Ask Your Family Doctor-Summer 2013

Rachael L. Ross, MD, PhD, a.k.a. Dr. Rachael answers your questions.

June 5, 2013 By Rachael L. Ross, MD, PhD

Q: How can parents explain the pitfalls of sexting to kids?

A: One of the hardest lessons to learn is the concept of permanence, and this is the biggest teaching point when it comes to sexting. Kids sext to have fun, to flirt, to feel sexy and to conform to peer pressure. But the biggest danger sexting entails doesn't come from the fact that someone took a risqué picture or wrote a sexually explicit message. After all, kids will be kids, and past generations did the same thing—only with pen and paper or Polaroid cameras. The problem with sexting arises when the image or sext is sent to one intended recipient and somehow gets forwarded to and seen by hundreds or thousands of other people—many of whom aren't even teens—and it remains public forever.

According to statistics, 71 percent of teen girls and 67 percent of teen boys admit they have sent or posted sexually suggestive content. Sexting can ruin your child's reputation and self-concept. In fact, many teens confess that sexting ruined their lives.

My advice for parents? Take time to discuss the long-term consequences of sexting with your kids and set rules and boundaries about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate text messaging. What's more, parents should be prepared to confiscate their children's phones if necessary.

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