

MONEY IN YOUR POCKET! \$7,000 THIS YEAR



**Jay Leno's
Best Laughs**

PAGE 114

**13 Things
Your Mother-
In-Law Won't
Tell You**

PAGE 16

**Bounce
Back from
Anything**

The new science
of success

PAGE 90

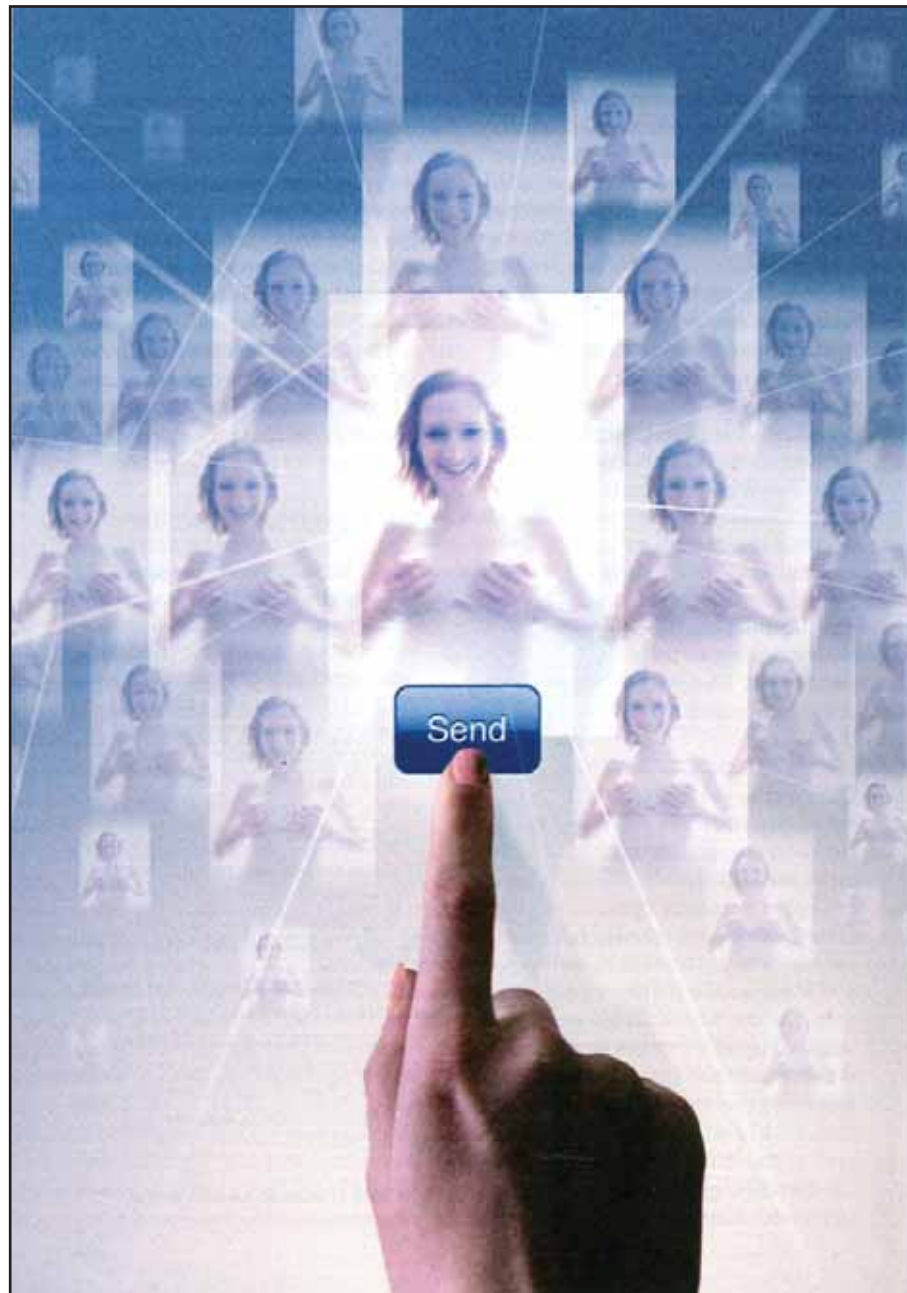
**The Cancer
Risk You Can
Switch Off**

PAGE 75

Reader's Digest com



08730
0 748224 1
05 >
May 2009
\$3.99



Porn has gone interactive—
and **your kids**
are at risk. From
'sexting' to video
chats, **how to**
fight back.

