

Texting, Sexting and the World of Teen Technology (Part 2- Parent Tip Sheet)

What Can Parents Do?

Don't forget! Parents are still the most influential presence in their teen's life. Pump the brakes. Keep in mind that not all kids sext and that not all kids who sext experience negative consequences.

Take a walk—down memory lane. Remember as a teen what it was like to be fed the lie that the mastery of pop culture nonsense somehow equals wisdom? Remember when we were teens and encouraged to dismiss parental guidance on the basis of a “generation gap” of parents being “out of touch”? Those same lies are alive and well in today's teen culture, so be sure to approach your teen as an ally and not an antagonist.

Request expert advice – Bring up the topic of texting, sexting and teen technology in a curious way at a time when your teen is least guarded and most talkative. Let them know that you are limited in your understanding of what it is like to face the pitfalls of virtual relationships. Ask your resident expert (your teen) to help you understand the world they operate in. Listen carefully. Don't interrupt. Manage your countenance. Ask open ended questions.

Warn without shaming -- Since sexting can result in devastating consequences for kids, parents should be proactive in discussing sexting and its consequences with their teenagers (such as the potential for viral distribution of a sext, the lingering impact of digital images on the internet, and the potential criminal and legal consequences of sexting, etc.) But do so in a way that encourages positive choices, rather than making prohibitive threats (e.g. “If you ever.....”).

Dain Bramage—Well... maybe not brain damage per se, but the completed maturity of the brain itself isn't achieved until young adulthood. This means that teens do not yet have the ability to assess risk, measure cause and effect and foresee consequences in a mature way. These limitations may increase the appeal of sexting. Christian parents work on calling their children's attention to the trustworthy standard of God's Word for principles that yield righteous outcomes and success.

Strengthen Identity—Peer pressure is only as strong as the family identity is weak. Temptation is only as strong as an individual's personal identity and understanding of God is weak. Verbalize and revisit often your family's core values with your teen. Model those values. Stress the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus and the security, acceptance and significance that come with knowing who you are in Christ. (Check out our helpful resources: The “Who I am in Christ” Bookmark and

the smartphone app “33idapp”.)

<http://freedominchrist.com/whoiaminchristyouthbookmarknew.aspx>
www.33idapp.com

Know Thy Child’s Apps-- Become familiar with smartphone photo apps that are commonly used for sexting. Notably, Shapchat has been a sexting app of choice because it gives kids a false sense of security in believing that pictures and videos self-destruct. Make sure you know all apps that are currently loaded on your teen’s phone. Note: There are actually apps designed to hide apps from parents and other apps designed to hide pictures. If your teen has their own itunes or android app account, get their password and regularly check their downloads. Or better yet, require them to ask permission before any app purchase or download. ;)

Collaborate – Work together as parent(s) and teen(s) to come up with a family policy/agreement for technology use, texting and acceptable apps.

Own it. Part of effective parenting is realizing that for certain seasons in life, you are your child’s self-control and boundaries. Be sure to consider having a central charging station for all smart devices with applications. Make a non-negotiable nightly docking time for devices. Smart phones, tablets, computers, game devices, etc. should have restrictions on nightly usage and be safely out of reach during study time and bedtime hours. Remove the potential for temptation. Parents should create an overall plan to provide direction for teen’s smartphone use to include what apps are allowed, what apps are purchased, and acceptable use for apps.

Additional Resources:

Guardchild.com

Qustodio.com

Purefreedom.org

Chapclark.com

Jantz, G and McMurray, A. (2016). Ten Tips fo Parenting the Smartphone Generation.

Commonsensemedia.org

Scarymommy.com

Puresight.com

FOSI- Family Online Safety Institute