

Talking to Kids About Porn and Human Sexuality

This article is reprinted, with permission, from the September 4th issue of the Sooner Catholic. The author is Father Tad Pacholczyk of the National Catholic Bioethics Center. Part I appeared in the September newsletter. Here is Part II. Please share with parents.

A growing concern today involves the role of pornography as the next generation's instructor in human sexuality. For many young people, pornography has become the only guide to sexuality they have ever known.

For Catholic parents, this raises the critical challenge of how best to approach these matters with their children, given that kids as young as 8 or 9 may already be acquiring information and viewpoints about human sexual behaviors from internet pornography. I would like to present **six practical suggestions** for parents, culled from parental testimonies and insights, from other experts in the field, and from ex-users of pornography.

Please note: the first three points of Father's article appeared in the September issue of this newsletter.

Fourth, be wary of internet access on cell phones. "Due diligence" with cell phones for children might mean looking for handsets that function strictly as phones without internet access, or maybe the kids should be given a phone only at those time when they are dropped off at events like piano practice, soccer, etc. As children grow older and show signs of maturing, restrictions and limitations can be scaled back.

Fifth, monitor internet usage. Check browser history, and make use of monitoring software, even though a particular child may be an angel. Keep the family computer in a shared space like the living room with the screen visible so family members can be aware of each other's online activities. Laptops and tablets can pose an inadvertent temptation in this respect as teens sit cuddled up on the couch with screens not visible to others. In family life, we are called to serve as our brother's keeper. Set limits on "screen time" for children, and maintain password/access control over devices. Have the neighbor's kids deposit their electronic devices on the kitchen table during visits to diminish the temptation to slip away to a private part of the house and surf the net, perhaps with younger siblings in tow. Such practices also may serve to indirectly evangelize other families in the neighborhood regarding the serious threats from internet porn.

Sixth, set appropriate rules regarding relationships, and be involved in the kids' dating practices. Too often parents are tempted to take a "hands-off" approach to this area of their children's lives. When I was growing up, we knew (and eventually appreciated) my father's rule that we couldn't date until we were 18. Setting appropriate rules for kids serves as a sign of a parent's love and concern for them. Whenever parents determine that dating should begin, it offers further opportunities and occasions to discuss problems and scenarios that can help teens set moral boundaries.

Talking to kids and helping them to become good stewards of the gift of human sexuality bestowed by God is hard work. In a culture that forcefully communicates a profaned counter-gospel, though, it is certainly one of the most important and enduring gifts for the happiness and well-being of their children.

