



Cyber-Romance

You're bored, it's Saturday night and he has a great pic on his Facebook. You are finding love in all the cyberplaces. But how safe is it to flirt online, or meet someone in real life that you only know online?

Before we begin, remember that "flirting" doesn't mean taking off your clothes for the camera. You should already know that's just plain stupid. Flirting should also not involve "cybering," since that can come back and haunt you. Be funny. Be interesting. Be gorgeous or an athlete. Be smart. Talk about things that you won't regret later on. Don't share secrets.

Then if you want to take it further, move to a webcam or the phone. (Block caller ID though and remember that they could be recording the cam chat.) Take it slow. And check them out. Visit their school website or Facebook group and see if you can find them there. Check any other personal details they have provided too. If enough time has gone by and s/he is consistent, hasn't been lying (to your knowledge) and checks out, you can consider meeting them F2F. But you'll need to follow the safer meeting rules above. And remember, the only thing hurt is your reputation if something goes wrong online. But teens have really been killed by someone they agreed to meet in real life, after only knowing them online. So, think twice, three times...be careful.

Sexting and Sexing

Sexting uses cell phones to take nude or sexual images and share them with one or more people through text messages. Sexing uses any technology to take, share or store sexual or nude images. While sexting is relatively new, sexing has been going on for years. The first case Parry encountered was in 1998, where a teen girl took videos of herself to give to a boy she liked. He shared that video with everyone on Limewire! (And didn't ask her out either.)

All teens know it's not smart to do this. But many do it anyway. They do it because they are in love. They do it because their boyfriend begs them to do it. They do it when they are bored, desperate, drunk, high or just plain stupid. They do it when they like someone and want to get their attention fast. They do it to impress others with how sexy or well-endowed they are. Younger teens and preteens do it to attract older boys or because they think it makes them more "mature." The point is not why they do it. The point is what happens afterwards.

Jessie Logan, an eighteen year old high school senior from Ohio, took a nude picture and shared it with her boyfriend. They broke up. You know the drill. Everyone in her town saw the picture. They called her names and were horrible to her. When no one tried to help her, she ended up taking her own life. While this is an extreme case, the humiliation can be more than some teens can handle. And the pics often end up in the hands of creeps who post and share them with other creeps. Some teens have even been blackmailed into doing

things they didn't want to do, because the blackmailer knew about or had a copy of one of those pics or videos.

And police and prosecutors are now treating this as a serious sex crime. Teens who have taken a nude picture of themselves are being charged across the US as child pornographers and are becoming registered sex offenders. Those who forward the pics are being charged with distribution of child pornography. And those who keep a copy are being charged with possession of child pornography. If you become a registered sex offender you can't live near a school or public park. Your college must be informed and so will your employers. You will be forever grouped with those creeps we try to avoid. And try and explain that the reason you are a registered sex offender is because you took a nude pic of yourself and posted it on MySpace. Who will believe you? Everyone will think you molested a child.

These are real risks and happening to teens across the US right now. So if he tells you that you can prove you love him by taking a nude pic and sending it to him, tell him if he loved you, he wouldn't ask.