Let’s Be Honest: Teen Sexting

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Let’s talk about sex(ting), baby . . .

If you are around my age (early 40s) like many parents who are reading blogs like this are, that introductory sentence immediately brings you back to a time when hearing “that” song on the radio or on MTV felt salacious. Well, I think we all know that is nothing compared to what is at our kids’ fingertips at all times right now.

What Is Happening On Smart Phones?

While cellular phones with constant access to the internet (Smart phones) have been around for over a decade now, I am still unsure that we as parents are doing enough to honestly address the some of the very adult issues that children may not be ready to handle that are literally at their fingertips constantly.

Ok – let me quit talking around the subject. My

experience tells me that as parents we tend to perseverate far longer on whether or not our teenage children may be at a party where there is beer than we do about the pornography they have access to and amount of sexting going on between young people.

This does not mean that I do not think we should be concerned about our kids heading out to a party. I still get the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when my kids are headed to a bonfire. In fact, I think that parent radar that goes off is amazing. It keeps us on alert and helps us to lead our kids away from potentially dangerous situations that could negatively impact the trajectory of their lives.

What Is Happening with Cell Phones in Bedrooms?

My point in comparing drinking to sexting and access to pornography is that I think we should increase our ‘radar’ for when they retreat to their bedrooms with their phones.

To be clear, I am not here to be the pornography police. Pornography existed well before smart phones, but never has it been easier for your kids to access anything in the wide world of pornography with just a few clicks. To be clear, unless you have proactively locked down your internet at home and your child’s phone settings, it is imperative that you understand just how easy it is to access material you most likely do not want your child to consume.

Teen Sexting Abuses

Much more importantly, in my eyes, is the prevalence of sexting among our teenage and pre-teen children. Every study you read shows a different data point, but both from the research and my experience as a school administrator I can share that sexting is FAR more prevalent than many of us would have liked to have assumed. Not only is it prevalent, it is leading to exploitation as people are sharing images and videos without permission, bullying, extreme social issues, and exacerbating mental health issues. I feel awful for the impact this is having on some students, but I can also tell you that sexting eats up an inordinate amount of time and effort from school administrators as well. Moreover, just like drinking, the decision to sext can – in a single moment – negatively impact the trajectory of someone's life.

Talk with Teens and Set Boundaries

As a parent, I have two calls to action for you based on what I have just shared with you. First, engage in the dialogue. Notice, I did not say establish a rule or tell them not to sext. Talk with your child and explain the permanence and potential impact of engaging in this behavior. Second, the largest barrier to sexting – particularly sexting with someone you are not involved in a relationship with – is self-confidence. As parents, if we can help to build out children up there is LESS chance of them seeking external validation from others in a potentially self-harming manner.

What Teens Need to Know!

To be absurdly direct, if you have a teenager, I would guess with a high degree of certainty that they are not using their electronic devices in a manner you would approve of at all times. It is time to have that discussion, connect on the issue, set boundaries, and enhance their self-confidence so that they POSSIBLY will make better decisions.