BY JUDITH
NEWMAN

My seven-year-old, Henry, can't spell. Yet there's one word he can spell perfectly. That word is *boob*. I discovered this last week when I gave him my iPhone to noodle around with. He told me he was playing on Disney's Club Penguin, but when I turned on the phone later, the page that popped up was juggworld.com. Suffice it to say, this site does not involve earthenware. When I confronted him, he looked at me very seriously and said, "Well, Mom, I'm extremely interested in the human body."

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION
BY KEVIN IRBY

This makes me laugh because he is seven. What's not at all funny is what this incident says about the future. If the ability to spell one palindrome at his age can get him to one of the most explicit sites imaginable, how blasé will he be about porn by the time he's a teenager? And how much of a leap is it to imagine my son getting into the latest teenage craze, so-called sexting—nude photos taken by teens and posted or sent to others over the Internet or cell phone? How long before he turns to me—as a friend's 15-year-

Kids as young as 11 and 12 are taking compromising photos of themselves and sending those shimmering pixels over their phones and computers.

old did to her mother recently—and says, “Mom, it’s no big deal?”

Sexting is, in fact, a very big deal. Not because sexual curiosity and boundary pushing aren't normal parts of growing up; they are. The thing is, on the Internet, nothing ever truly vanishes. Of course, it's perfectly possible that a teen's knuckleheaded homemade *Girls Gone Wild* moment sent to her boyfriend stays on his computer or cell phone forever, as precious to him as any 19th-century billet-doux. Then again, it is possible those photos will be sent to everyone she knows (and doesn't know), will turn up as her first Google hit when

she's looking for a job, or, just maybe, will land her in jail.

Just a Click Away

Kids as young as 11 and 12 have been discovered taking compromising photos of themselves and sending those shimmering pixels over their phones and computers. More than a few incidents have made the nightly news. In February, for example, a 15-year-old girl from central Pennsylvania faced charges for possessing, distributing, and creating child pornography after she sent topless photos of herself to a man on MySpace; the man, 27, was also charged. Last year, an 18-year-old Orlando, Florida, teen began serving five years' probation and had to register as a sex offender after forwarding naked photos of his then-16-year-old ex-girlfriend to her friends,

teachers, and relatives. And six middle school boys in Massachusetts were questioned by police after they passed around a picture of a half-naked 13-year-old classmate on their cells.

Surely this is just one of those salacious, overblown “trend” stories, right? There can't be that many teenagers sending and receiving inappropriate photos of themselves.

Think again.

Last fall, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy teamed with CosmoGirl.com to canvass 1,280 teenagers and young adults about their electronic activities. According to their survey, one in five

girls (11 percent between 13 and 16) and 18 percent of teen boys have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves. About 15 percent of senders forwarded photos to people they hadn't actually met but knew only online. E-mails containing sexual come-ons are even more prevalent: About 39 percent have tapped out lurid e-mails and text messages.

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are lousy with pages that boast names like “I've Sent Naked Pictures of Myself Over the Phone” and “Practicing Safe Sexting.” (Sample rules: “Don't get your phone taken away during school” and “Don't get caught.”)

The age of the kids involved sometimes upsets the kids themselves. Monica D. (her name, and those of other minors in this story, have been changed) went to a Connecticut middle school where one giggling girl took a picture of her friend, 12, vamping naked while changing for dance class. They sent it to a friend as a joke, and the friend sent it to the entire school. A parent saw the image on her son's computer and called the principal. The girl who sent the photo was suspended, and she eventually changed schools.

“But this is what shocked me,” says

Wanted: Peace of Mind

Your kids are savvy enough to delete the recent history of their Internet use from their computers. Here are other options for the wary parent:

>> **Yoursphere.com** is a social networking site that restricts membership to kids and teens (“creepers,” adults trawling for teens, are sussed out and barred) and monitors bullying.

>> **LMK** (lmk.girlscouts.org), for “Let Me Know,” is a Girl Scouts site where girls can talk to one another about Internet safety.

>> **Websafety.com** sells software that can be downloaded to your kid's cell phone and computer to alert you if she's sending inappropriate texts or photos.

>> **Safe Eyes**, from internetsafety.com, lets you track your child's instant messaging, monitor social networking sites, and impose limits on his online minutes.

