Safer Sexting

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<u>Materials</u>: Powerpoint, Safer Sexting Worksheets, post-it notes (optional depending on implementation method), flip chart paper, markers

<u>Overview of Session</u>: This presentation provides a harm reduction model for teaching youth about sexuality and technology.

<u>Learning Objectives</u>:
● Participants will be able to define sexting and frame it as a sexual activity
● Participants will be able to name the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive sexting
● Participants will learn about harm reduction, identifying risks, and getting consent
● Participants will gain ideas for healthy responses when sexting goes public
● Participants will learn where to get helped if they've been exposed or exposed someone else

I.   <u>Introduction (3-5 min)</u>

Say: Today we are going to talk about sex, dating, and technology in a discussion about sexting. It's important that we approach this topic with respect and maturity. Are there any "group norms" y'all would like to set before we begin (ex: Vegas rule, don't yuck my yum, throw glitter not shade, no slut shaming)?

Optional: Post group norms where all can read them

Say: It's important that I make a quick disclaimer… Unfortunately, there is no way to completely remove all risks associated with sexting. However, there are things you can do to reduce potential harm and make yourself safer if you choose to sext. When it comes to sex ed, we teach you about safer sex so that you can make informed decisions, know how to manage potential risks, and can identify where to get help or support. This presentation is based on the same harm-reduction foundation!

Ask: **What is sexting?** Allow students to respond. Answers may include: sending nudes, sending dirty texts, using Snapchat to arouse… any way that someone uses technology for sexual connection.

Say: **Let's put this into perspective with some statistics.**

Statistics: Teens use social media for many different reasons, including positive ones! One study shows that 29% of teens have sexted. In SAVE's informal sexting survey, 93% of respondents said they had sexted.

Transition: So many people your age are sexting, or have a friend who does, and yet most adults in your life are probably telling you "just don't do it." This can make it a difficult topic to discuss, so let's start out easy with some warm up questions.

II.   Warm-Up Questions (3-5 min)

Say: Turn to the people sitting near you and discuss these warm-up questions:

Is sexting right or wrong? Why?

Why do people expose other people's nudes?

Ask students to share snippets from their discussions.

Mention: Sexting is just an activity that some people do... it's not necessarily right OR wrong! However, people can approach sexting in ways that range from healthy to abusive. That's why it's important for us to learn healthy practices.

Ask: The next question you discussed was about exposing people. What were some of the things brought up in your group? *Example Responses:* To get revenge, to embarrass someone, to blackmail someone

Transition: Having nudes exposed is one of the risks of sexting. Let's quickly name some other risks, which most of you probably can think of pretty easily.

III.   Risks of Sexting (5 min)

Ask: What risks are associated with sexting? That's right, (getting in trouble, permanence, blackmail) are all risks that other young people have mentioned as well.

Say: Let's talk about risk reduction, otherwise known as harm reduction. Harm reduction is what people do to decrease the risk that they may experience harm when doing something they want to do. Most things in life involve risk - riding a bite, for example.

What are some risks of riding a bike? *Example responses:* Falling off, crashing, flat tire.

What are some ways we decrease these risks? Wear a helmet, ride in bike lane, wear reflective gear at night.

So, the fact that something has risks involved doesn't necessarily mean it's something we must avoid altogether. Sexting might be one of those things for you. We encourage you to think about reducing your risks, and understand that for some, that might mean abstaining from sexting, and for others that might mean something different. We will talk more about risk reduction later, and your worksheet has a risk activity as well.

Transition: We talk about risks pretty often, and that's important. But we don't always get a chance to look at the other side of things… why do people like sexting? Let's brainstorm.

IV.   Why do people like sexting? (10 min)

Implementation methods:
● Break class into groups or pairs to brainstorm
● Discuss as a class
● Individual brainstorm

Sample answers: Because it's hot, you're long distance, it's a confidence boost, because it's safer than doing things in person, etc.

Discuss: These are all common reasons that people may enjoy sexting and sending nudes.

Transition: Like many of you have probably noticed in this conversation, sexting can be healthy, unhealthy, and abusive. We call this the sexting spectrum - let's spend some time thinking through the different behaviors that fall under each category.

