

Are computers, media creating a new sexual playground for kids?

SEXUALISED media, changing values and portable technology have made good parenting hard. This was the theme from speakers at a seminar about the sexualisation of girls last week, with some speakers warning parents not to "freak out" if children brought difficult questions about sex, dating and on-line behaviour to them.

"Sexing" was just one topic on the agenda at the Raising Healthy Kids in a Sexualised World seminar in the Supreme Court Building, Phillip Street, Sydney.

State Government Whip Greg Donnelly invited three passionate authors and advocates to the session where they spoke to parents, principals, health care workers and other people who work with children every day.

Principal of St Ursula's College, Kingsgrove, Anne Anderson, who attended, said computers made it more difficult for parents to keep up with what children did in their private lives.



Handle with care: Students Ashleigh Lopez, Robyn Papadimitos and Chelsea McGuinn at St Ursula's College, Kingsgrove, have had online safety classes after receiving laptops through government programs. Picture: John Veage

"I think it's very hard for parents these days. They are not as aware of technology as their children are," she said.

"With the government roll-out of laptops we've particularly tried to educate our students on cyber security so students remain safe and don't put images out there."

Sergeant Peter Northey, field commander of school liaison police, said mums and dads should know that "sexting", or personal pornographic images sent between mobile phones, was rife.

"This is one of the major things that NSW school liaison police are trying to educate s-

tudents about," he said.

"They don't understand that their boyfriend can take that photo and put it on the internet where 100 million people can see it."

Melinda Tankard Reist, author of *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls* said teenagers had increasingly poor self-esteem and that advertising, television and technology was exposing primary school children to too much adult material. "Little girls and little boys are growing up in a shadow cast by pornography," she said. "Girls are getting a message that it is the baring of their body that makes you a real woman."

Ms Tankard Reist said some children were demanding sex acts they had witnessed on computers or mobile phones.

"I'm hearing more and more about boys acting out the scenes they've seen in pornography. They're learning from porn," she said.

Keynote speaker and author Maggie Hamilton said parents needed to be accessible and not get hysterical if faced with confronting questions or behaviour by children.

"Kids say to me again and again that they can't talk to their parents about this stuff

because of the 'freak out' factor: they know that most parents will freak out," she said.

"We can't leave our kids in that space." Julie Gale, founder of children's advocacy website Kids Free to be Kids, agreed parents should protect children from overly sexual images.

"It's not an even playing field out there. Our little ones need to have a childhood and not be forced into adulthood at an early time."

Mrs Gale said people needed to be more active in protecting their children's future. The former comedian said she had helped change the presentation of adult magazines in service stations by contacting the company directors of Shell, Mobil and BP.

"People don't complain because they feel powerless," she said. "Speaking out does make a difference." Mrs Gale said other shops still stock sexually explicit magazines at a child's eye level. "Children are held captive to this. They are involuntarily exposed," Ms Gale said. "There is no law protecting children at the moment. They have R-Rated sections in full view of children."

Article from The Leader



Great cause: Simone Zimmermann, Megan Gale, Alex Perry and Donna Hay yesterday

When shopping is good for health

IF EVER a girl needed a good excuse to hit the shops, then supporting the fight against breast cancer is surely reason enough.

Today, David Jones will donate the day's profits earned from each of its 37 stores to the National Breast Cancer Fund. The department store's ambassador, model Megan Gale, joined fashion forces with designers Alex Perry, Dan Single and Simone Zimmermann and cooking maestro Donna Hay to promote the day.

Gale, a vision in pink, urged shopaholics to spend up a storm in support of a very good cause.

"At one time people would have thought of their grandmothers and mothers when asked about breast cancer but you hear of people in their 20s being diagnosed", Gale said. "Do a little bit of shopping and know that it is going towards this fantastic cause".

Gale also reminded women to be vigilant against breast cancer.

"It's so important for women of all ages to be aware of the need for regular check-ups... early detection is so important" she said.