

WHAT NOW ?

What to do
when your teenager
encounters pornography

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INTRO

The days of students finding their dad's *Playboy* or sneaking a quick peak on a late night cable channel to view porn are over. Today's 13 to 18 year-old spends more than 72 hours a week using electronic media, while 75% of parents admit they are clueless about their student's on-line activities. Bad combo!

If internet pornography has become a problem in your home, you're not alone. 47% of families struggle with pornography as it seeks out teens long before they think to search for it themselves. Fear not, the solution begins with you.

Parents are the most effective guard between students and pornography, but to become effective, parents must become more informed and take action. The question is no longer, "if" pornography is problematic for teens, but "how" problematic is it. If you have the internet in your home, then you have pornography in your home.

As parents, we love our kids. We want to think the best of them, trust them, and empower them; but we must also be willing to protect them. The facts about internet pornography are staggering.

FACTS

- 87% of all teenagers are online.
- Average age of first exposure to internet pornography is 11 years.
- Nine out of 10 children between ages 8 and 16 year have viewed online porn.
- One in seven students aged 10 to 17 years have received a sexual solicitation or approach over the internet.
- Pornography leads to early sex.
- Young children can get addicted.
- Pornography is not just a problem for males. Ninety-three percent of boys and 62% of girls are exposed to internet pornography before age 18.
- The 12 to 17 year-old age group is the largest consumer of internet porn.
- Only 3% of boys and 17% of girls have never seen internet pornography.

Taking control of the computer does not mean we don't trust our students, it means that we understand that the internet was not created for the purpose of nurturing healthy childhood development. The internet is not the "evil of all evils," but it is a lot like fire: it can keep you warm or it can burn down your house. The internet must be respected.

HOW ARE STUDENTS ACCESSING PORN?

- Internet pornography runs on a “Triple-A Engine” effect: it’s affordable, accessible, and anonymous.
- The marketing tactics of pornographers make it easy for students to accidentally find themselves on hardcore porn sites by misspelling a word in a search or clicking on a student-friendly looking link.
- Some pornography is cross-marketed with popular cartoon characters, student icons, or online gaming.
- Age verification/limitation is practically non-existent for the curious child.
- If students can’t gain access to porn at their home due to parental controls, they may have access through friends who’s parents do not limit internet usage.
- The porn industry has reformatted their content to accommodate mobile devices like iPhone, iPod, and portable game systems.
- Pornographic material can be found on social media or video-sharing websites.

HOW BIG OF A DEAL IS THIS?

Pornography will promise you anything, give you nothing, and take away everything.

No one thinks when they start viewing pornography that they are heading down a road that leads to a place where their sex life is distorted, their spouse is devastated, their children are disgusted, and their world as they know it is destroyed. Everyone begins the journey with a curious notion, an unmet need, or the naïve assumption that pornography really isn’t a big deal.

Researchers are comparing pornography to heroin in regards to its effects on the brain. Some experts go as far as to say that internet pornography is the most powerful addiction facing our youth.

Today’s pornography is nothing like the pin-up girls of the 1960s. Any child with a computer can access softcore or hardcore pornography with the click of a mouse.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOFTCORE AND HARDCORE PORN?

Softcore pornography contains semi-nude to nude actors engaging in sexual activity such as intercourse or masturbation. Softcore typically does not show frontal nudity, vaginal or anal penetration, oral sex, or ejaculation. The industry refers to it as “softcore” because viewing this level of content does not “get you hard.”

Hardcore pornography contains much more graphic images of sexuality such as sex with children, students, animals, and corpses. Hardcore porn may involve violence, bondage, group sex, prostitution, rape, or sodomy. It can also include sexual activities involving defecation, urination, vomit, torture, mutilation, or murder.

HOW IS PORNOGRAPHY CHANGING CULTURE?

As pornography becomes a “cultural norm,” society’s understanding of healthy sexuality is becoming more and more distorted. The addictive behaviors of pornography restructures the brain to the point that intimacy becomes boring and pornography becomes the only thing that satisfies.

