



The following article is taken from a website called “PsychCentral.com”. The author is Lynn Margolies, Ph.D. It offers some good information for parents of teens to consider in protecting their child from internet pornography which is becoming a national epidemic.

Teens & Internet Pornography

What should parents do when they discover that their young teen or preteen has been looking at pornography sites online? And what does it mean?

Based on a survey of online victimization conducted by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, only a small percentage of kids seek out pornography on purpose, and most respond appropriately by quickly leaving the site, though few report such incidents to parents (Wolak et al., 2006). Exposure to sexually explicit content online can occur very easily through a misdirected Google search using an innocent word such as “toy,” a misspelled word or URL, a misleading website or email, or a link or photo sent by a peer or through spam (Wolak et al, 2007).

When evaluating what it means that your child is viewing sexually explicit material, before reacting or drawing conclusions, the first step is to assess the situation to find out what is really going on and whether there is a problem. Is this an ongoing issue? How many times has this occurred? Does this seem to be a habit? Are there other changes in behavior, mood or sleep? Is your child isolating himself?

Find out how your child has encountered these sites. Does anyone else at home frequent these websites or suffer from a hidden sexual addiction? When others at home with access to the computer have a hidden sex addiction, children are exposed to such material with or without the parent’s knowledge, giving the child more opportunity and temptation to explore such websites themselves.

What are the sites the child is going to and what is he looking at? For example, the meaning and effect of looking up the word “sex” on “ehow.com” (a website that is an “encyclopedia” of sorts on how to do anything) is different from watching porn videos online. Children may look for, or view, sites at first out of curiosity after having stumbled upon them – or to find out about sex. When the motivation is curiosity, the diagnosis could simply be “teenager” or “preteen”, the impact benign, and prognosis good.

However, viewing pornography, especially in an ongoing way, can have potentially detrimental effects on children, and may be motivated or perpetuated by loneliness, isolation and compulsion.

What are the potential negative effects of viewing online pornography? In the absence of any context, and without having learned about or known healthy sexuality, children may experience depictions of sex as confusing and take the images they see to be representative models of adult behavior. They are thereby introduced to sex before they are ready through images they do not understand, which often involve sexual deviations, and sex detached from relationship or meaning, responsibility, and intimacy.

Children are most at risk when they are repeatedly exposed to images that are overstimulating and potentially addictive. If viewed compulsively and accompanied by sexual release Internet pornography can have a desensitizing effect, requiring greater intensity and frequency as well as causing deviant sexuality to seem like the norm.

Cybersex addiction functions in a similar way to any other addiction, leading to a cycle of preoccupation, compulsion, acting out, isolation, self-absorption, shame and depression as well as distorted views of real relationships and intimacy. However, not everyone exposed to pornography becomes addicted to it.

Teens who are most susceptible to addiction are those who cannot rely on parents to provide a consistent source of contact and comfort to help them regulate their emotional state. Such families include, but are not limited to, those where a parent may suffer from an addiction – including alcohol – or fail to be emotionally available for other reasons. Children from these families are vulnerable – they often have low self-esteem and feel alone. They learn not to trust or depend on others and find ways to comfort and stimulate themselves which do not involve people and which are reliably available to them and within their control.

Another danger teens are exposed to online is unwanted sexual solicitation. Teens are the most vulnerable of any age group to such unwanted sexual advances (Wolak et al., 2006). One in 7 teens reported having been subjected to unwanted provocations—the majority of which involved invitations to meet offline, asking teens to talk about sex or answer sexual questions, or asking teens for sexually explicit photos.(Wolak at al., 2006).

A related hazard for teens online involves “sexting” – sending sexually explicit photos usually over cell phones or sometimes over the Internet. Sexting is most commonly engaged in by teens with their peers and usually involves peer pressure. Sexting

often creates an expectation of “hooking up” (sex) on the part of the recipient, and increases the pressure to have sex, and likelihood of it occurring, during the next encounter. Sexting is risky in this way and, also, because it often leads to unforeseen reputation disasters that may be irreparable. This often begins with a photo sent to a boyfriend or potential boyfriend, which then – unbeknownst to the sender – is passed around and forwarded to the recipient’s friends and “contacts,” like a chain letter spreading out of control. In addition, these photos can resurface later on and be used for blackmail or to wreak havoc on a person’s career.

The surest way to protect teens is to be aware of what is going on with them, and within your family, and make it safe for them to talk to you. Finding out that your child has viewed Internet pornography is not cause for panic. Most children and teens do not suffer from sex addictions. And when they do, this problem is usually secondary to other secret or hidden issues in the family affecting them, which must be the focus of treatment along with the teen’s symptom. To keep teens out of harm’s way, the key is being their ally and helping them collaborate with you in wanting to be safe. If you are not on the same side, your teen will find a way to outsmart or work around even the best technology and well-thought out rules. Remember – the relationship you have with your child and his perception of you as trustworthy and reasonable is the most protective factor against all the dangers faced by teens today.

N.B. Take note that the dates of the research in this article are from 10-11 years ago. If the cited statistics were accurate then, can you imagine what they are now?!

