SEX AND TECH

5 TIPS TO HELP PARENTS TALK TO THEIR KIDS ABOUT SEX AND TECHNOLOGY

1

Talk to your kids about what they are doing in cyberspace.
Just as you need to talk openly and honestly with your kids about real life sex and relationships, you also want to discuss online and cell phone activity. Make sure your kids fully understand that messages or pictures they send over the Internet or their cell phones are not truly private or anonymous. Also make sure they know that others might forward their pictures or messages to people they do not know or want to see them, and that school administrators and employers often look at online profiles to make judgments about potential students/employees. It's essential that your kids grasp the potential short-term and long-term consequences of their actions.

20% OF TEENS HAVE SENT ELECTRONICALLY, OR POSTED ONLINE, NUDE OR SEMI-NUDE PICTURES OR VIDEO OF THEMSELVES.

2

Know who your kids are communicating with.
Of course it's a given that you want to know who your children are spending time with when they leave the house. Also do your best to learn who your kids are spending time with online and on the phone. Supervising and monitoring your kids' whereabouts in real life and in cyberspace doesn't make you a nag; it's just part of your job as a parent. Many young people consider someone a "friend" even if they've only met online. What about your kids?

3

Consider limitations on electronic communication.
The days of having to talk on the phone in the kitchen in front of the whole family are long gone, but you can still limit the time your kids spend online and on the phone. Consider, for example, telling your teen to leave the phone on the kitchen counter when they're at home and to take the laptop out of their bedroom before they go to bed, so they won't be tempted to log on or talk to friends at 2a.m.

4

Be aware of what your teens are posting publicly.
Check out your teen's MySpace, Facebook and other public online profiles from time to time. This isn't snooping—this is information your kids are making public. If everyone else can look at it, why can't you? Talk with them specifically about their own notions of what is public and what is private. Your views may differ but you won't know until you ask, listen, and discuss.

5

Set expectations.
Make sure you are clear with your teen about what you consider appropriate "electronic" behavior. Just as certain clothing is probably off-limits or certain language unacceptable in your house, make sure you let your kids know what is and is not allowed online either. And give reminders of those expectations from time to time. It doesn't mean you don't trust your kids, it just reinforces that you care about them enough to be paying attention.

The National Campaign
to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

COSMOgirl.COM