



Sexting

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It seems that everyone today has a cell phone; it seems to be a necessary accessory that no one can leave home without. The cell phone has also become the must have toy for every teenager in school. The cell phone, which parents of teenagers consider a necessary evil, can also lead to serious negative behaviors and consequences. A rising concern that is taking place within our schools is the presence and usage of cell phones for sexual misconduct. A behavior known as sexting is a serious issue for many school officials and parents.

In January of this year, three 15 year old girls from Pennsylvania sent their boyfriends pictures of themselves topless. The teenage boys shared the photos with several other students. Eventually school officials became aware of the photos and notified authorities. The three girls and three boys were arrested. The girls were charged with disseminating child pornography and the boys were charged with being in possession of child pornography. These six young people will now have a sexual offense on their record just because of a personal photo taken on a cell phone.

Sexting is defined as the sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit photos over a cell phone. The common trend in sexting is girls taking photos of themselves and sending the photos to boyfriends. In a study done by Teen Cosmo, it was reported that 22% of teen girls have taken and sent nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves over a cell phone. The same study revealed that 29% of teenage girls believe that it is expected that they share these types of photos with a boyfriend over a cell phone. This is an alarming number; it reveals that young girls now believe that it is acceptable to expose themselves to a boy over a cell phone.

The sexualization of teenagers is one of the main causes for the growing concern of sexting. Teens are exposed to sex on a daily basis through television, music, and peers. The Center for Disease Control reported that 47% of teenagers age 15 – 18 had been involved in a sexual relationship. San Antonio Metro Health reported that the average of number of births to teenage girls was 82% higher than the national average. The second main cause of sexting is peer pressure. Teenage boys pressure young girls into taking erotic pictures of themselves. A teenage boy will often tell their girlfriend that if she really loved him, she would take the picture.

This display of “love” can lead to two severe problems. The first is that the boyfriend will often show others the picture. According to Teen Cosmo, 50% of the teens they surveyed have seen a sexually explicit photo intended for someone else. This private photo is rarely kept private. A young girl might have to live with the consequences and stigma of having her sexually explicit photo shared with an entire school. The more severe problem associated with sexting is being charged with a child pornography. Teenagers rarely consider this consequence, but any sexually explicit image of an underage teen is considered child pornography and is punishable by imprisonment and being considered a sex offender.

Many teenagers use their cell phones for many things, but they need to be aware of the dangers it can lead to. Young girls cannot allow themselves to feel obligated or pressured into sending an inappropriate picture. Knowledge of the consequences is necessary to avoid sexting. It comes down to a simple fact: once a teenager clicks on send, it is too late. At that moment, they no longer have control of how that image will be used and who will see the image.

More information on sexting and tips for parents can be found on the Archdiocesan website; www.archsa.org. Just click on the Child Protection link.