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Pornography: A Haven of Secrecy Affecting Our Children

No one wants to believe that their children have been exposed to pornography. Everyone wants to believe that if they just find or purchase the right filter, our kids will be protected. Most do not want to admit that we have willingly given our children unfettered access to pornography through unmonitored phones, tablets, iPods, and so on.

The truth is that the primary consumers of pornography are youth between the ages of 12-17.¹ The Journal of Adolescent Health in an anonymous survey reported in August 2009 that 96 percent of the interviewed teens had Internet access. Furthermore, 55.4 percent also reported that they had visited a sexually explicit website.² At the university level, 93 percent of boys and 61 percent of girls reported they had seen Internet pornography during adolescence. If that is not bad enough, 80 percent of 15-17 year-olds have reported having multiple "hard-core" pornography exposures.³



The concern here is not just that kids have been exposed to pornography. In the aforementioned university study, the researchers reported that the degree of exposure to paraphilic and deviant sexual activity before 18 was of "particular concern".⁴ Dr. Gail Dines, professor of Sociology at Wheelock College, Boston, best stated the issue during a 2015 Symposium when she said, "The porn you see within 15 seconds of typing 'porn' into Google is cruel, abusive, violent and free. No credit card is needed to enter this world of sexual abuse..." In a more extensive treatment of the subject, she explained in her book, *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*,⁵ that porn is no longer about nude women or men in provocative positions or sexual situations. It is about violence, abject humiliation and dehumanization of the human person. The consequences are not inconsequential.

The evidence is pouring in

Since 2011, there have been 26 major studies which reveal that pornography has serious and detrimental impacts on the brain⁶ including:

- Shrinking brain matter in the areas associated with motivation, decision-making, and impulse control⁷
- Hijacking the brain's reward system in the same manner drugs do with an ever-increasing need for a "fix" (i.e. watching more pornography)⁸
- Increasing a negative impact on marital (and relationship) satisfaction with a strong use (not necessarily a consistent use) of pornography that used images as a proxy for the spouse and thus high dissatisfaction with sex-life or marital decision-making⁹

The studies and negative impacts are mind boggling. The three just mentioned are but the tip of the iceberg.¹⁰ But what about our kids? Do our kids really have this kind of access? And how does it affect them?

Social media and porn

So, you gave your child a Smartphone to stay in communication with them. We all know that the majority of their use has nothing to do with communication with you. How are they using their phones? It's time to get to know the social media apps that are on your children's digital devices and to whom they are communicating. The truth is that if the device receives a data stream, they are vulnerable. Let me be candid: what I hear from parents all the time is, "It's not my kid."

Not your child? Here are some stats that paint a clearer picture:

- 91 percent of teens use mobile phones to go online¹¹
- 92 percent of teens age 13-17 go online daily¹²
- 89 percent of youth admit to receiving sexual solicitation in chat rooms¹³
- 20 percent of teens have sent or posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves.¹⁴

Hear me when I say in all sincerity, I hope you are right. But are you willing to take the risk with the child in your care? Research teaches us that 76 percent of victims in internet-initiated sexual exploitation cases were 13-15; 75 percent were girls.¹⁵ Pornography as part of the exploitation and abuse was present 100 percent of the time. And considering something less extreme, youth with significant exposure to sexuality in the media were significantly more likely to have premarital intercourse at ages 14-16.

I recently offered a Teens and Technology presentation to a group of parents. Initially, most were resolute that their teens were not involved with any unhealthy apps, conversations or pornography. Then they took my challenge and went home to "trust but verify." Unfortunately, many of these parents disclosed to me that several of the tweens were knee deep in viewing pornography and even sexting; some even consistently viewed child pornography. Much good is coming out of this painful realization that many of us give our kids electronics but never set, enforce or secure safe boundaries. So what can we do?

Tips for parents and caring adults

One of my favorite Scriptures is from Romans 5:20b, "Where sin abounds, grace all the more." Prayer leads to action and there are practical steps that all parents and caring adults can and should take:

Educate: First yourself, then your family. A great start is The National Center on Sexual Exploitation at www.endsexualexploitation.org

Communicate: Speak to your kids and let them know the dangers and potential impacts of pornography on their health, relationships, potential job opportunities, etc. Always, of course, in an age-appropriate manner. Keep in mind that persons are mysteries that are meant to be revealed-not exposed-and too much information too early is just as detrimental as none at all.

Develop a contract: Work with the youth to manage expectations from the very beginning, and write out exactly what is expected. Remember the second Golden Rule: Whoever has the gold makes the rules. If you are paying for the equipment, data and roaming usage of a smart phone, tablet or laptop, you always have a right to view what is on it. And not just a right, but a responsibility to ensure that the youth in your care are safe!

Trust but verify: For our youngest children, it is very likely that they did not go searching for porn; rather, it found them on websites that may have initially appeared to be tailored for children. Perhaps, for older youth, the expectations about pornography were never communicated. Consequently, that first conversation is so important to keep the doors of communication and healing open.

Model the proper behavior yourself: What's 'good for the goose' is 'good for the gander'. Our brains do not care about our age and/or maturity when it comes to developing an improper fixation. Porn is porn, and its path of destruction does not discriminate.

There are fantastic counselors among us who are assisting with healing the wounds of pornography and thus putting our culture back together—one person at a time. If you suspect that a youth, or even an adult in your life has a fixation with pornography, encourage them to seek help. A helpful website with sage advice is www.integrityrestored.com

That being said, wouldn't it be better to attempt to prevent the wounds before they happen? Porn is a secret illness filled with shame and potentially devastating effects for adults, and especially for children. Let's work together and protect our kids from a future of potential brokenness and heartache by implementing an action plan to interrupt these issues before they can begin.

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1) What are ways that caring adults and parents can work with youth to reduce or eliminate access to online pornography?

- A) Give the youth the tools to behave responsibly online, and verify their online activities by reviewing their devices

Trust the youth to behave responsibly online without monitoring what they're doing; and give them unlimited access to the sites of their

- B) choosing
 - C) Have ongoing conversations with youth about the dangers and potential impacts pornography can have on the developing brain, overall health, relationships, job opportunities, etc.
 - D) All of the above
 - E) A and C only
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