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Archdiocese of Los Angeles - Our Lady of the Angels Region

Protecting God's Children for Adults



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Do You Know What's Dwelling in Your Child's Phone?

By [Margaret Ochoa, J.D.](#)

You are a good parent. You diligently check your 13-year-old's phone each day to be sure of her cyber-responsibility and safety. You know the signs—you are on the lookout for adults texting her, fishing her Instagram account, or otherwise engaging her inappropriately. You are aware that one in seven kids who use the Internet receive sexual solicitations. You read her comments to see that she isn't providing personal information, and verify that her settings keep her accounts private. You run through her photo stream to make sure she isn't lacking judgment about the appropriateness of her selfies and those of her friends.



But wait. Are you missing anything?

Did you know there are a multitude of apps that can be loaded onto an iPhone or Android to hide photographs? Let that settle in for a minute. A 13-year-old you know could be holding a smartphone full of graphic photos, and despite vigilant daily checks, you wouldn't have the slightest clue. Just such a realization struck dozens of families in Colorado.

Canon City High School's Woes

A sexting scandal occurred at a small southern Colorado high school. With around 1,000 students enrolled, school officials at Canon City High School were stunned when their close-knit community was hit with the news that potentially hundreds of students were carrying graphic photos on their phones.

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Margaret Ochoa, J.D.

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The school district and the local police chief worked together to determine what happened. Cell phones that were voluntarily released revealed that perhaps hundreds of photos were in circulation. Some were taken on campus when students were engaged in school activities.

Enough students were involved in the matter—some described it as a contest to collect the most “nudies”—that the coaching staff forfeited the final football game of the season. They thought they couldn’t field a full team of players if they couldn’t play students who were implicated. Additionally, they were uneasy about how the team would represent the community in light of the scandal. This decision wasn’t made lightly. The forfeited game was the final in league play—just before playoffs.

The investigation at the high school took weeks to complete. A few things were immediately apparent, however. Both boys and girls engaged in the behavior. There are kids as young as middle school age who circulated pictures, and students as old as 18 also involved. Officials also had to determine whether other adults were implicated in the activity, whether children were coerced into being photographed, and whether sexual contact occurred. Law enforcement also found that there were ghost apps hiding in the kids’ phones, which concealed explicit photos.

In Colorado, the possession of sexually explicit photos of minors is a felony. The law in your jurisdiction might differ, but know that the behavior is illegal in every state. The law is designed to protect children, however, it is a conundrum when those in possession of child porn are actually minors themselves. Deciphering victimization in this age of smartphones is complicated. The school superintendent and police chief in this case stated their desire to get help to the kids who need it and deal with potential suspects “in a way that makes sense.”

What's the takeaway?

- A couple of kids did some smart things. One told a trusted adult at the school. Another reported to an anonymous safety tip line available to school kids in Colorado called Safe2Tell. Adults should reinforce the good choices of these kids in “what if” scenarios so that youth have tools and know how to communicate in advance if something inappropriate does occur. Reporting protects kids, and they need a safe place or person with whom to report.
- Look for suspicious apps on your children’s phones. There are a multitude of private photo vaults available in both the iTunes App Store and Play Store. Many are free. A few to beware of are Private Photo Vault, Gallery Lock Lite, Best Secret Folder, KeepSafe, KYMS, Vaulty, and PhotoVault. Almost all require a PIN or password for entry. They are sneaky, because that’s the point. KYMS, for example, appears as a calculator icon once loaded. Others lurk behind a “My Utilities,” clock or game icon. Some are so sophisticated they take a snapshot of anyone who attempts to enter the app with an inaccurate password, so the phone user knows who tried to “break in.”
- If you have the responsibility of monitoring a youth’s phone, keep a tight grip on access apps on the phones of the kids in your care. You can prevent your own children from loading them by using parental controls set up through Apple’s Family Sharing plan or Google’s Restricted User functions. Sharing an account will allow you to prevent anything from being loaded without your knowledge. Go to those sites to see how to set it up. Yes, it’s inconvenient and yes, the kids might be irritated. However, children have no right to privacy when it comes to

your supervision and protection of them. You must act to keep them safe.

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1) According to the article, which of the following answers is the BEST way we should coach our kids to use their smartphones safely?

- A) ☐ We should tell them that they only need to tell their friends if they receive a “sext” message--without need of also informing a caring adult. Keeping it quiet among their peers is perfectly acceptable.
- B) ☐ Tell them that they need to have all of their app downloads approved by a trusted adult, and ensure that a monitoring process is in place.
- C) ☐ The caring adult should "Scare them" with the legality aspect of the problem, and make them understand that possession of child porn is a felony. This is the absolute ONLY way to help them see how dangerous it can be to use smartphones.
- D) ☐ All the above

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