

# The Editorial

## Parental Dilemma

Over the last several years, I've written several articles on "What happened to the good old days?" It seems that when I was growing up;

- Life was much simpler.
- Cell phones, emails, and the internet did not exist.
- Fax machines had not been invented;
- Neighbors got together and "hung out".
- You could let your children play for hours outside, not worrying that something would happen to them, and the kids always seem to come home.

As the population exploded, things started changing; first the fax, then email and the internet that forever changed our lives. Then cell phone and text messaging became a way of life.

As parents it's our responsibility to:

- Protect our children.
- Instill values that will make them a productive part of society.

When my older children were growing up, the fad was pagers:

- I struggled for months, before I let any of my kids have a pager, but;
- I rationalized that if they were late, or in trouble, I would have access to them, however;
- I also recognized that, I needed to control the use because pagers could be used for other things, particularly for teenagers.

Somehow children managed to grow up to be adults and to stay out of trouble – for the most part. However, today it's different. Young children that are 7-13yrs now have cell phones, and;

- As parents, it is our responsibility to teach them what the cell phone is to be used for.
- Sometimes, we have to remind ourselves that we purchased a cell phone for our children, so that we know where they are.
- We didn't purchase the phone so they could text their friends or take pictures, or talk for hours about nothing – but they do!

Unfortunately, there has been a rash of incidents, where young teens across the nation, are sending inappropriate photos and "racy" messages through their cell phones. The new term for this is "sexting". It's important to understand that:

- Children never think of long term consequences.
- Teenagers live for the moment, and;
- The unfortunate part of this problem is that it's growing and as parents we need to monitor our children's activities because it directly affects our lives.
- Underage, the parents are also going to be in trouble.

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September 4, 2009

**Technically, if pictures are of minors, that constitutes “child pornography”. The law is trying to catch up with the technology. Law makers in Vermont, Utah and Ohio are making “sexting” a misdemeanor – it used to be a felony. In many states “sexting” is illegal and can get a child into a lot of trouble, which means that if the child is underage, the parents are also going to be in trouble.**

**In Arizona there is no specific law dealing with “sexting”, but they are starting to prosecute these types of incidences. Indiana and Ohio are following suit.** A teenager in Alan County Indiana, is facing felony obscenity charges for sending an inappropriate photo to several female classmates.

**In Ohio, a 15yr old high school girl faces charges for sending racy cell phone photos of herself to classmates.**

**In another incident in Ohio, a judge order 18 kids, ages 14yrs to 17yrs, to perform community service because of inappropriate behavior.**

**Most young teenagers don’t understand that the pictures can fall into the hands of the wrong people. In fact, a survey by the national center for missing and exploited children,** identified that out of 21 children that have been identified as victims, ¼ were involved in texting initial inappropriate images.

**Statistically, 1 in 5 teens have sent or received suggestive photos through cell phone messages or email, according to an April survey of 655 teens ages 13yrs to 18yrs. As a parent of four children, I would be the first to say that I am like all parents. I’m sure this doesn’t apply to my child.** Unfortunately, based upon the statistics, any of our children can be subject to this type of environment. **The question is what do you do? And no matter what you do, it will impact your relationship, with your child.** As you are going through this process, it’s important to recognize that;

- As a parent, it is easy to be your child’s friend, but;
- You need to be their “mentor”!
- Provide them with values, and;
- Hopefully, they’ll grow up to be responsible adults.

**If your child is old enough to have a cell phone, your child is old enough to have a conversation about this type of behavior. It’s also important that;**

- You monitor your children’s cell phone, by regularly checking messages, pictures and games.
- The cell phone belongs to you, the parent, and;
- **If anything inappropriate is transmitted on that phone, it’s you that the police come looking for and it can become a criminal matter.**

**I know that this sounds “far-fetched”, but believe me it’s not. Let your kids blame you for not being able to send or receive inappropriate material. They can tell their friends, “my parents are crazy, they read my text messages because their own lives are so boring”, I think someone said that to me one time.**

**However, for a small fee, parents can get an email from most phone carriers of the text messages that have been sent and received. If your kids know that you will be randomly checking, they’ll keep their conversations in check.**

**Another solution is to buy your teen a phone with no camera, or ask your carrier to turn off the camera function. Besides sending inappropriate pictures, students have also used cell phones to cheat on tests and take unflattering pictures of their classmates.** It’s important to understand that often times, pictures are taken as pranks, because kids don’t think about long term consequences. Unfortunately, if your child is underage and you purchased the cell phone, **you are legally responsible for their actions.**

**Not too long ago in Arizona, a 12yr old girl faced criminal charges after she sent an explicit photo using a classmate’s cell phone. She did this as a prank. Ultimately, she was not prosecuted,** but was suspended from school. There are some cameraless cell phones that are available that are popular today.

- The Blackberry 8800.
- Fire Fly Glow phone.
- Virgin Mobile LG Flair, and;
- Samsung Knack.

**In closing, it’s important to understand that teenagers are very trusting. They want to “fit in”. They want to be part of the “in crowd”** and therefore, in some cases, their judgments are tempered due to their desire to be popular. As parents, it is our responsibility to teach our children the difference between right and wrong.

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Be appreciative of your teachers"