

# vigilant

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO WHAT'S GOING ON IN POPULAR CULTURE

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## be sober. be vigilant.

Peter puts it like this, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." In the Greek, the word **vigilant** means: to watch, to give strict attention to, to be aware. The dictionary defines it as "keenly watchful to detect danger; wary; ever awake and alert; sleeplessly watchful. Vigilance is an action and something that is sadly lacking in today's Christian culture. We NEED to be aware. We NEED to be watchful. We NEED to be armed with information! It's amazing just how uninformed many of us are to the **reality** of what our children are bombarded with every day. Often, we don't realize the dangers and so we are unable to be true spiritual coverings for them. God gives us discernment and wisdom to help shape the lives of our young adults so that they will be able to make wise choices as they grow and learn. That being said, the purpose of *Vigilant* is to help inform parents, youth workers, educators, or anyone who has influence in the life of a young person about issues in media and culture that they may not know about.



## the ever-present cell phone

Let's start with the big one. Have you noticed that it is almost impossible to pry that phone off the ear of your teen? I'm telling you, the cellphone has taken over as one of the biggest things that fascinate and captivate our preteen and teenagers. It's ridiculous! And parents enable this by spending hundreds of dollars per month on their children's phones, often believing that the primary reason that they "have to have them" is for "emergencies." Teens are quickly becoming obsessed with their phones, often leading lives that parents are completely unaware of. Many students reported getting at least 500 texts per day, and most teens admit that they "pretty much text all day long, even when they are in school." Here are some facts that you need to be aware of.

"Mary Madden, research specialist for the Pew Internet and Life Project, said 45% of teens have a cell phone and 33% of teens send text messages from their phones. Of teens who have cells, 64% regularly send text messages. Sherrie Cunningham, spokeswoman for Verizon Wireless, said that during the first quarter of 2006, **9.6 billion** text messages were sent or received through its service." <sup>2</sup>

"According to a national survey of one thousand 16- and 17-year-old drivers released on July 10 by AAA, **46%** send text messages with their cell phones **while driving**. Desera Gonzalez, 17, estimated the number of texts she receives daily at about 500. She sheep-

ishly admitted she texts while driving." <sup>3</sup>

"When you look at teens and text messaging (SMS), the numbers are equally startling. Parents surveyed by Jupiter Research earlier this year said that nearly half of 12- and 13-year-olds will have a mobile phone by the end of 2007, and text messaging is an integral part of their daily lives. **73%** of teens ages 13-17 are sending text messages from their cell phones. A recent survey by CTIA found that more than 158 billion text messages were sent in the U.S. in 2006. This represents a 95% increase over 2005. And the majority of these probably came from the 15-25-year-old age group." <sup>4</sup>

## by the numbers

- 30%** – Percentage of who teens have been text messaged 10, 20, or 30 times an hour by a "partner" wanting to know where they are, what they're doing, or who they're with.
- 25%** – Percentage of who teens in a relationship have been called names, harassed, or put down by their partner through cell phones and texting.
- 22%** – Percentage of teens in a relationship who have been asked via cellphone or online message to engage in a sexual activity when they did not want to.
- 10%** – Percentage of teens who have been threatened physically via e-mail, IM, text messaging, chat rooms, etc. <sup>1</sup>





## tired teens who text

Night time is a big time for teens to be on the phone. But studies are finding that more and more kids are tired everyday from staying up late texting or talking on the cellphone. "From 10 pm to midnight, almost a third of teens in a relationship call or text 10 to 30 times an hour, Teenage Research Unlimited found." Many parents don't even realize it since their teens' phones are often set to vibrate or silent mode.

Jan Van den Bulck, a sleep study expert in Belgium, said that cell phone use accounts for about a third of all children being tired. He wrote that "There is no safe dose and no safe time for using the mobile phone for text messaging or for calling after lights out." Van den Bulck said that most parents are probably "in the dark about the nighttime activities of their kids." He states that "It is a very typical phenomenon — kids grow up with new technologies that adults discovered at a much later age, and, as a result, they use these technologies in ways adults can't even imagine. Concerned parents often think they know what their kids are up to, but often they don't."<sup>5</sup>

Here are a few tips to help your teen get a better night's rest and for you to keep up with what is going on with your teen's cell phone use.

**Turn off the phone.** "Dr. Preetam Bandla, who works with teens at the Swedish Sleep Medicine Institute, suggests turning the phone off half an hour before bedtime."

**Bedrooms are phone-free.** "Some parents take phones or require them to be set in a charger outside a teen's room by a certain time each night. Parents need to be firm that phones shouldn't be in bedrooms."

**Check out the bill.** "Most companies record text messages separately from phone calls. Text message records should include the sender/recipient phone number and time. With Verizon, you can call from your teen's phone to find out the number of text messages sent and received in the billing cycle." A detailed bill is also available online.

**Block text-messaging.** "Verizon Wireless customers, for example, can turn off a phone's text-messaging capability by calling the company, going into a store or accessing their account online. Customers can also block specific senders."

**Get other parents on board.** "Polite society used to frown on phone calls after 9 pm. Now calls or messages come directly to teens' phones, so 'those boundaries don't apply unless parents set them,' noted Anastasia Goodstein, author of *Totally Wired*. Network with other parents of teens to agree on community standards."<sup>6</sup>

## here's my take

There was so much more information that I came across while researching cell phones, texting and teens. Recently, a series of events in the life of a friend caused me to seriously begin to look into the reality of some of the issues that teens deal with regarding cell phones. It's amazing that when the bill comes, many teens do not even realize how much they have texted, called or how much they downloaded — it's a "sticker shock" moment for them.

I have seen some of the forwards that are passed from phone-to-phone and much like spam e-mail, they are full of sexual innuendos, perversion, coarse joking, or are just negative. I read one that said something along the lines of "You are my retard for a day, send this to 10 of your friends..." Those type of negative messages, which do nothing to uplift or encourage, are coming at our kids all day long at unparalleled rates. And sadly, they are forwarding them on as well.

Texting has taken over the lives of our teens. Conversations between two people in the same room is often done on phones rather than face-to-face. The phone is on all day and all night, with messages coming and going. Although much of it is mundane conversation — "i'm bored, how bout u?" — some of it is much more insidious. Relationships intended to be secretive are easily hidden from parents as it is impossible to know everything that is going on with the phone. In one respect, you want to respect the privacy of your children, but on the other hand you have a spiritual responsibility to guard and protect them. In any case, good communication with your teen is vital.

The whole point of all of this is to encourage you — as parents, as ministers of truth — to be involved in your teens' mobile communication life. Put up parameters and boundaries, and don't fall into the thinking that it's only harmless. The enemy is far too good at what he does for us to take lightly the inherent dangers of unchecked cell phone use. Be aware, be vigilant, for this generation has great destiny and purpose and the love of God for them is so great.

## about vigilant

Vigilant is an informative newsletter of spiritual and social concern which is published monthly. Information is found through various studies, articles, online sources and life experience and is documented by footnotes. Contact Joshua Petrillo at Voice Ministries, 58300 Ash Rd, Osceola, IN 46561. [vigilant@voiceministries.com](mailto:vigilant@voiceministries.com). Vigilant is a part of Voice Ministries. ©2008

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