>> **Cell Phone Spy Elite**, a device from brickhousesecurity.com, retrieves deleted text messages from cell phones.

Monica. “Two months later, the girl who posed was at orchestra rehearsal, and she raised her hand and said, ‘I just lost a tooth.’ She was young enough to still have her baby teeth!”

Living Libido Loca

There is a me-me-ME quality to blogging, Facebooking, Twittering, and the like. And what could be more attention-grabbing to a teenager than taking your clothes off?

“It's pretty appalling,” says Pamela Paul, the author of *Pornified: How Pornography Is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*. “Among girls and boys, porn has become increasingly accepted, even kind of cool.” And with “the Ameri-

can Idol-ization of the culture, where everyone can be a star," she says, it's almost inevitable that kids would be tempted to cross the line into interactive porn. "Every form of media has become interactive. Why shouldn't porn be as well?" she laments.

The biggest technological facilitator of teen porn is the webcam. Making a video and then e-mailing it or uploading it to Facebook is as easy as pressing a button. That's how one New York mother's 15-year-old daughter got into trouble.

Teenagers are sexual beings and they want to push the envelope. There's **not a lot of thought** before hitting the send button.

"Cheryl was upstairs in her bedroom with her laptop," the mother begins. "A friend was sleeping over. I'd seen her do video chats plenty of times, and apart from language I disapprove of, I hadn't thought of it as a big risk. So mostly I was alert to her staying up too late chatting with her friends.

"We'd gone to bed when I heard a thump from upstairs like someone jumping out of bed," the mother continues. "I go up, and she immediately flips the laptop lid down. The girls—in bed, wearing jammies and cami tops—look guilty. I repossess the laptop and go downstairs. There's a picture of the 'I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours' variety, only this is creepier because it's of the two girls

and they'd sent it to some teenage boy. There was even a script right out of a porn movie. Plus, she had screen shots of some naked boy on her desktop."

The computer was confiscated, but by that point, it was too late. Those photos could turn up anywhere.

Why would kids take this kind of risk? "Teenagers are not exactly known for their great judgment," notes Lawrence Balter, a professor of applied psychology at New York University. "They are sexual beings, of course, and they want to push the envelope. They're play-acting. And they're impulsive. Generally, there's not a lot of thought before hitting the send button."

But there's another aspect to sexting that many parents haven't considered. "Because it's not exactly face-to-face—it's visual, but the other person isn't right there—a kid can be more revealing," Balter continues. "It's the distance that makes a kid feel both bolder and safer."

Perception = Reality

And now for some good news: Not every kid is a budding Jenna Jameson. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, promiscuous behavior is down. In 1991, 54.1 percent of 9th- through 12th-grade students said they'd had sexual intercourse. In 2007, that number was 47.8. Could it be that sexting and Internet porn are substitutes for sexual acting-out in real life? Ralph DiClemente, a professor at

the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, is trying to find out. He's studying how exposure to sex on the Internet affects teens.

The results aren't in yet, but DiClemente thinks he has relevant information from another study he conducted, on African American teenage girls and their exposure to rap music videos. Many of the videos are violent and misogynistic, he points out. "We wanted to know how this music affected the girls' perceptions of themselves and women in their community." He discovered that the girls who watched the most rap videos were more likely to binge drink, smoke pot, and have multiple sex partners. Distressing, too, was the teenagers' belief that the scantily clad models and dancers

in the videos were a lot like women in their community. "So their perception of what was real and what wasn't was skewed," says DiClemente.

Extrapolating from those results, DiClemente thinks that 1) kids are likely to believe more of what they see in the media than adults are, 2) they perceive people in porn to look and

Parental Guidance Is Key

Walking that fine line between parent and prison guard is tough. Here's what other parents do when it comes to their teens and social networking sites.

>> "My teenage boys have to 'friend' me on Facebook, and if I see something that crosses my line, we talk, and they remove it."

>> "We limit her contact list to a few trusted friends."

>> "Since friends do crazy things, they are not allowed to use his computer."

>> "She has iChat and Google Talk, but she will have neither if she chats with someone she does not know."

>> "Two rules: The computer stays in the family room, and we don't buy laptops. They're too easy to sneak into another room."

>> "I snoop. She doesn't want me on her Facebook page, but if the computer's on, I will check it out."

