

Let's Talk about Sext

So you got your driver's license?

Enjoying the Teen Years

Caring Well

March/April 2013

# TEEN TALK

“When I was 16 my favorite band was...”

Dr. Middleton: Jimmy Buffett  
Christine: Boyz II Men  
Lauren: Dave Matthews Band  
Michelle: The Go Go's  
Lisa: Reba  
Kelli: Red Hot Chili Peppers  
Liz: Boyz II Men  
Ginger: Bon Jovi  
Ebony: Boys II Men  
Arla: Finch

## Let's Talk about Sext

You may have heard the slang term “sexting”. This refers to the act of sending sexually explicit text messages or pictures via cell phones. It is the modern equivalent of phone sex. However, unlike phone sex, sexting leaves evidence that could potentially be shared with people it was not intended for.

Sexting is occurring among children and teens as young as 10 years old. Sending sexy pictures and text messages doesn't necessarily indicate that teens are engaging in sex. In fact, statistics have shown that compared to 10 years ago the number of teens having sex has decreased, and more and more teens delay their first sexual experience until after high school. Some adolescents may feel sexting is a safer alternative to sexual intercourse, and while you can't contract STI's or get pregnant from sending a racy photo, sexting has serious consequences of its own. Did you know a teen caught sending a naked picture of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend can be charged with possession of child pornography, even if the teen sending the photo is under 18 and even if the photo is of themselves? Material sent via cell phones, email, Facebook, and other internet social media can be shared with the entire world in a short period of time,

even if by accident. It is important to know whom your kids are talking to and monitor their cell phone use to protect your child from the legal matters, harassment, and bullying that sexting can cause.

- Talk to your teen about appropriate and responsible cell phone use. Remind them that you have the right to see what kind of text messages they are sending to friends, boyfriends, and girlfriends. Explain to your child that digital photos are never private once they are forwarded or have been posted.
- Remind your adolescent that someone who actually cares about them won't push them to do things that make them uncomfortable. Tell them to talk to a trusted adult if they ever feel pressured by someone to “sext”.
- Introduce your child to [ThatsNotCool.com](http://ThatsNotCool.com), a public service website that helps kids handle all kinds of online harassment.

**See the article “The Naked Truth About sexting in Orlando Family magazine for more information.**

## So you got your driver's license?

Earning your driver's license is an exciting milestone, and you are probably feeling excited, nervous, or possibly scared. Earning your license means taking on a lot of responsibility that you have never had before, so it is important to adopt good, safe driving habits from the beginning. Here are a few tips to help keep you calm and safe behind the wheel:

### Limits

It is important to know your limits when you first learn to drive. As a kid learning to ride a bike, you probably started with the basics, kept both hands on the handlebars, and limited trips around your neighborhood. First learning how to drive can be a similar experience. Although you might see older friends or relatives doing something risky, such as speeding up instead of slowing down at a yellow light, it is important to go back to the basics when you are an inexperienced driver. Before taking long road trips, make sure you are comfortable going to and from school or work. Before you drive at night, make sure you are well versed in daytime driving. Before you start driving your friends or siblings around, practice having a responsible adult riding shotgun. Knowing your limits and gradually increasing them as you spend more time behind the wheel will help you become a safe, experienced driver.

### Know other people's limits

Although you may be a safe driver, there are always other drivers on the

road that may be aggressive, inattentive, or irresponsible. Additionally, pedestrians and cyclists can be unpredictable, so it is important to keep a lookout and be aware of them while driving. Maintaining a safe following distance, checking your mirrors often, and recognizing and anticipating potential hazards ahead are all ways to be better aware of your surroundings and will help you avoid accidents. Always maintain at least one car's distance between you and vehicles ahead of you to ensure you have enough time to react if the car in front of you slam on the breaks. If someone is tailgating you, move lanes to let them pass. Always be aware of what is going on about 3 cars ahead of you to gauge when you need to slow down or brake.

### Safety

While it may seem obvious, obey all traffic rules. Make sure you and any passengers wear a seatbelt at all times, come to a complete stop at red lights and stop signs (even when roads are clear), obey all speed limits, know when to yield, and avoid any distractions. It is a good idea to avoid driving with friends in the beginning. Driving with passengers can be distracting, even for an experienced driver. Once you become more comfortable driving on your own, driving with friends and siblings will be less stressful. Other distractions include talking or texting on your phone, eating, putting on makeup, and listening to loud music.

