

10 Things Parents Need to Know About Internet Pornography



No one wants to talk about pornography. It's an awkward and uncomfortable subject, but if we don't take the time to learn why pornography can be so destructive, we won't have the knowledge that we need to protect our families.

During the past several years, I have had the opportunity to talk with plenty of people who emphatically said, "Pornography is bad for you", and I completely agree with them. But when I asked them why it's bad, I got a lot of blank stares. The same people who felt so passionate about their beliefs only seemed to be repeating what they had heard from a friend, parent or religious advisor.

The truth is there are plenty of problems associated with pornography use. I would like to take this opportunity to explain, what I consider to be, ten of the more important issues concerning pornography abuse. I hope these ten points will shed

some light on the darkness of this subject matter and arm you with some new tools that can help you keep yourself and your families safe.

1) Due to a lack of regulation, the Internet contains some of the darkest, most disturbing, and easily-accessible pornography ever created.

With the exception of child pornography, no other form of Internet pornography is vigorously investigated and prosecuted by law enforcement. Why? Because the courts cannot decide on whose definition of "pornography" to use, the Internet is available to everyone, everywhere. Therefore, obscenity cases that were once routinely prosecuted are now stuck in limbo.

If that weren't enough of a problem, the computers that are used to publish pornography to the Internet can exist anywhere—including countries with relaxed or non-existent obscenity laws—leaving the door wide open to pornographers to do what they want.

The combination of a lack of Internet regulations, law enforcement's inability to prosecute obscenity laws, deteriorating social morals, and a \$50-billion-dollar market for pornography worldwide has pornographers rushing-in to do anything and everything they can to grab as much of that money as possible, regardless of the harm they may cause to children, adults, and the performers themselves.

The end result is that the Internet has some of the darkest, most-disturbing, most-violent and easily-accessible pornography known to man. The Internet is not a family-friendly place. Don't treat it like it is.

2) Pornography is not a victimless crime.

Some people would have you believe that pornography is a victimless crime. That is not true. Pornography frequently takes advantage of and abuses underage or barely-18-year-old individuals, luring them into the industry with promises of wealth and fame. Before these individuals can appreciate the magnitude of their decisions, they can be mentally and physically abused, contract sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, develop drug and drinking addictions, alienate themselves from family members, and succumb to the notion that pornography is all they will ever accomplish with their lives.

Other performers are enslaved through drug and drinking habits or are simply abducted into sex-slave rings. These performers are coerced either implicitly or explicitly into performing increasingly-degrading sexual acts, with little hope of escape. When you view pornography or allow it to be viewed, you are contributing to the crimes and abuse being perpetuated against these unfortunate souls.

3) On the Internet, everything is connected to everything else.

Everything on the Internet—websites, web pages, images, videos, etc. — is connected by hyperlinks (links) to everything else on the Internet. Just because your children visit family-friendly websites like Disney.com or Nickelodeon.com doesn't mean they are safe.

With a couple of mouse clicks or by visiting less-scrupulous websites, your children could find themselves in the darker corners of the Internet very quickly. For example, youtube.com, a popular video hosting site, not only contains videos that are appropriate for children, but also videos that are nothing more than advertisements for adult websites.

Another problem occurs when, with a few clicks of the mouse, your children wander from a clean site to a more questionable site, and finally to a website that is completely inappropriate. These types of links often exist within forums, blogs and other social networking websites. You should know what websites your children visit and check any external links from those websites. You should also consider making websites that have mixed content and questionable links off limits.

You should also be concerned about gateway websites. Similar in respect to gateway drugs, like smoking, drinking and marijuana, pornography has gateway websites. These sites contain softer, more subtle forms of pornography (e.g., bikini websites, lingerie websites, or "funny"-but-sexually-suggestive-video websites), but link to increasingly harder forms of porn. The danger being that an unaware individual can be lead along a path to abuse and addiction by visiting increasingly harder-pornographic websites in order to feed his fascination.

4) Internet pornography isn't just on the Internet.

