

7 Disturbing Realities About Teen ‘Sexting’ Trend

You’re sitting in the Publix parking lot at dusk and notice the unsupervised 12-year-old riveted to his iPhone with his wide-eyed friend looking on.

Walking through the mall you see three teen girls seemingly oblivious to surroundings as they stroll together each focused on their phones.

Munching their curly fries at Arby’s, each one of five youths are simultaneously engaged with their phones.

Stopping at the intersection you glance over and observe a pre-teen in the back seat basking in the glow of her phone.

Mobile phones and teens are everywhere. The question is: “What are they looking at?” And as a parent are you aware what they’re seeing?

“Vamping” refers to teenagers staying up after hours, engaging socially and possibly sharing sexually related items. “Sexting” refers to transmitting provocative sexual images of one’s self to others.

If your son or daughter has access to an iPhone—or any kind of smartphone for that matter—are you absolutely sure there’s no questionable activity going on? More importantly, do you know how to protect your children from the onslaught they face in today’s technological revolution?

In recent days, the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, *Washington Post* newspaper, *NBC News*, *PBS NewsHour* and other news outlets are recognizing the rising tide of sexting among youth in our culture. We ignore these warnings to our peril. Let’s survey the situation so we are both informed and prepared as parents.

Here are 7 realities regarding sexting:

1. Our culture encourages sharing information and images freely, including those of a sexual nature.

Nude—or nearly nude—pictures and themes are commonplace in ads, Instagram or on YouTube. Miley Cyrus, Nikki Minaj, Beyoncé, Rihanna and other “strippers” masquerade as dancers. Hot groups like “Nude Beach” fan the flames while Maybelline runs full-page ads heralding “Dare to Go Nude!” Shamefully explicit Victoria’s Secret displays hit us on every side-television, posters and provocative magazine layouts.

The message is clear: Throw off restraints, don’t hold back, show and enjoy what you got!

2. Exchanging naked pictures on iPhones or in other places is not viewed as unusual. We’re being told it’s “normal” and is “happening all the time.”

In a recent *Washington Post* article on this topic by psychologist professor Elizabeth Englander, the “expert” calls us to stop demonizing teen sexting. She says in most cases it’s “harmless” and a “normal part of a teen’s sexual development.”

3. Research studies reveal that 40 percent of teenagers have posted or sent sexually provocative messages. Over 10 percent of 13- to 16-year-old teen girls admit sending or receiving sexually explicit messages.

4. Seventy percent of young people acknowledge their sexting is with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

5. Fifty-five percent admit that, no matter what they say to others, they share content with more than one person. The average guy has little chance of discreetly deleting that “juicy” picture with such bragging rights available the next time he’s with his buds!

6. Thirty-three percent do it to “feel attractive/sexy.” Girls send more sexual images than guys.

7. Twelve percent do it because they are pressured or manipulated to do so.

In this month’s *Atlantic* magazine, the cover story on “Why Kids Sext” visited a high school of 1,450, where students surveyed said they believe anywhere from 60-80 percent of their classmates sext. Some of the more significant excerpts include:

- “The speed in which teens have incorporated the practice of sharing naked pictures of themselves into their mating rituals has taken society by surprise.”
- “This is my life and my body, and I can do whatever I want with it!” declared one girl.
- In another high school surveyed, 28 percent of sophomores and juniors said they sent naked pictures of themselves and 31 percent asked someone to send them one.
- The act of sending sexually explicit material through mobile phones does not just entail bikinis and scantily-clad girls.

“Is This Really Just Harmless Activity for Young People—A Playful Stage to Pass Through?”

Last year, Audrey Pott, a curvy sophomore at Saratoga High School in California, wore a low-cut top and a miniskirt to school and got sexually explicit messages on Facebook.

What’s amazing to consider is what publication probably did the longest feature on this incident—none other than *Rolling Stone* magazine! The herald of hedonism that celebrates drugs, booze, rebellion and “anything goes,” as well as regularly features pictures of “cool” celebrities smoking dope, tells the story in all its gory details.

In Virginia a 13-year-old girl posted her naked picture on and had grown men show up at her house.

Guys have learned to manipulate by threatening to send out naked pictures from their girlfriends unless given the sexual favors they demand.

Imagine your “naive,” just-developing daughter looking in the mirror and repeatedly wondering, “Am I attractive? Do I look sexy? Guys at school say girls who don’t sext aren’t cool; they’re stuck up. Is that me?”

Then some Justin Bieber guy on whom she’s had a crush texts her. You and your spouse are asleep, and she’s exiting the shower. The conversation goes: “BAE, WYD?” “Getting ready for bed” “WHAT ARE YA WEARING?” “Wraparound towel” “WOW! YOU ALWAYS LOOK SO HOT. BET YOU’RE SMOKIN’ HOT NOW!” “Really?” “TAYLOR SWIFT’S GOT NOTHIN ON YOU. YOU’RE ALONE—SHOOT ME A PIX. JUST FOR ME. I’LL DELETE IT ... PROMISE. COME ON, I’M PERSISTENT BAE!”

Vulnerable. Gullible. Alone. Late. Why not ... Once ... Just for him?

Practical Guidance for Parents:

1. Pray to God for divine protection, discernment and wisdom. Your assignment is to equip and empower them to make wise decisions on their own. Help them understand choices and long-term effects.
2. Make sure you are meaningfully involved in a community of believers with like-minded parents who share a biblical worldview on sexuality and parenting.
3. Be engaged with cellphone use, monitoring and the safeguards available today. Many wise parents have initiated reasonable curfews in the evening regarding cellphone use.

4. Reject the notion that in the teen years parents step back rather than stay involved. In this season they need you more than ever!

5. Remember you're first and foremost a parental authority, not a buddy or friend. Talk show host Kelly Ripa shared recently about her 13-year-old daughter having cellphone privileges curtailed. "I don't care if she doesn't like me. I'm not trying to be her friend. I'm her mom!"

6. Teach your children there is a mystique to sex that's God-ordained. While the culture seduces us with "Indulge yourself," the Holy Scriptures direct us, "Control yourself."

"Young women ... I charge you: Do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time" (Song 8:4, CSB).

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven ... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing ... He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:1, 5b, 11, RSV).

7. Clearly and convincingly explain there are very severe legal consequences for sexting. In some states teenagers can be charged with a felony, a 20-year prison sentence and registered as a sex offender for life. Continue with a very honest conversation about ruined reputation, humiliation, depression, revenge tactics, sexual predators and opening doors to pornography, homosexuality and eventually even suicide.

Remember your normal sexual curiosity as a youth? It's by divine design. But if parental authorities are not present to instruct, steer and oversee it in young people, it becomes like a fire out of control leading to disastrous consequences. In today's cultural morass, we have no more options except to hit this head on and trust God for His protection.

Here's the deal: There simply are no easy solutions or

shortcuts anymore. The United States of America desperately needs a transformative revival. As we await that divine intervention, let us pray and stay close together as families did in the time of Nehemiah when the city of God was being restored.

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