>> "I unwittingly reinforced the idea that raunchy paper trails are bad when my teenager discovered my high school yearbook. Reading notes from my friends, she was mortified to learn that I had tried drugs."

>> "We conduct surprise inspections of her photo cache and iChat histories. We haven't installed spyware—yet—but if we find anything out of line, we will, and she knows it."

act just like you and me, 3) many kids see nothing abnormal about creating and/or starring in porn, and 4) their perceptions lead to behavior that is less than desirable.

Jay W., a freshman at Brown University, sees the same nonchalant attitudes toward sexting that DiClemente found in his study. "The first experi-

ence I had with sexting was a video my friend sent me when I was in ninth grade. It was of a naked girl, really young," he says. And though he insists he didn't do it himself, passing around nude photos of girlfriends was fairly common in Jay's California school. "What I've seen has changed the way I think about sex," he says. "Even at a younger age, I began to feel jaded and numbed out."

Although Jay may have become injured to it all, some of the girls who

Internet being the most dangerous of all. Parents have a responsibility to know what children are doing on it."

Fair enough. So how do we prevent our kids from becoming citizens, wittingly or unwittingly, of the vast pornopolis of American culture?

The most important thing, says Marisa Nightingale, senior adviser to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, is to be proactive, not reactive. In other words, don't wait until your daughter's breasts are plastered across her boyfriend's MySpace page. "You have to raise the issue, even if it's uncomfortable. Instead of the 'Don't do that' lecture, open up the conversation. Say 'What

do you think about this? Do you know kids who've done it? What do you think can happen when you have that photo of yourself out there?'" Explain that "when you send a photo of yourself off into the ether, you are making a decision to forgo control over yourself and your image."

Chances are, Nightingale says, you have no idea what your teen's definition of privacy is. Chances are, it's very different from yours. "This is a generation that thinks nothing of updating their Facebook friends on mundane little activities of the day. The concept of having a private life has been muddled."

Setting limits is key, she says. "Let them know what is appropriate to you and what your values are. You can't

"When the legislation for child pornography was enacted, no one was imagining minors taking photos of their own bodies."

posed found their new fame downright alluring. Notes Monica, the middle school student from Connecticut, "The girl who had her picture sent around the school was at the low end of the popular set. But once she took off her clothes, it upped her visibility. She got a lot more attention, from boys especially." Just as there is no longer such a thing as bad publicity, apparently there is no such thing as bad attention in junior high school.

What Do We Do Now?

"We live in a precarious society for young people," says Michael Josephson, president of Character Counts, an organization that runs values-education programs. "There are many ways they can damage themselves, the

assume they know what you think."

Michael Josephson wants to go one step further—he wants parents to discuss the ethics of sexting. "When we talk about morality or ethics, we're also talking about responsibility," he says. "None of these acts truly occurs in a vacuum; there are stakeholders. If a child puts his picture on the Web, you don't think that's a major embarrassment to brothers and sisters, possibly the school? A responsible person thinks about how his or her decisions impact other people."

At the very least, kids need to know how much trouble they can get into for simply making or possessing these images. "When the legislation for child pornography was enacted, no one was imagining minors taking photos of their own bodies," says Jeffrey Douglas, a Santa Monica, California, defense attorney. "People don't realize that prosecutors may not have a lot of leeway in prosecuting these

cases, and if kids are convicted, they could be labeled as sex offenders. Kids don't think about this, because they never believe they'll be caught. They don't even know that what they're doing is a crime."

Seven seems absurdly young. But the next time an image from one of these sites pops up on my iPhone, Henry and I will have another talk, as age-appropriate as I can make it, about people's bodies and how his body belongs to him and him alone. Once he takes off his clothes online, even as a joke, he becomes public property. Other people have control over him. Anyone can do with him what they like.

I know my son. He's a control freak and a tightwad, and the idea that anyone could have something of his that he didn't consent to give would be horrible. I can't rely on this impulse forever, but for now and for the foreseeable future, he really doesn't like to share.

CONSIDER THE LESSON LEARNED

In Pitman, New Jersey, a woman was injured when she turned on her oven and it exploded. No one's rushing to judgment, but it might have had something to do with the homemade fireworks she'd stored there.

A British television show host thinks all the angst about cyberthieves is just rumormongering. To prove it, Jeremy Clarkson posted his bank account details in a newspaper. After learning that cyberthieves had gone through his bank account, Clarkson admitted he had been misinformed.

