



We must, as parents, monitor our kids' phones more closely

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This was about 10 days ago now. I'm speaking to a creative writing/journalism class at a local high school when the following subject arises from the discussion: nudes.

A nude, for the uninitiated, has become the favorite pastime of many high school kids (and now, as you'll learn, middle school kids, too.) They send each other nude photos on their phones, often through various sources of social media.

I asked the kids their opinions on the percentage of boys in the school who had nudes on their phones. The answer: 75-85 percent.

Pause here for a moment to absorb that.

And so the words of Tom Pincince, the assistant athletic director at Central Connecticut, continue to echo. I saw Pincince, who gave a fascinating talk at Ledyard High in March about the perils of social media, Sunday at Dodd Stadium, during Central's baseball game. He alluded to a recent social media incident May 16 at a middle school in Southington:

Excerpts from the Meriden Record-Journal:

"Fourteen middle school students who police say had been exchanging nude and partially nude pictures with each other were referred to the town's juvenile review board after an investigation.

"Earlier this month, DePaolo Middle School Vice Principal Chris Palmieri received an anonymous call from an adult who told him they'd seen naked pictures on a girl's phone, according to a police report. Naked photos on the girl's phone of herself and a boy prompted the investigation which led police to a third youth, a boy, who had 40 nude photos of nine other middle school students. That boy also admitted sending nude pictures of himself to several girls.

"All the photos were shared on Snapchat, a social media platform, and screenshots were taken of the pictures shared. The boy with 40 photos had hid them on his phone with a 'calculator plus' app, according to police.

"Police interviewed juveniles whose pictures had been found on the phones. Some said they had sent nude photos because another youth had asked for them. One girl said she was hesitant to send topless pictures as requested 'but felt since she had received naked pictures of the boys she should send some back,' the report said."

This is an epidemic, folks. Now middle school. Maybe that's why Pincince, who lectures in schools all over the state, said he even spoke to elementary school kids at Great Neck School in Waterford recently about social media responsibilities.

Never too early.

Pincince has seen it all. Ill-advised posts on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and various other outlets, leading to suicide attempts, job denials, athletic scholarship denials, suspensions and expulsions, all because of the failure to think before hitting "send."

"The photos get traded around like baseball cards," Pincince said of nudes. "Aside from it being illegal to have photos of people of a certain age, they don't go away. Once you hit send you lose complete control of that picture."

And what would a college coach think about a potential recruit's decision to send a nude?

Or a college admissions director?

It's not just photos. Pincince spoke of a college athlete who took to Twitter to criticize his coach a few years back. It was so egregious that the tweets followed him, imperiling his ability to land a job for years. His message: This stuff — whether nudes, angry tweets or other questionable posts on Snapchat, Facebook or wherever — follows you. It can't be hidden by an app, as a middle schooler in Southington just discovered.

Pincince used the word "think" as an acronym for the best way to post on social media. If the post isn't "true, helpful, inspiring, necessary, kind" don't post it. He said never to post when emotional, angry, stressed or upset.

"You will make a bad decision," he said.

Pincince's message resonates louder every day. Every minute. To parents and educators. This is a discussion we need to have. All of us. Around the dinner table and in the auditorium:

What's on your phone?

Have you ever sent a nude?

Why?

Do you know anyone else who does?

What do you post to social media?

Do you understand the consequences?

This goes beyond the dismissive scope of "kids being kids." This is deeply personal. Note to all parents, teachers and administrators: It's time. We need to talk about this. It's hard to regain a reputation after it's been lost by hitting "send."

This is the opinion of Day sports columnist Mike DiMauro.