The effects of porn on culture include:

- A belief that since “everyone is doing it” that porn must be normal.
- A belief that a healthy, monogamous, intimate sexual relationship is unrealistic and impossible.
- A belief that sexual promiscuity is normal, natural, and healthy.
- A belief that sexual purity is abnormal, unnatural, and unhealthy.
- A belief that sex within the context of marriage is boring and unsatisfying.

Some of the consequences of these beliefs include:

- Limited interested getting married and starting a family.
- Decreased intimacy.
- Decreased sexual satisfaction.
- Increased divorce rates.
- Infidelity.
- Increased pornographic appetite.
- Negative, painful, and sometimes traumatic sexual experiences.
- Loss of virginity at an earlier age.
- Increased tendency to objectify people.
- Increased tendency to normalize sexual perversions (rape, bestiality, group sex, bondage, etc.).

WHAT DOES PORNOGRAPHY DO TO THE BRAIN?

Pornography has a huge impact on four neurochemicals in the brain: dopamine, norepinephrine, oxytocin, serotonin. Mix softcore or hardcore porn with these neurochemicals in the young, undeveloped brain of your child, and he/she will experience a toxic cocktail of responses and emotions.

Dopamine: During sexual activity, dopamine is released in the brain to help it focus its attention on the experience. In a healthy relationship, dopamine is a wonderful little chemical that helps a person ignore anything negative, and focus solely on arousal and pleasure. In addiction, dopamine also creates a healthy relationship dependency or connectedness with the partner.

However, dopamine and pornography are a harmful mix when you consider that the process is almost identical, yet the outcome differs significantly. As the person viewing porn becomes focused on the images, any thoughts of parents, spouse, family, boss, beliefs, consequences, future are ignored. Not to mention, dopamine also creates a strong dependency on the images that is as powerful as any drug addiction.

Norepinephrine: This little chemical helps with memory. Norepinephrine is the branding iron of the brain. In a healthy sexual experience, norepinephrine chronicles the intimate details of the couple's encounter. When mixed with pornography, norepinephrine brands every detail of the pornographic image into the brain. As a result, the more bizarre the image, the more likely the image will be remembered.

Oxytocin: Oxytocin is known as the "cuddle chemical" or "bonding chemical" and is released in the brain when people touch. (This is why couples typically don't like to touch during arguments because it's difficult to maintain intensity while touching). During a healthy sexual experience, oxytocin is experienced throughout the sexual cycle: excitement, pre-climax, climax, and resolution phases.

However, researchers are finding that the amount of oxytocin released in the brain when a person views pornography is significantly less, leading the person to feel lonely, empty, disconnected, and craving human touch. Consequently, this flooding of emotion and unmet needs pushes to the person to view more pornography or participate in more "at risk" behaviors by seeking out real life sexual encounters with people met online.

Serotonin: In a healthy relationship, after a person experiences orgasm, serotonin is released in the brain creating feelings of calm, closeness, and peace. Serotonin affects mood and is known as the Prozac of the brain.

Many people turn to pornography to find escape, to self-medicate, or to self-soothe. When serotonin is released into the brain, pornography becomes the drug of choice for the viewer while addictive behaviors are chemically rewarded.

HOW DO I MAKE MY HOUSE A PORN-FREE ZONE?

- 1 Confront your own issues regarding pornography. Before we can help our students, we must first take an honest look at our own sexual behaviors. A personal commitment to healthy sexuality makes creating a porn-free home possible. If you struggle with pornography, take action to end the cycle. Get an accountability partner, see a counselor, tell your pastor or priest. Help is out there.
- 2 Hate pornography. Pornography will lie to you and tell you that it will enhance your sexual experience, but it will do the exact opposite. Pornography will destroy your family; see it for what it is and develop a healthy hatred.
- 3 Talk about healthy sexuality with your students. Your students need to know about procreation, anatomy, pornography, and sex. You need to establish yourself as their primary resource for knowledge. This is not a one-time conversation between your child and the bravest parent. This is a conversation that happens throughout your child's development. And when it's time to have "the talk," it is completely appropriate for both parents to take part in the conversation.
- 4 Talk about sexual intimacy vs. sexual activity. Help your child understand that the intimacy shared between two committed adults is much better than what is experienced through pornography. In other words, make sure they understand that sexual purity is not merely avoiding certain behaviors or doing the right thing. Boring! Sexual purity leads to pure hot sex! The pornography industry can't compete with what a couple with a healthy understanding of sexuality experiences. And don't forget, one of the consequences of pornography is a decrease in sexual satisfaction.
- 5 Speak positively about sex. Sex is beautiful, intimate, and AMAZING! Sex is not dirty, evil, naughty, or forbidden. Avoid inappropriate joking or innuendos in front of your students.