V.   Sexting Spectrum (15 min)

Guide students through a discussion brainstorming the following:

A. **When is sexting healthy:** To connect with partner, to explore fantasy, to have fun, to discuss things before trying in person, to explore sexuality
B. **When is sexting unhealthy:** To "save" a failing relationship, to "convince" someone to be with you, playing mind games with trust ("I know I said I'd delete it but I kind of want to keep it…")
C. **When is sexting abusive:** Pressure, force, coercion, boundary manipulation, nonconsensual exposure, humiliation, blackmail. These things are NEVER okay and no one deserves for someone to treat them in any of these ways.

Implementation Methods:
● In advance of the presentation, write the healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors on post-it notes. In the classroom, create columns on the board labelled "healthy," "unhealthy," and "abusive." Divide class into groups and pass out post-it notes. Ask

groups to decide which column each post-it belongs to. Bring the group back and discuss.
● Gallery Walk: Bring flip chart paper labelled "healthy," "unhealthy," and "abusive." Post in the classrooms. Break students into pairs and have them discuss ideas for each category together, then walk around and write their ideas on the posters.

Community Responses: When Sexting Goes Public

Say: For many people who have been exposed, there are two sets of harm. The first harm done to them is by the person who exposed them. But often times, the second harm done to them is from their community. Our communities have the power to protect us and hold the person who harmed accountable for their actions, and it's important that we plan right now for how we are going to respond in a healthy way when sexting goes public.

Implementation Methods:
● In advance of the presentation, write the healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors on post-it notes. In the classroom, create columns on the board labelled "healthy," "unhealthy," and "abusive." Divide class into groups and pass out post-it notes. Ask groups to decide which column each post-it belongs to. Bring the group back and discuss.
● Gallery Walk: Bring flip chart paper labelled "healthy," "unhealthy," and "abusive." Post in the classrooms. Break students into pairs and have them discuss ideas for each category together, then walk around and write their ideas on the posters.

Lead class through a discussion brainstorming the spectrum of ways we can respond when sexting goes public.

● **Healthy community responses:** Talk to your friends who are exposing people, speak up for the person who was exposed and reiterate that it was not their fault and they did not deserve it, encourage schools to have policies around sexting and dating violence, stand up for them if you hear others gossiping, delete the photo, etc.
● **Unhealthy community responses:** Gossiping about the person in the photo, laughing at jokes people make about the person, etc.
● **Abusive community responses:** Forwarding the photo to more people, saying they deserved it, isolating the person who was harmed, victim blaming, slut shaming

Say: We see how important it is to have a supportive community. Let's make a commitment to respond in healthy ways when sexting goes public.

Transition: So… what happens if someone decides these risks are too big, but they still want to explore sexuality through technology? Let's brainstorm in our groups some alternatives to sexting.

VI.   Group Brainstorm: Alternatives to Sending Nudes (10 min)

Break class into groups to brainstorm.

Ask: What could someone do in place of sending nudes if they decide the risk is too great?
Example Responses: Send audio messages, send cute selfies with clothes on, send a makeout playlist, etc.

*Facilitator Tip: Alternatives to sending nudes might be especially important for folks to consider if they are part of communities that are disproportionately overpoliced/overdisciplined (POC, QT, undocumented)

Transition: These alternatives could be really useful, but as with sending nudes, you need consent from your partner to know if they're okay getting sexy texts or anything else on that list. It is possible that their answer might be "no." At some point in all of our lives, we are going to have to say "no," and we are going to have to hear "no."

VII.   Consent, Saying No, and Hearing No (4 min)

Consent: How do you know when someone wants to sext? It's important to ask! Some people might prefer to talk about it in person to make sure everyone is on the same page, and some people might ask over text. People might want to sext, but have different ideas for boundaries. Use your "Safer Sexting Checklist" to decide what is important to you so that you can communicate with your partner about it. Remember that just because someone sexted with you once, doesn't mean they consent to sexting with you again.

Hearing No: We are all going to hear someone say "no" to use at some point or another in life. What does it feel like to hear "no?" (ex: disappointing, frustrating, sad) Yes, it is totally normal to feel those things after someone tells you "no." Here are some tips for handling this tough moment: 1) Give yourself time and space to feel your feelings. 2) Take the high road: continue to treat the person with respect and thank them for being honest. 3) Self-care: do something that makes you feel happy and healthy! Go on a run, hang with friends, have a snack.

