

# **“Cuties” is a Wake-Up Call for Parents**

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**Quite a few people have asked me what I thought about the film Cuties. So, I watched it. Yes, it certainly was disturbing to see children engaged in provocative dancing and lewdness at such an early age. However, I also think that the film serves a purpose as a wake-up call to parents about the need to keep careful watch over their children. In particular, parents should know what their tweens and teens are doing on their phones.**

**Parents, understandably, have trouble keeping up with the various forms of social media that tweens are using to capture and document a tremendous portion of their lives. Everything — the good, the bad, and the ugly — is being recorded and shared. Some of these recordings are disturbing, some are hurtful, and some are pornographic. Children need oversight and guidance. It is tough because the child usually knows more about the newest app than the parent!**

**I recommend that parents have a discussion with their children about safety when using different forms of social media, from Instagram to Tik Tok, to texting and anything in between. Today, the culture seems to promote that “anything goes” regarding self-expression. There needs to be a discussion about what constitutes appropriate behavior and what actions could have huge repercussions that damage their reputation and are harmful to others. Have these conversations regularly with your children and set reasonable expectations.**

**I am also in the camp that children under the age of six or seven should be very, very closely monitored. They should not be exposed to social media content without parental controls, as developmentally, they are not ready to comprehend what may pop up, particularly violent images or graphic images like the ones circulated in “Cuties.” I recommend that parents diligently monitor their TVs, computers, phones, etc. You can’t “unsee” something. Once they view it, it is in their brain forever.**

**Let’s protect children from the dangers that lurk on the internet. I am a big fan of SafeKids.com which has many excellent resources for protecting children and teens from online dangers.**

**They have a specific “pledge for parents” and a contract for online safety that parents should read and practice. They are applicable to computers, iPhones and all mobile technology that children use. Here are a few of the key points:**

- 1. I will get to know the services and websites my child uses. If I don't know how to use them, I'll get my child to show me how. (Parents, this is critical, take heed!).**
- 2. I will set reasonable rules and guidelines for computer use by my children and will discuss these rules. I'll remember to monitor their compliance with these rules, especially when it comes to the amount of time they spend on the computer.**
- 3. I will not overreact if my child tells me about a problem he or she is having on the Internet. Instead, we'll work together to try to solve the problem and prevent it from happening again.**
- 4. I will try to get to know my child's "online" friends, the same way I know their other friends.**

**The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) also encourages parents to stress these safety points to their children:**

- Report any nude or violent pictures that they receive on their phone or computer to either you, or to another adult that they trust. They should not delete the message and get you, a teacher, or a school counselor involved immediately.**
- Please caution them to be careful with what they download or look at. Some images are extreme, and once they see it, it's in their mind forever. This is particularly true for violent and/or pornographic images.**
- Adults who talk to them about sex online are committing a crime. So are adults who meet underage teens for sex. Some teens may think it's fun but it is serious trouble and best to report it to the police. Parents, you can make a report through the CyberTipline.**
- Tell them to be extremely careful if they go to meet someone in person that they met on the internet. They may think that they know them well, but they don't. Have them tell you, or someone that they trust, before they go. Don't go alone, bring a friend. Always meet in a public place. Make sure that they have their cell phone and an exit plan.**

**Parents, unfortunately, "Cuties" does portray the reality of how some children use their phones now. The frontier of social media is changing all the time. Be aware and be prepared to help your children navigate it!**

**For more information about keeping your children safe visit [www.nyspcc.org](http://www.nyspcc.org).**