

# Cindy Pierce

Author, Speaker & Comic Storyteller

## July 2022 Newsletter

**Watch Cindy's latest video:**  
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[ONWARD WITH THE AWKWARD](#)



Parents can learn about their kids' online social lives by asking questions. Rather than asking them about what they do on social media and in group chats, ask them about what their peers are up to **WITHOUT USING NAMES**. Kids have strong opinions about how others post, comment and engage on social media and in group chats. Ask and listen without comment.

***Social Media and Kids: Inquire Indirectly***



### **Cindy's Summer Speaking Engagements:**

- Instagram live conversation with Henry Muggia on **Under the Hood Talk**
- **Tuck School of Business** at Dartmouth
- **Electives.IO:**

Everyone complains about kids and phones, but few people actively challenge the accepted norm for kids to own a cell phone before they start middle school. Many parents share educators' concern about how distraction, drama and the endless pull of social media, videos and group chats interfere with kids' engagement in school and family life. Research confirms that screen time negatively impacts the emotional wellbeing of kids and young people. Getting the genie back in the bottle seems like an impossible task. Perhaps a few of the following ideas will help readers start conversations with their kids or students.

It is absolutely appropriate and normal to be interested in and concerned about what your kids are doing on social media. The majority of kids' social lives and interactions are invisible to the adults in their lives. The moment parents offer a cell phone, kids have instant connection and exposure to a vast world of contacts and information of which adults will have very little understanding or awareness. Parents who risk fracturing a trusting relationship with their kids by sneaking on their phones only get a very limited view of what is going on in their lives. Access to the Internet is a full blown free-for-all for even a mildly curious kid.

I hear parents claim that their child "knows their values" or "knows what will happen if they dare do anything stupid or look at porn." Self-delusion about what kids will search online is validated by safety in numbers. It is very common for phones to be given to younger and younger kids to keep them "safe." Phones are unquestionably a convenient way for parents to keep track of their kids and efficiently negotiate plans. For many parents, the upside of their kid having a phone overrides how unsafe it is for their child to have private access to an infinite amount of misleading and confusing

information and images. It is also convenient for parents to have kids' internet searches and online interactions out of sight, out of mind. Parents are concerned, but the possibilities of what is going on is too big to take on.

Parents who attempt to connect with their kids about what they do on Snapchat, Instagram or TikTok are usually met with a snarky response or dramatic eye roll intended to exclude. The general sentiment of kids is that parents couldn't possibly understand their group chat banter or what they find compelling online. It is also highly unlikely they would share the full extent of their posts and comments with their parents. Some kids appease their parents in the early years by sharing some benign posts to put them at ease. Keeping eager and nosy parents at bay is fairly easy for kids, especially parents who want to be considered "cool" and connected. Sharing an obscure meme or video kids find hilarious usually baffles parents enough to keep them at bay.

I offer an alternative approach to learning about kids' online lives. Instead of asking your kids about what they do online, keep the inquiries general by asking their opinions about online and social media behavior. The key to these questions is to insist they don't use names of people or friends in their circles and group chats and to refrain from offering suggestions. Hearing kids talk about what other unnamed people do online will give parents a better understanding of what their own kids are up to. Let them vent. I have found that kids have strong opinions about what they like and dislike about social media behavior. They are much more free about those opinions when they are not directly implicated (even if they have been guilty of the same stuff and perhaps learned the hard way).

Below you will find a list of questions that could inspire a conversation with your kids. Of course,

mood and context will either open or close the discussion. Tread lightly. I usually throw out a question when riding in the car or lead with a story about adult social media behavior that bugs me without using a name! Choose one or two and let them speak without interruption. Sometimes they will vent for a while. You could learn a lot if you resist the urge to offer suggestions or opinions. Just ask questions and listen.

- ***What social media or group chat behaviors annoys you?***
  - ***What do you like about how people post or comment on Instagram? SnapChat? Tik Tok?***
  - ***What works well in group chats? What doesn't?***
  - ***How much is too much texting? How do you handle it?***
  - ***Has anyone shared your texts or photos without permission?***
  - ***Have you ever been surprised when you meet someone you follow? How are people different in person than they are on social media?***
  - ***What happened on your phone today that was interesting? Boring? Funny? Irritating?***
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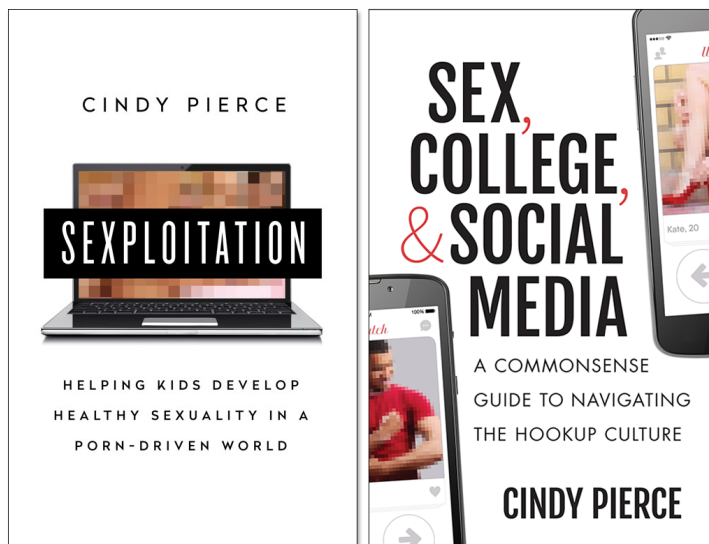
[\*Sexploitation: Helping Kids Develop Healthy Sexuality in Porn-Driven World\*](#)

(Bibliomotion, 2015)

and

[\*Sex, College and Social Media: A Commonsense Guide to Navigating the Hookup Culture\*](#)

(Bibliomotion, 2016)



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