Dear Alice,

I'm in a long distance relationship and my boyfriend always wants to try "sexting" or have "phone sex." I'm just not comfortable doing so, and don't even know how. Any pointers?

Answer

Dear Reader,

For people in long-distance relationships, or even those who are simply tantalized by technology, sexting (sending erotically charged messages or photos via cell phone) or phone sex may be an ideal way to scratch their sexual itch. Whereas, incorporating new ways of being intimate may help dial up the passion, listening to yourself and knowing what gets you ringing off the hook is a vital component of your ever-evolving sexual identity.

Consider the following questions: What about sexting and phone sex makes you uncomfortable? Are you feeling pressured to send racy text messages or photos or have phone sex? As with any sexual act, the ultimate goal is pleasure, so if you and/or your partner aren't enjoying it, try something else that gets you both in the mood. Consider telling your partner how you feel and maybe just talking about what turns you on may get the ball rolling. The bottom line is that healthy relationships are built on mutual trust and understanding, so bringing up your concerns may offer a prime opportunity to evaluate your relationship.

What makes sexting different from phone sex (and part of what makes it so exciting for people) is the semi-public aspect of it. While most sexual activity occurs behind closed doors, sexts may be sent or received in the presence of other people who are oblivious to the naughtiness heralded by your ringtone. This risqué play is a creative way to amp up arousal, but the same risk that makes it fun could lead to something less so. Keep in mind that once you hit "Send," you may not be able to control who has access to the pictures or messages that you had intended for your partner's eyes only. Sexts or photos going viral may be a real risk. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it, but before you do, ask yourself:

- Who else might see this sext?
- How would I feel if someone besides my partner saw it?
- Do I trust my partner to keep this private?

If you're comfortable with the potential risks, sexting and phone sex are great ways to explore new and unique ways to sexual satisfaction. If you're not comfortable with the privacy
concerns, you may want to let this sexual adaptation of technology slide. If you're in between these and want to give it a try, easing into it may help. Phone sex: Getting started offers some helpful pointers to initiate coital convos. Keep in mind some qualities of SMS:

- **Character limits.** Sexting a Shakespeare sonnet may callous your fingers and require 30 texts before you even get "there", so you may need to keep it short and sweet.
- **Different sense of time.** If one or both sexters are multitasking, response times may vary from seconds to days. If you're looking for more instant gratification from a distance, phone sex or cyber sex may be quicker. If you're looking for something that fits into a busy schedule, this may be your sexual medium while you're physically away.
- **Beep beep!** If you're expecting a heavy flow of incoming sexts, you may want to switch your mobile device to vibrate or silent to not gather a crowd's attention or disturb bystanders.
- **Keep it discreet.** If you're in a public space, consider stepping aside as your face blushes, heart races, or breaths get deeper. Having a concerned stranger ask if you're hyperventilating may create some awkward moments.
- **Secure the messages.** Consider setting up the security and privacy features of your phone to minimize curious friends, family members, and strangers from accessing your sexts.

If you choose to engage in "safer" sexting, some additional tips to help you get started may include:

- **Start gentle.** "Hot weather out! Too bad you're at home. I'm heading to catch some rays! " Like in-person sexual relationships, good times often start with simple conversations to get to know each other. Say what you would feel comfortable saying in person.
- **Sexting as flirting or foreplay.** "I know you're thinking about me, so I thought I'd say Hi! " "Can't wait for tonight?" Sexts may help create sexual tensions for your next in-person relief. Exclamation points, ellipses, onomatopoeias (oohs and aahs), emoticons, and a simple "I want you" may help spice things up. Like the greatest suspense novels, allusions and lead ups whet readers' appetites for more?
- **Reinforcers.** "Last night was AWESOME! I still owe you a cupcake!" "Miss me yet?" Since your last conversation or interaction, texts may serve as a sweet P.S. note. Keeping the lines of communication open with timely texts may help boost your relationship.

Trying "safer" sexting may get the job done while respecting your comfort level and your privacy concerns. If things do go unfavorably and you feel violated, experience bullying, or get blackmailed, please take back control of the situation by contacting the appropriate authorities at school or the police.

Keeping the potential risks in mind with the above tips may help you decide if and how sexting would work for you. So, instead of just plain old cell service, you could be cell-serviced.

Alice!
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About Sex Without "Doing It" (Outercourse)