By Dr. Stephen F. Grinstead, MFT

Q: I recently found some inappropriate content on my child’s personal networking page. How do I confront her without getting accused of being a spy?

A: You are right to be concerned about inappropriate content, especially since the Internet has become the new hunting ground for predators and the latest way kids “hook-up” for sex or drugs. I’m glad you will challenge your child about what is appropriate and acceptable and what is not. (Too many parents want to be friends with their children when what kids really need is their parents’ protection.)

To keep kids safe, parents sometimes need to be authoritative—but not authoritarian—so kids have appropriate limits and healthy boundaries. To make the most of your talk, I invite you to shift your focus from “confronting” to “lovingly sharing” your fears.

Now, this is important: Do not get defensive or take it personally if your child calls you a spy – or worse. You need to stay focused on your job of providing safety and structure for your child. It is also important to validate your child’s concerns if she does accuse you of being a spy. Validating does not mean agreeing with her, just showing that you have compassion and understanding for her feelings. Reassure your child that it is always okay for her to share her feelings with you in an appropriate way.

This may also be a good time to establish some Internet ground rules – or revise the rules you already have in place. Also, it might be helpful to hire an expert to help you set parental controls – many children are far more cyber savvy than their parents.

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