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'Sexting' is something to be taken seriously

"Sexting" involves someone sending nude or partially nude photos via cell phone messages.

And students, middle school age or younger, are participating in this latest teen craze. According to a study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, one in five teens participates in sexting.

Last week, local law enforcement officers talked to area students about sexting. The officers also discussed tips about using the Internet safely. They warned students that sexting is the equivalent to having child pornography.

But law enforcement officials aren't the only ones who should take a proactive approach to this national trend. Parents must serve as the first line of defense. Their responsibility is to help protect their children, and the first step in protecting their children against the dangers of sexting is educating them about the consequences.

Parents who haven't talked to their children about sexting should do so. It may seem like a harmless prank to a child, but sexting carries serious consequences.

A juvenile who sends, receives or possesses such photos could be charged with pandering obscenity involving a minor, a second-degree felony. If over the age of 18, the charge changes to disseminating matter harmful to juveniles. In both instances, anyone found guilty would have to register as a sex offender for as long as 15 years.

Once you participate in sexting, that image is nearly impossible to erase. Your mistakes instantly go global, and they are timeless.

Parents, help your children make responsible choices.
