5 Ways Students Use Technology to Cheat - What Parents Need to Know

Cheating has been around as long as school has existed. In the days before handhelds and Wikipedia, students would create crib sheets tucked into sleeves or palmed discreetly in their hands. I remember sitting down for my first day of Latin class in high school and seeing 20 different conjugated verbs etched into the wooden desktop -- a legacy of cheating I suppose. In my senior year a giant cheating scandal was unearthed in New York City where it was discovered that kids from one parochial school were selling the Chemistry Regents Exam to public school students. The *New York Post* published the answers on the front page which made for interesting reading during the subway commute to school.

Thanks to the Internet and connected devices, cheating is easier than ever before. Texting answers, cut/paste plagiarism and file sharing are some of the most common ways. Reporters and writers have been exposed [1]for repurposing and stealing others' words. Major corporate websites have appropriated the work of bloggers and passed it off as their own. And cheating scandals have ripped through Ivy League schools [2] and elite high schools. So how do parents talk to their kids about cheating in a time when it's so prevalent and so very easy? What constitutes cheating in this new world of social media, wikis and sharing?

Here are five ways students are using tech to cheat that parents need to be aware of:

Plagiarism

Seems simple enough -- don't copy other people's words and phrasing of ideas and pass them off as your own. But in a world of “cut and paste” it seems that it is all too easy. There is software that parents, professors and teachers can use to detect plagiarism such as PlagTracker [3] and Turnitin [4]. But, this shouldn't be a matter of worrying about being caught. Plagiarism is cheating pure and simple.

Texting

The entire Stuyvesant cheating scheme was carried out with text messaging. It was ridiculously easy for the kids to execute because of poor proctoring of exams. With one click the answers were sent out to tens of students at a time. You can monitor your child's texting (and all other cell usage) with an app like My Mobile Watchdog [5]. You can even disable the phone during school hours.

Term Paper Purchasing

It's easier than ever for students to buy and sell papers. One Google search will turn up tens of sites dedicated to the term paper market. This one should be easier for parents to stop since most kids don't have credit cards or Paypal accounts. The only way they can make these purchases is with an adult's help. Paying cash to another kid for a term paper is much more difficult to stop.

Bit Torrent File Sharing

Illegally downloading music and media files for free isn't something only students are doing, but it's violating copyright and piracy laws and is something parents should be aware of both ethically and legally. You can read all about copyright and fair use law at the official government site here [6].

Smartphone Crib Sheets

The old-fashioned notes in the hand have gone mobile and kids can store a lot of data in their phones. They can also surf the web for answers during tests if they can manage not to get caught. Again, a mobile app can help you stay on top of this form of cheating.

Most of the cheating taking place today is not really new -- it's a high tech version of what's always gone on. The difference is that it's much easier and the tools are readily available. The ways in which we now collaborate and share with ease online has made many facets of cheating seem like just an extension of this world.

You can use some of the monitoring solutions I've mentioned above, and parents should talk to their kids about their essays and term papers and really see if a child understands the material, or if they are cutting and pasting their way through it.

However, the bottom line is that parents need to be having these ethics conversations with their children all the time - and of course setting a good example. The Internet may have democratized information, and certainly smartphones have put this information at our fingertips, but the definition of cheating has not changed. Unless someone changes it in Wikipedia of course.

Are you aware of the ways kids can use technology to cheat in school? Do you think this is any different than what students have been doing for years?

Read More [7]

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