The Facts

We’ll start with the cold, hard facts: Twenty-two percent of teen girls and 20 percent of teen guys have sent nude or semi-nude photos of themselves either through texting or posting them online. Twenty-two percent of teens admit that technology (texting, IM, Facebook, MySpace, online hooking-up groups, etc.) allows them to act more forward and aggressive.

When people take nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves and send them as text messages, it’s called “sexting,” which has alarmingly increased among teens and 20-somethings.

“What I have seen in my counseling would indicate that those percentages are probably really low,” says Brandon Bower, MA, CADAC. “My guess is that people don’t want to admit to a survey that they have been involved in sexting.”

But those involved in sexting and/or posting inappropriate images online tend to forget, or not fully realize, the consequences of their actions. Once an image is sent over the phone or posted on the Internet, it can never be retrieved.

“It’s never ending,” says 16-year-old Brianna Blumenherst. “People don’t understand that even their grandkids could see it one day. It’s out there for the whole world to see.” Another teen girl commented, “People don’t just hold on to those photos, they show them off.”

According to Newsweek, it seems the sexting trend hurts teen girls more than guys. Girls feel pressured to take and send nude photos as they feel it will “attract attention” or “prove commitment.” Girls can feel that they are competing with an image and this leads girls to believe that their self-worth is only found in their bodies. “It’s a self-esteem/self-confidence issue,” says 16-year-old Estee Wells.

“Teens are giving in more and more to the lie that purity leads to unhappiness,” a teen guy says. “Guys who sext are less able to keep a commitment to a girl.”

Another teen reported, “There have been a few incidents at my school where people have done this and their reputation is completely ruined. It even got around to neighboring high schools.”

The Consequences

Not only do reputations get ruined, and the probability for addiction is extremely high, especially for guys. Sexting also leads to criminal charges. Teens in several states are facing charges of child pornography because of sexting.

The Hope

Sexting or viewing inappropriate material isn’t something everyone struggles with to the same degree, but it is something that everyone must be on guard against. It’s everywhere. “Remaining pure is an uphill battle, but it’s also swimming upstream, fighting the environments and influences around you,” says a 20-something.

Some young people have taken preventative steps against sexting, such as blocking their cell phone’s ability to picture text or having limited texting. Another student says that she doesn’t open a picture message unless she already knows what the picture is and the person sending it. “I don’t want to risk seeing something I don’t want to see,” she says.

Some teens won’t post their phone numbers online or give out their cell phone numbers unless they know a person well. Other families keep the computer in an open, public area.

Several teens talk with family and friends about the seriousness and danger of sexting and posting inappropriate images online and how it affects them. “When what is done in secret is brought to light and talked about, the darkness and heaviness vanishes,” says a 20-something.

“You can deal with it, in whatever way it has affected you, because you aren’t alone. Psalm 34:5 says, ‘Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame’ (NIV).”

But above all, if you receive a sext, immediately turn off your phone and report the image to a trustworthy adult (parent, school counselor, teacher, pastor or youth pastor) before you delete it. Make it stop with you. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

If you have participated in sexting or struggle with viewing inappropriate material, please seek help from a trusted adult or accountability partner. Know, “Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear” (Job 11:13-15, NIV).

Leilani Squires recently got hitched to her sweetheart Eric. OC wishes a big congrats to the newlyweds!