

4 Ways to Respond to the Teen Sexting Problem

Think back when you were a junior high or high school student. What would've been the equivalent to sexting?

I'm guessing it would probably be flashing. The only difference between the two (besides the obvious) is that a quick flash would only be talked about after it happened. Sexting pics are forever; therefore, people have visuals to add to the conversation for years to come.

If you think sexting is about students just getting a quick fix of sexual gratification, you are mistaken. There is a lot more going on. I did a very detailed survey on sexting, and the results were interesting:

- One in five teens has engaged in sexting—sending, receiving or forwarding sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos through text message. And over a third knows someone who has either sent or received messages like this.
- 38 percent of teens confessed to someone sharing with them what was sent to them.
- 34 percent of the girls that have participated in sexting say they did it to feel sexy.
- 23 percent of girls and 24 percent of boys say they were pressured by a friend to send the inappropriate pictures.
- Most participants say they engage in sexting because their boyfriend/girlfriend ask them to or to have fun.
- 52 percent of girls said they did it as a present.
- 29 percent of teens believe those exchanging sexually suggestive content are “expected” to hook up or date.

These statistics say a few things that we in youth ministry need to pay attention to:

- These statistics change the face of the person who's sexting. When you think of a flasher, you think of an old pervert who walks around in a trench coat all day. Well, when you think of sexting, you may think of an older, porn-exposed student who's been a troublemaker for most of their life. These statistics suggest that's not the case. These statistics normalizes the profile of a sexter to look a lot more like your everyday teen in junior high or high school who may or may have not viewed porn before.
- These statistics suggest that sexting is becoming normalized within boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.
- These statistics suggest that sexting is becoming more normal and culturally acceptable in the world of teens.
- These statistics suggest that sexting is a gateway to getting into more sexual activity.
- These statistics suggest that it's impossible to shield your child from sexting.
- These statistics suggest that there is a deceptive identity/power piece that sexting gives to girls and guys.

So, what should be our response?

Sexting is a complete lie embedded in the mindset that it's innocent or that it's not worse than having sex. Here are four ways I feel we should respond:

1. Prayer. We should be interceding for our students and for the students at our local schools. Prayer in our ministries needs to be proactive, not reactive. Keep your ministry connected to the power source—God.

2. Educate parents on trends and technology. About two out of every five teens say their parents have no idea what they are doing online. So we must take the initiative and help parents become more knowledgeable with trends and technology. Let's be the support they don't know they need.

3. Talk about it in youth group. I wrote a post on this ([click here](#)). Add sexting to the list because it's becoming the norm. And right now, students don't get a choice whether they are exposed to it or not.

4. Challenge your students. I think sometimes we may feel like a good talk is enough, but actually talk is only half the battle. You need to challenge your students to take action and stand against cultural norms that are slowly destroying their generation. Give them action steps that will give them confidence in the stance they take. Teach them how to move in righteous anger. Be creative in what you give them the opportunity to do. I would grab a few students and let them help you shape the challenge. I love getting students involved in stuff like this, because it gives them ownership.

What are some other ways we should respond to sexting?

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