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## Enjoying the Teen Years

We've lived through 2am feedings, toddler temper tantrums and the back-to-school blues. So why does the word "teenager" cause so much anxiety? Adolescence is a period of intense growth and transformation. The pre-teen and teenage years are a time of many physical, mental, emotional and social changes. It is understandable that it's a time of confusion and upheaval for many families. Despite some adults' negative perceptions about teens, they are often energetic, thoughtful and idealistic with a deep interest in what's fair and right. Adolescents are forming their own identity and preparing for adulthood. During this time of growth adolescents change how they think, feel and interact with others. They are developing their own unique personalities and opinions. So, although it can be a period of conflict between parent and child, the teen years are also a time to help kids grow into the distinct individuals they will become.

What can we do, as parents, to help make parenting teens more enjoyable?

**Understand that the primary goal of the teen years is to achieve independence.** They will begin to pull away from you and exert this independence. Give them room to be an individual, while staying involved.

**Educate yourself.** Read books about teenagers. Expect some mood changes and some conflict.

**Practice empathy!** Put yourself in your child's place and think about how they are feeling. Think back on your own teen years.

**Communicate.** Talk about the "hard stuff" early on. Talk about puberty and body changes. Talk to them about sex. The earlier you open the lines of communication, the better chance you have of keeping them open through the teen years. From personal experience, the more you talk about the "hard stuff" the easier it gets!

**Stay informed.** The teen years are often a time of experimentation, which can include risky behaviors. Don't avoid the subjects of sex, drugs, alcohol, tobacco and anything else that can be harmful. Discussing these scary subjects openly with kids before they're exposed to them increases the chance that they'll act responsibly when the time comes.

**Pick your battles!** Don't fight about every little thing. Leave objections to the

things that really matter to you.

**Set expectations.** Teens may be unhappy about the expectations placed on them by their parents. However, they usually understand and need to know that their parents care enough about them to expect certain things. If parents have appropriate expectations, teens will likely try to meet them. Without reasonable expectations, your teen may feel you don't care about him or her.

**Know the warning signs.** Be alert for drastic or long-lasting changes in behavior or personality. Watch for: extreme changes in weight, sleep problems, drastic changes in personality, sudden changes in friends, skipping school, failing grades, experimentation with tobacco, alcohol or drugs, run-ins with the law. Get professional help if you see any of these signs.

**Respect their privacy.** To help your teen become a young adult, you'll need to grant some privacy. If you notice warning signs of trouble, then you can invade your child's privacy until you get to the heart of the problem. For safety, you should always know where teens are going, when they'll be returning, what they're doing and with whom. Start with trust, but if the trust gets broken they need to understand that they will enjoy fewer freedoms until the trust is rebuilt. Reward them for being trustworthy.

**Monitor what kids see and read.** Be aware of what yours watch and read. Don't be afraid to set limits on the amount of time spent on the computer or watching TV. Know what they are learning from the media. Know who they are communicating with online. TV and internet should be public activities. Technology should be limited after certain hours.

**Last but not least: LOVE, ENCOURAGE, AFFIRM, LAUGH. Cherish every single second.** Even though it can be a challenging time for parents, all too soon they will be packing their rooms and heading for their future.

**Treasure every minute you have with them!**

Michelle Cash ARNP, MTT (mother of three teens)

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### Stay Alert

Aside from paying attention, avoid any factors that might detract from your reaction time. Alcohol reduces judgment, driving ability, and alertness. Drowsiness can have similar effects, so make sure you get enough sleep and stay well rested. Mixing driving, alcohol and drugs, and drowsiness can be deadly.

### Know Your Car

Other things you should become familiar with as you learn to drive are checking and changing oil, pumping gas, jump-starting your car, locating and knowing how to use the

spare tire and jack, checking tire pressure, and staying on top of maintenance. Knowing these things will help keep you from breakdowns. However, sometimes accidents and breakdowns are unavoidable. Keeping insurance and registration cards, a flashlight, jumper cables, first-aid kits, and a cell phone with a list of phone numbers to call are a good idea in the event you find yourself in an emergency.

Most importantly, practice makes perfect. The more you drive, the more comfortable and experienced you will be. Just remember to keep safety first!

[www.teenshealth.org](http://www.teenshealth.org)

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### CARING WELL

Middleton Pediatrics would like to invite you to an evening discussion on "Parenting Your Preschooler" on Thursday, May 2nd. Dr. Middleton will be conducting the time from 7:00pm to 8:30pm, and will be joined by Ansley Hodges, Director of Quest, Inc.

This is the twelfth discussion in a series of talks entitled "CARING WELL-A Curriculum for parenting and pediatric health that goes beyond simply not being sick".

Topics will include:

- Behavioral issues and anxiety
- Discipline Strategies
- Knowing and guiding your unique child

Space is fairly limited, so if you are interested, please respond to our Family Care Coordinator, Kelli Coon, at [kelli@middletonpediatrics.com](mailto:kelli@middletonpediatrics.com) or (407) 284-6460