Lived out, it sounds something like this:

Child: "Mom, can I watch this show?"

Mom: "No sweetie, it'll take some of your kid away."

Child: "Mom what is pornography (she saw me writing this eBook)?"

Mom: "It's something that will take some of your kid away." She didn't ask any more questions because she wants to protect her "kid."

Child: "Can I have a boyfriend?"

Dad: "Having your first boyfriend is very special. Something to wait for. Don't waste your first boyfriend experience on Johnny. Plus, having one now will take some of your kid away."

Our children will describe adults that they like as "having a lot of kid left." It's become something that they are invested in protecting.

- 6 Limit access to TV. Much of what can be seen on television is – by definition – softcore porn. Covering your kids' eyes is not enough. Children can't process the sexual activity seen on reality TV shows, dramas, or even some sitcoms.
- 7 Limit internet access. Utilize internet safeguards to protect your students. We have an old computer that is set aside for our children. Each child has a separate password on the computer where they can only access the websites that we have approved. My husband and I have personal computers that our students are not allowed to use without our direct supervision.
- 8 Honor website guidelines. If a website – that doesn't care one bit about your student – says that a person must be 14 years old to have an account, you should honor that guideline.
- 9 Keep the computer in the main part of the house. Secrecy is the life-source of pornography.
- 10 Know your child's password. Don't be afraid to hold your students accountable. My husband and I know each other's passwords. Accountability does not mean we don't trust each other. Accountability means we live a shared life.
- 11 Use accountability software. A great example of free accountability software can be found at **xxxchurch.com**. The software will keep track of your online activities and send an email to your accountability partner listing any inappropriate websites.
- 12 Supervise all internet activity.
- 13 Be together as often as possible: students and adults who struggle with pornography report that they started viewing porn because they felt lonely and disconnected. Spend time together: family meals, family fun night, movie night, morning prayer, etc.
- 14 Hug often. We learned earlier in the section about how porn impacts that brain that the stimulation of the mind is not enough. People need touch. So hug, snuggle, cuddle, and wrestle . . . A LOT.
- 15 Do not unintentionally sexualize your children. Many parents think it's cute to encourage young boys and girls to have little boyfriends/girlfriends. I have three daughters, and I can't tell you the number of parents who would talk about my girls marrying their sons one day. I know they were not serious, and they were trying to compliment me and my girls. But the message to my girls was loud and clear: there is something wrong with you if you are single. My oldest daughter is almost 13. She is gorgeous, and she has had several boys ask her to be their girlfriend. She declines because she's waiting for the right boy to be her first boyfriend.
- 16 Discuss and model safe internet habits. Talk to your students about internet safety. Parents must model safe behaviors as well by avoiding to post things like "Four more days until my husband gets home" or "My two week vacation in Jamaica begins today!" on your social network wall.
- 17 Sign a family digital covenant of conduct. A great example of one is: http://www.digitalstudentsinitiative.com/files/2012/01/family_covenant.pdf

WHAT DO I DO IF MY CHILD HAS VIEWED PORNOGRAPHY?

- Do not shame your child. Shame does not stop addictive behaviors. Shame perpetuates addictive behaviors.
- Do not overreact.
- Do not act shocked or disgusted.
- Do not lose your temper.
- Do talk about it with openness and kindness.
- Do let your child know how much love them.
- Do focus more on the condition of their heart and less on their behavior.
- Do educate your child.
- Do take steps to restrict access.
- Do hold them accountable.
- Do seek out help if you believe your child has compulsive or addictive behaviors.
- Do examine your own heart.
- Do not give up.



WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

- Your or your child starts getting a lot of strange or excessive pop-ups and emails.
- Your child tries to prevent you from seeing what they are viewing.
- Your child is spending a lot of time online.
- Your child is getting up in the middle of the night to go online.
- Your child seems overly interested or preoccupied with sex.
- Your child will not share his/her password with you.
- Your child wants to spend a lot of time with a friend who has unlimited internet access.
- Your child withdraws from family, friends, and activities.
- You discover pornographic material on their computer or in their history.
- You discover photos of strangers on their computer.
- Your child receives phone calls from strangers.
- Your child receives letters or gifts from strangers.
- Your gut is telling you something is wrong.

The sad reality is that our world is so broken that the chances of your child seeing pornography is very high, but your response as a parent could be the very thing that moves them through the unhealthy side of sexuality into the healthy and intimate side. You can do it!

HOW DO I TALK TO MY TEEN ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY?

The best thing to say is to use the material in this article to work ruthlessly to guard your children and your home from the influence of pornography.

If you discover your children viewing pornography, you'll need to assess what their habits are:

- Is it a one-time accidental viewing?
- Is it a beginning curiosity?
- Is it a significant habit?

Your goal is not to make the issue bigger or smaller than it is, but to respond appropriately.

Some key phrases to avoid:

- X You'll never be able to stop.
- X You're disgusting.
- X You're going to turn out just like your father.
- X You're just like every other guy/girl.
- X It's really no big deal. Everyone's doing it. Boys will be boys. Just don't do it too much.
- X I'm disappointed in you.
- X You're a pervert.
- X You're weird.
- X Tell your grandmother (or parent, or sibling, etc.) what I found you doing last night.

Some key phrases to use:

- + **We love you.**
- + We believe in you.
- + We want what's best for you, and pornography is not best.
- + Pornography lies to you. It promises anything, gives you nothing, and takes everything.
- + People get addicted to pornography, and it's super difficult to stop.
- + People think once you're married you won't need pornography anymore, but pornography doesn't work like that.
- + Pornography creates a cycle in you now that will make it difficult to experience healthy sexuality later.
- + Healthy sexuality is awesome, and pornography is not a part of it.
- + Healthy sexuality feels amazing. Pornography makes you feel empty, lonely, and unsatisfied.
- + As weird as this may sound, we want you to have an amazing sex life one day, and pornography will destroy that.
- + We're here for you.
- + We can get some help.
- + **We love you.**

HOW DO I HELP MY TEENAGER STOP VIEWING PORNOGRAPHY?

- ✓ Commit to making your home a pornography-free zone.
- ✓ Limit and monitor internet access (computers, mobile devices, iPods, etc)
- ✓ All devices are placed in your care for charging at night.

If your teen ignores your stance and continues to find ways to view pornography, you may need to:

- ✓ Cancel the internet in your home (computers, mobile devices, iPods, etc), especially if your teen is more computer savvy than you.
- ✓ Cancel all cable movie channels and basic channels with questionable programming.
- ✓ Restrict your teen from spending time with friends who you know view pornography.
- ✓ Restrict your teen from spending the night at friends' homes.
- ✓ Restrict your teen's friends from spending the night at your home.
- ✓ Seek a counselor.

When does my teen need a counselor:

- ✓ Your teen's behavior is excessive.
- ✓ Your teen can't seem to stop viewing pornography.
- ✓ Your teen's pornography preferences are hardcore, bizarre, and/or illegal.
- ✓ Your teen is engaging in sexual activities with strangers met online.
- ✓ Your teen says they want to see a counselor.

WHAT ARE OTHER WAYS MY TEEN CAN GET HELP?

One of my favorite tools for internet pornography is **xxxchurch.com**. There's a section on their site for teens that's extremely well done. You'll find lots of resources, and blogs written by teens about pornography.

Another great way to understand the devastating realities of pornography is to get involved in the movement to stop human trafficking. People are not for sale, and pornography hurts innocent people!

My view of the pornography industry changed drastically when I began working with young girls and women who are victims of the sex trade. Human trafficking is taking place in the United States, and it is not just an inner-city problem. It's in all of our towns and cities impacting all demographics making it a societal problem. To learn more about the victims on our computer screens, go to: **thea21campaign.org**.

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