

# The Naked Truth about TEEN SEXTING



BY JULIE BAUMGARDNER  
MS, CFLE

Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and iChat: When it comes to technology, it's hard to keep up with the younger, totally tech-savvy generation. While some parents are totally on top of what their kids are doing, most would tell you they are in the dark.

"What in the heck is Snapchat?" asked a parent at a recent gathering. Therein lies the challenge between technology, parents, and their kids. It's a fast-moving train and it's hard for parents to keep up. When you think you have a handle on what's out there and how to talk with your kids about it, something new comes along. For example, for years now parents have been dealing with teens and sexting (sending nude or nearly nude pictures through their phone whether it's "smart" or not). Just when you think everybody is clear about appropriate use of the phone, Snapchat comes along and teens think they can outsmart their parents by using this application to send a picture of themselves to someone be-



cause the photo will self-destruct (maybe) after a few seconds. Ah, the joys of social media!

## What Can Parents Do?

Truth be told, your kids will probably always be at least 10 steps ahead of you when it comes to the latest technology and how they can use it, in good and not-

so-good ways. As a parent, it's important to remember what we are all ultimately working towards—raising people who, when they are not in your presence, will be able to manage their own behavior. While it's tempting to want to put safeguards on your computer, kids usually figure out a way to get around it. Perhaps another strategy is in order.

## What Every Parent Needs to Know

Findings showed:

- 30% of those interviewed have been involved in some type of naked sexting.
- 29% reported receiving messages with sexual words or images by text or on the Internet.
- Those who have shared a naked photo or video mostly report that they initially sent the photo to a significant other or romantic interest.
- 29% of those who have sent sexts report sending them to people they only know online and have never met in person.

Catherine Steiner-Adair, author of *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age*, interviewed 1,000 students nationwide about relationships. Her findings are somewhat alarming. Teens are using social media to try and build relationships. Boys think sending a girl a nude photo with a message "I like you," or "Would you like to....?" is perfectly acceptable. The research showed boys see nothing wrong with this type of behavior, believing they are just flirting with a girl.

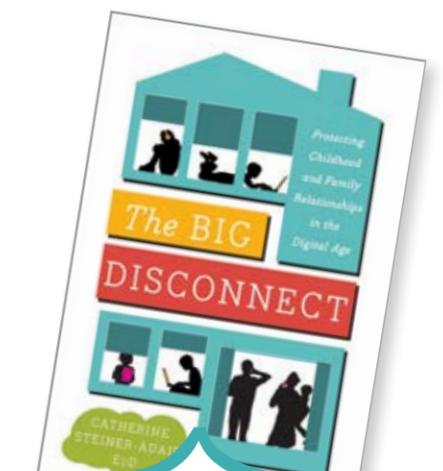
You may think that your teen would never do this. The reality is sexting is pervasive among youth. Many talk about being uncomfortable with it, but have no idea how to deal with it.

## Be Proactive

- Don't wait for an incident to happen before you talk about sexting. Discuss the consequences of sexting including the fact that sending images of people under the age of 18 is considered child pornography and it is illegal.
- Remind your kids that once an image is sent, it can never be retrieved AND does not just self-destruct. Never

- take images of yourself that you wouldn't want everyone to see.
- Discuss how to handle the pressures of being asked to send revealing pictures and what to do if you receive a naked photo.
- Discuss the qualities of healthy dating relationships.
- Be clear about your expectations concerning technology and their behavior, and the consequences if they do not abide by your rules.

Many parents assume that since they survived the world of dating without their parents teaching them how to navigate the journey, their kids will too. Today, we live in a whole new world filled with lots of complicating factors when it comes to relationships and dating. While it may feel awkward, this is one of those times where you really have to step up and talk about it in the best interest of your child and your family. [5]



## Good Reads

The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age  
By Catherine Steiner-Adair, Ed.D.