Saying No: We all are going to have to tell someone "no" at some point or another in life! What does it feel like to tell someone "no?" (ex: scary, don't want to hurt their feelings, don't want them to retaliate)

Those are very real things to consider about why it's sometimes hard to say no, especially to someone we care about.

When saying no, you can use the model of "refuse, delay, negotiate" for help. If you completely are uninterested, refuse: "No, I'm not comfortable doing that." If you are interested but want some more time to build trust in the relationship, or you'd rather sext on a day when you're

feeling more confident in your body, etc., then delay: "Yes, when…" If you are interested, with some clarification or boundary-setting, then negotiate: "Yes, if…" Having different boundaries and/or different desires does not mean you're in an unhealthy relationship! Your relationship is not doomed if one of you wants to send nudes and the other doesn't.

Transition: Unfortunately, some of us have had experiences on either side of an exposure. Let's talk about what to do if you were exposed, or if you exposed someone else.

VIII.   Getting Help (7 min)
*Facilitator Tip: Ask students to read out bullet points to break up facilitation and engage students.

I was exposed: **Here are some social and legal steps to consider if you've been exposed, as well as areas of self-care.** (see Powerpoint)

I exposed someone: **Here are some social and legal steps to consider if you have exposed someone, as well as areas of self-work.** (see Powerpoint)

Transition: SAVE is a resource for you! We are more than happy to work with folks to create safety plans, restorative justice responses, or to provide counseling. Now let's chat for a second about your handouts and then we will close out this presentation.

 IX.   Handouts & Close Out (2 min)

Say: These handouts are for you to look over. One is a Safer Sexting checklist that may come in handy for you or a friend when thinking about your boundaries and harm reduction strategies when it comes to explore sex and technology. The other is a worksheet where you get to rank the level of risk depending on the scenario. This is just to get you thinking about what someone in that situation might do to decrease their risk, and also so you can start identifying what things feel risky for you.

Close out question: **What is one thing you will take away from this discussion?** Give participants some time to think about this, then share with their groups or with the class as a whole (they always have the option to pass).

Thank you all for taking part in this challenging and important discussion! Feel free to bring up any questions.

Safer Sexting Checklist

Here are some things to consider about safer sexting. Fill in the blanks if you have more ideas to add to your checklist!

- ❏ Check in with yourself: *Do I want to send/receive sexts? Why? What is my plan to protect myself and my partner from the risks?*

- ❏ Check in with your partner: *Do you want to receive or send sexts? Why? What is your plan to protect both of us from the risks?*

- ❏ Share your individual boundaries and make some agreements together:

    - ❏ What is off limits? Think through your yes's, no's, and maybes.

    - ❏ What app will we use?

    - ❏ Do we delete or keep the photos? Is screenshotting okay?

    - ❏ _____

- ❏ Get and give consent!

    - ❏ Remember that consent is ongoing - anyone can change their mind at any time

    - ❏ Agree to stop if someone is no longer having fun or feeling safe

- ❏ Turn off message previews

    - ❏ iPhone: Settings > Notifications > Messages > Show Previews > Never

- ❏ Make sure your devices are password-protected

- ❏ If you agree to delete images, you must also clear your trash can file

- ❏ Stick to the boundaries you agreed to

- ❏ Don't show your face or recognizable body markings

- ❏ _____

- ❏ _____

- ❏ _____

Sexting Risks Activity

How risky is each activity? Circle your answer:

Sending a sexy text message (with no photos) over Snapchat:

> 1 least risky - 2 kind of risky - 3 neutral - 4 very risky - 5 most risky

Sending a nude (no face or visible body markings) through Instagram DMs:

> 1 least risky - 2 kind of risky - 3 neutral - 4 very risky - 5 most risky

Sending a sexy video (shows face) over Twitter DMs:

> 1 least risky - 2 moderately risky - 3 neutral - 4 very risky - 5 most risky

Sending a half-nude photo (no face or visible body markings) over text:

> 1 least risky - 2 moderately risky - 3 neutral - 4 very risky - 5 most risky

Sharing a makeout playlist via Spotify:

> 1 least risky - 2 moderately risky - 3 neutral - 4 very risky - 5 most risky

Follow-up Questions:

What, if anything, is risky in each of the scenarios?

What ways could someone in these scenarios reduce their risk?