

Kids and Online Pornography-What You Need to Know

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Many parents have a strong gut-reaction when they discover that their son or daughter has viewed sexually explicit content.

The internet has made hardcore pornography easily accessible to anyone with a computer and online access. 20 years ago a person would have to take multiple steps to see porn. They would have to find out where it's sold, get to the store, find the gumption to go in and make the purchase. And the magazine would have a beginning and an end.

Now one simply has to Google whatever they're looking for, and hundreds and thousands of pictures, webcams, and videos pop up, many for free. Unlike the pornography that shows up in print, the internet doesn't end. A person could look at pornography day and night and still see new images.

As a parent, or adult who works with or cares about kids, here are some things you need to know about online pornography.

◆The APA (American Psychological Association) states that every year, 40% of teens and preteens visit sexually explicit sites on the internet. This includes both deliberate searches as well as accidentally clicking on an unintended link. This study is from 2007, and I would expect that the number is significantly higher at this time.



◆Many of these sites have explicit material on their home page, so even a single click can take a child to images they are not prepared to see.

◆No matter how tightly you try to control what your child sees on the internet, if they want to view online pornography, they can easily find a way. Ipads and other tablets, phones and friends' computers are just some of the ways kids are able to view explicit material. This is why talking to your kids about pornography is so important.

◆Teens are sexually curious. This is healthy and normal. Your job as a parent is to allow them to mature sexually in a safe, age appropriate manner.

◆There are different ideas about how viewing pornography affects kids. For children under 10 it can result in a very skewed and harmful understanding of sexuality. Children's minds are simply not prepared for explicit material. What is seen cannot be unseen, and young children are often very disturbed and harmed by viewing pornography. For older children it can result in a need for increasingly greater stimuli. Some teens are plagued with feelings of guilt for viewing pornography and distressed because they can't stop looking at it. Teens who access online pornography can be drawn into conversations and interactions with adults who intend to engage teens in sexual activity or child pornography.

◆Sexual predators often use pornography while grooming a child or teen. This is why it's critical to find out how your child was first exposed.



So, what is a parent to do?

◆ Ask your child or teen how they came across porn for the first time. If they were shown pornography by an adult, you need to contact authorities, as this is sexually abusive behavior. Most often, kids are exposed to pornography through their own curiosity, the influence of friends, or simply accidentally coming across a site or ad.

◆ Talk to your kids. Tell them your views on pornography. Explain any concerns you have about it.

◆ Don't shame. From the moment a child is born, he or she is a sexual being with sexual feelings. Teens and preteens are flooded with a massive rush of hormones that changes everything from how they see themselves, their bodies, and others.

◆ Install a quality internet filter on all of your home computers. Talk to your teen about why you're doing it. But don't rely on the filter to completely block everything explicit. Nothing is foolproof. The idea is to make it difficult for your child to accidentally or purposefully view harmful or disturbing content.

◆ Remind your kids that anything they post or text is easily spread all over the internet. Sexting (the texting of sexually explicit material) can be copied and re-texted/tweeted thousands of times. Once something is on the internet, it can be impossible to take it back.

◆ Monitor what your kids are doing online. Privacy is important for teenagers, but if you're concerned that your teen is engaging in harmful behavior, you need to know what is going on.

Many parents make it clear that if they're concerned about their child, they will first talk with the child about it, and then, if needed, view emails, texts, and posts.

Pornography is a subject that many people are uncomfortable talking about. It can be hard to accept that your son or daughter is maturing into a person who has sexual thoughts and feelings. Remember that things are vastly different than they were a generation ago. Ask your kids what their thoughts are about porn. They may not tell you, but at least you'll have opened the door to what can be a difficult subject.

Pope Francis — “A society can be judged by the way it treats its children.”

Rome, Italy October 6, 2017

Every child's life is unique, meaningful and precious and every child has a right to dignity and safety. Yet today, global society is failing its children. Millions of children are being abused and exploited in tragic and unspeakable ways, and on an unprecedented scale all over the world.

In this era of the internet the world faces unprecedented challenges if it is to preserve the rights and dignity of children and protect them from abuse and exploitation. These challenges require new thinking and approaches, heightened global awareness and inspired leadership. For this reason this **Declaration of Rome** appeals to everyone to stand up for the protection of the dignity of children.