

# Protecting kids from technology

I have always heard that there is a part of the brain in every young person that does not develop until their late 20s. This part of the human brain that controls the assessment of risk and the controls judgment is not fully functional until adulthood.

As I look back to my crazy driving as a repo-man at age 17, flying stunt planes at 19, bungee jumping at 25, skydiving at 30, NASCAR driving school at 35 and tracking illegal aliens at 40, I am still waiting for my risk taking sense to kick in. My logic now is if I have enough life insurance and solid body armor I can still do whatever I wanted as long as it is moral.

That slow development of risk evaluation in young men is why 18 and 19 year olds comprise the vast majority in our military's infantry. These guys are the trigger pullers and they are mainly just-out-of-high-school pimply faced kids with no fear or concept of risk.

I saw hundreds of them in Ft. Benning, Ga., along side my son when he graduated Army infantry boot camp back in 2005. Let us all remember it is those groups of fearless American boys that stand between us and the barbarians of the world and we truly thank them.

Back in the civilian world, teenagers with this natural lack of judgment combined with technology have found new ways to get into trouble. Show me a high school kid and I'll show you them yapping or texting on their cell phone. I have even seen them talking on the cell through a headset while texting on the keypad walking across the street.

Now there is a new craze taking over made possible with cell phone cameras and risk-ignorant teenagers. Kids are now taking inappropriate or even illicit pictures of themselves



John Deans

with their cell phone cameras and sending those digital images to their boyfriends or girlfriends.

This idiotic act is called "sexting" and has become a major problem nationwide. In the news lately here is a typical example. Earlier this year six

students age 14-15 at a High School in Greensburg, Pa., faced charges of manufacturing, disseminating or possessing child pornography while the boys, who are 16 and 17, faced charges of possession.

This is from the girls taking semi-nude or even fully nude pictures of themselves and emailing those images to their boyfriends just for fun. Of course that tends to get out of hand real quick when the foolish boys forward those criminal digital pictures to all of their friends.

All over the country there are pending cases, charges filed and even more investigations continuing of minor committing felonies with their cell phones thinking it's cool to send nude pics of themselves to a classmate. They only get it when the officers are sitting in their living rooms reducing the teenagers to tears as the realization of the offense's severity sets in on them.

When these kids are convicted their lives are messed up. They will have to register as sexual offenders and be in that scarlet letter list for at least decades if not for their entire life. With this horrible criminal record

from just sending an image with a cell phone, they will lose out on going to a good college, be instantly rejected from promising jobs and avoided quickly by others around them.

Can you imagine a daughter has just start dating a guy and her dad finds out that this cool dude is a registered sexual offender? This information is easy to discover with background lookup services like PublicData.com, which is only \$25 a year.

Trust me, when my daughters start dating I'll know the guy's DNA strain, to say the least.

Sexting starts out with provocative phrases in text format between cell phones. Later it escalates to e-mailing pictures of themselves in a bikini last spring break.

Then, on some wild night after a few underage drinks, they snap a quick shot of their bare upper half and quickly send it off with out thinking of the repercussions. It only gets worse from that point of no return.

Parents, please remember that we are their guardians and we must educate and protect them from themselves. After raising a son, I know that active and even intrusive involvement is required to keep these young idiots from ruining their lives.

I drug tested my son every 3-5 months via PDT-90's hair sampling lab service. I searched his room, backpack and wallet randomly when he was not there. I filtered and inspected all his e-mail, files and electronic communications all throughout his high school years.

"Trust with verification" as Ronald Reagan once said, and I truly believed and practiced that. My son turned out OK and I know he never did drugs or committed any stupid crimes because I watched him like a hawk and counseled him constantly on numerous issues to keep him from ruining his life.

We parent MUST monitor our kids' cell phones, e-mail and computer files to help them walk the line. They have way too many negative influences from the dark side of the Internet, pathetic sex laden shows like Real Life on MTV, and strong peer pressure from less than moral kids whose parents do not want to "invade their kid's privacy."

Let me make this real clear: **KIDS HAVE NO PRIVACY!** They are minors under our care and guidance and we parents MUST have the courage to actively monitor and manage them. We cannot let them use technology to destroy their lives with a simple key stroke that will haunt them forever.

Wouldn't you rather quickly view your teenager's cell phone text buffer while they are in the shower than take out \$10,000 to retain a criminal lawyer?

Wouldn't you prefer to spend the \$60 on PDT-90 to verify your son's hair is free of residue from smoking pot, taking meth or snorting cocaine than dropping \$15,000 a month on some rehab clinic in Houston for him this summer?

Don't you want to know from examining e-mails if your daughter is being taunted and harassed from peers compared to having her hang herself like 18-year-old Sycamore High School senior Jessica Logan did after a nude cell-phone photo was sent all over her high school?

Bottom line: Knowledge is power and ignorance is not bliss when it comes to protecting our kids from the interaction of technology and youthful recklessness.

Next week's column: Monitoring your kid's cellphone.

*John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233*