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PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Help kids with cell phones get the message: Say no to ‘sexting’

With more and more children using cell phones to call, text and send images, parents should consider the risks to kids who use them for illegal and regrettable purposes.

One such activity is “sexting,” the sending of text messages with pictures of children or teens who are naked or engaged in sexual acts.

One in five teens participates in “sexting,” according to a nationwide survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The emotional pain it causes can be enormous for the child in the picture as well as the sender and receiver — and often involves legal implications.

Parents should talk with children about sexting before a problem arises and introduce the issue as soon as a child is old enough to have a cell phone, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

The following tips from the AAP can help parents have a conversation with children about sexting:

- Ask kids about the issue, even if it has not directly impacted the community.
- Gauge your child’s understanding of sexting and then offer an age-appropriate explanation. Alert younger children with cell phones who do not yet know about sex that text messages should never contain pictures of kids or adults without their clothes on, kissing or touching each other in ways that they have never seen before. For older children, use the term “sexting” and give more specific information about sex acts they may know about. For teens, be specific that “sexting” often involves pictures of a sexual nature and is considered pornography.



- Make sure kids of all ages understand that sexting is considered a crime in many jurisdictions. In all communities, there will be serious consequences if they sext, possibly involving the police, suspension from school and notes on their permanent record that could hurt their chances of getting into college or finding a job.

Additional resources on cell phone and Internet safety are available on the AAP Safety Net Web page, <http://safetynet.aap.org>.

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