



Is your 8 – 10 year old boy/girl crazy?

Eight-to-ten year-olds obsessed with love notes, boyfriend and girlfriends, and the like is very young but not unheard of.

In some cases it is like a dog chasing a car. It looks like fun, but the dog doesn't know what to do with the car when they catch it. So too with the kids.

The notes and friendships are in part a game and in part rehearsal for adolescence. With kids of this age many are "rehearsing" and playing out the behaviour they see of teens and their teen idols. Television shows like Canadian and American Idol do have young girls swooning over dreamy contestants. One need only view the television audience to see the effect on some of the very young viewers. Further, they see other role models such as teen pop stars who blatantly use sex for self-promotion. But the issue isn't the role-playing or rehearsal per se. The issue is how far they take the game or role-playing and does it lead to trouble.

Early sexual exposure and experimentation can lead to trouble. In one community, 4 kids (ages 10 - 12) were involved in sexual activity. It became known when one girl disclosed to a friend who in turn told her mother. In this case the kids were acting out the various sex scenes they saw on Internet porn sites. Although consensual, the behaviour went far beyond conventional sexual activity and was far beyond the normal imagination of children at this age. It was very disturbing. It is important to note, these were otherwise good kids from good homes. They had never been in trouble before. They were role-modeling behaviour from an obscene source in the absence of supervision or other activities to occupy their time.

Kids in our society are being exposed to sexual information and material far beyond their maturity to manage or understand and some do mimic it.

If you want to put a little ice on youngsters' sexualization, here are a few tips:

1) Talk with them about relationships and what it means. Given their ages, this is sometimes best done

one-to-one. If done in a group, kids of this age may degenerate into giggling and nervous laughter. Parents are generally the best persons to have these conversations with their kids. The parent should also be role-modeling appropriate interactions with their intimate partner when in view of their kids.

2) Keep kids in public view. Kids in public view are at less risk of getting into trouble. In other words, keep an eye on them and have them participate in many activities that can avoid trouble while having fun. Know where they are and whom they are with.

3) Parents MUST keep the home computer in the kitchen or some other open area where they can wander by. It is difficult for kids to surf for porn or any other dangerous websites when in plain view of mom or dad. Don't give in to whining if they object.

4) Many TVs have "parental controls" built into the remote. Parents are encouraged to block channels or specific programs that show explicit sexual content. Even if the kids do not go there intentionally, they can catch a glimpse when channel surfing. A glimpse is enough to capture their attention and lead them astray.

Following these recommendations can decrease kids likelihood of young sexual experimentation, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and getting pregnant when they become teenagers. The important thing is for parents, educators and other adults in positions of trust and responsibility to start when kids are very young. These recommendations should form a normal part of their lives. Let their life be filled with the fun and excitement of age-appropriate, healthy activities. It's a prescription for better, safer kids!

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