for acceptance, especially those among the opposite sex, teenagers have continued conversations for hours in the secrecy of their bedroom and late into the morning hours. They can share private thoughts and feelings to others without anyone else knowing their content. [According to recent research,](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2673719) nearly 15 percent of youth have sent sexually-explicit material, and more than 25 percent have received it.

Many teenagers who venture out and expand their sexual experience often have feelings of excitement, arousal, and curiosity, but naïve to the consequences of sexting. Their feelings of excitement may soon turn into feelings of vulnerability, hurt, and betrayal due to someone sharing their “private” messages to everyone.

Whether sexting is consensual, sexting has been connected with trauma, violence, and bullying.

* Youth who engage in sexting are three times more likely to experience emotional victimization and are also more likely to experience dating relationship violence.
* One study found youth who have sent sexually suggestive photos and videos are five times more likely to experience cyberbullying.
* Sexting may also be connected to mental health. Youth who engage in sexting are more likely to experience [depression](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/depression) and [anxiety](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/anxiety).
* Reputations are often ruined as a result of sexting.

Sexting can be considered a sexual addiction if this behavior continues. People who sext often have the same characteristics and mindset of a pedophile, one who grooms a target for personal arousal. While a pedophile is a person who preys on children, sexting can include children and adults. Most of the time, sexting does not mean physical interaction but if not stopped, sexting can lead or direct someone into a physical encounter.

Some people think that teenagers will "out-grow" this phase in their lives and learn from their mistakes or the mistakes of others to avoid this in the future.

**"But teenagers grow up into adulthood".**

Sexting in the Ministry

I believe there are a few reasons why this is happening:

**Increased Need for Texting.** Texting has become a "necessity" as a way to quickly communicate with other. While most people view texting as a necessity, it also creates problems:

* Texting in most cases is addictive. I have seen people in social settings, such as in restaurants, business settings, and even churches where a person is interrupted by a text message. The person is so addictive that they have to "stop everything" they are doing, just to answer that text. ***Addictive!***
* By immediately texting back, a person is creating another problem of being on call 24/7 and creating a mindset with the other person are more important than anything else you are doing. ***That is creating dysfunctional behavior and thinking.***
* Putting words in text can take on a whole different meaning. In the church world, we tell everyone, "We love you", without thinking anything bigger than just letting others know we care about them. But when a person tells someone they love them, fantasies can began to spring up. "My husband does not tell me he loves me as much as my pastor!" ***We have to be careful about what we say!***
* Texting to the opposite sex, someone outside of your normal relationship or spouse, should be forbidden! If any texting is received by someone from the opposite sex, it should be extremely limited answer like "yes or no" and never open-ended where the conversation is lengthy.

If for some reason there is a need to have multiple texting, start a new text that will include your spouse in that conversation where all parties are included.

* Many ministers have a mindset they are "immune" from being tempted to have their texting evolve into sexting.
* Never text minors! With the possible exception of answering "yes or no". There is really no reason why adults should be texting a minor unless it is a children's or youth pastor and that should include multiple people. If a minor keep trying to text you, please inform others, such as a parent.
* Do not text late at night. And don't be "secretly" texting others by going into another room from your spouse. Keep your phone where it can be easily seen, not face down.
* Be sure to inform your spouse if someone from the opposite sex is texting you. Show them the message, etc. Keep nothing hidden!
* Never send personal and intimate pictures to anyone else!!!
* Texts are a matter of record and they can be retrieved and used for or against you. Be careful what you text.

**Lower Moral Values as a Generation.** One of the biggest issues among denominational leaders is how do we address this problem and other moral issues among a generation that seems to have lower moral values. Denominational leaders must do something to protect the integrity of the ministry.

* Many offenders, including ministers, do not view sexting as not being a big issue since it does not involve any physical interaction.
* Many offenders, including ministers and church leaders, do not view emotional adultery as adultery.
* Ministers often justify or minimize their actions. "Most are not sorry for their actions but are sorry they are caught".
* Many lay people and church leaders do not understand the need for disciplinary action or possible suspension for their pastor by denominational leaders.
* People in the church may be more "conditioned" by the world and its moral values and standards rather than taking a Biblical stance.

Sexting as an Adult

Sexual addictions are not exempt from the ministry.  Pornography and sexting has been increasing among ministers to where it is becoming a huge problem.  Pastors are on call 24/7 and use their phones constantly, which includes texting.

With endless texting, if not careful, texting can become sexting, which is inappropriate texting outside of a normal relationship with the purpose of flirting, using inappropriate language, graphic photos, and carrying on an emotional affair with someone outside of their marriage.  They may include audio clips, suggestive selfies, or videos. In simple terms, it is an affair, an emotional affair, that is usually conducted in secret but eventually becomes exposed, causing harm to everyone, including the church and community.

It is an incentive to start a relationship with another person outside of a normal relationship or marriage. It can be used to express one’s sexuality or fantasies. One who initiates such behaviors will increase texting to perfection to obtain one’s goals and desires. One will usually achieve a goal of sexual arousal, excitement, and adventure within the confines of not physically being there with this person but fanaticizes from a distance. If one is sexting with a minor, they can be placed on a Sex Offender Registry and face possible jail time.

Sexting may impact one’s daily functioning with overwhelming thoughts of sending and receiving more messages. It is often referred to as a “secret affair”. Once discovered, it will always negatively impact any marriage or normal relationship, as well as destroy your career and reputation.

If you are sexting, there are some steps you have to do immediately before your life as you know it comes to an end. Listed below are some steps you must consider whether your sexting has been revealed or not.

**Phase I (If your sexting has not been discovered)**

* Stop Sexting anyone outside of your marriage or relationship immediately!
* Acknowledge the impact that your betrayal on your spouse is causing.
* Admit your problem and give a genuine apology to your spouse.
* Answer your spouse's questions about the sexting honestly
* Be completely honest about your whereabouts and activities going forward.
* Check in with your spouse frequently to keep the communication open.
* Heal with the goal of healing yourself and your relationship.
* Contact your Denominational officials before they find out.
* Most ministers have stated that they thought the addiction to the point of sexting would grow as large as it has.
* Most will have more than just one person they are sexting.

**Phase II (If your spouse finds out before you have a chance to tell them)**

* Be assertive and confront your spouse about your sexting.
* Tell your spouse how their sexting back made you feel.
* Clarify your boundaries around sexting other people with your spouse.
* Make sure your spouse knows you have ended things with the other person.
* Take care of yourself while you process your initial reactions and emotions.
* Work towards forgiveness for yourself and spouse as you move forward.
* Contact denominational officials before they find out.

**Phase III (Restoration and Rebuilding Trust)**

* Make a plan with your spouse to build better communication.
* Seek marriage counseling to work through the trauma and to rebuild trust.
* Work together to discover the core issue that led to sexting.
* Commit staying together to heal your marriage.
* Work closely with your denominational leaders during the restoration process.

These phases are discussed more in another article on our website, www.pastoralcare.org or at the bottom of this article.