Internet pornography is digital pornography, images and videos that can be easily copied and transported via a variety of different media and applications. In other words, a Web browser isn't the only way to access Internet pornography in your home. Digital pornography can be easily copied and saved onto your home computer, a CD, a DVD, a USB thumb drive, or external hard drive. It can be sent and received via email, instant messaging, peer-to-peer (P2P), and other applications that have nothing to do with a browser. You can also access pornography with a number of web-enabled devices, such as a PSP (Playstation Portable), XBOX, or cell phone. Just because the browser's history is clean doesn't mean that someone isn't accessing pornography in your home.

5) What's legal and what's not illegal.

Is it legal for a website to allow your children to access pornography? Since adult websites aren't being prosecuted for allowing minors to access pornography, it is essentially not illegal.

Some adult websites do use a warning page as their home page, with a simple question: "Are you an adult? Enter or Exit." These warning pages often feature pornographic content and act more like a teaser than a security feature. After all, there is no real technology behind that question. It is up to the user—in some cases a curious child—to decide whether to click on the "Enter" or the "Exit" button.

Furthermore, as I have stated earlier, the only form of pornography that is regularly investigated and prosecuted is child pornography. Your children need to know that taking nude/sexual pictures of themselves or their friends—even if the pictures were taken jokingly or accidentally – could be considered by law enforcement as child pornography. There are, in fact, many minors who are facing child-pornography charges for doing just that.

Lastly, you and your children should understand that the Internet can be forever. What I mean by "forever" is that if your children post a nude/sexual picture of themselves on the Internet that image could remain in cyberspace forever, haunting them for the rest of their lives. Even if law enforcement gets involved, that doesn't guarantee the image will be removed from the Internet.

6) Pornography is not sex.

Some people believe that pornography is nothing more than a depiction of people doing "what comes naturally". Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only is pornography devoid of the emotional and spiritual aspects of a healthy intimate relationship, but it also portrays attitudes and behaviors that are completely contrary to the ideals of love, trust, respect, commitment, kindness, consideration, etc.

Surprisingly, there are people that use pornography to teach their children about sex. What a huge mistake. Pornography is absolutely toxic to healthy relationships and to the understanding of what a healthy relationship is. Do not use pornography to teach your children about sex.

Even more dangerous are "barely legal" forms of pornography and child pornography, which can confuse your children into thinking that relationships with older individuals are normal and even desirable. In fact, sexual predators often use these forms of pornography to condition children to the idea of sex, making them vulnerable to their advances.

Don't use pornography to teach your children about sex. Don't believe that just because your children are curious about sex, that looking at pornography is okay. It's not, and you need to explain to them why it's not.

7) Pornography can be addictive.

For someone who is predisposed to sexual/pornography addiction, a single pornographic image can be enough to ignite a lifelong habit. Not everyone reacts to pornography the same way. Not everyone who views pornography will become an addict. But for those who do, pornography is considered to be one of the most addictive behaviors known to man.

If you have an addiction or someone in your family has an addiction, seek out professional help to overcome this disease. Don't wait for the problem to become overwhelming and destroy your life. Seek out help.

8) Pornography doesn't make us healthy.

Dr. Mary Ann Layden, co-director of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Cognitive Therapy, said this about pornography: "There are no studies and no data that indicate a benefit from pornography use. If there were a benefit, then pornography users, pornography performers, their spouses and their children would show the most benefit. Just the opposite is true. The society is awash in pornography and so in fact the data is in. If pornography made us healthy, we would be healthy by now."

Pornography is not healthy for us. Besides causing addiction, pornography can also harm individuals directly and indirectly in the following ways:

- Objectification of women—and men—as sex objects
- Perpetuation of the “Rape Myth”
- Developing deviant sexual attitudes and behaviors
- Developing abusive attitudes and behaviors towards a spouse
- Developing a sexual dissatisfaction toward a spouse
- Devaluing and destabilizing marriage and family
- Inability to form healthy relationships
- Developing sexual-dysfunction problems
- Being terminated for accessing pornography at work
- Physically, emotionally or sexually abusing a spouse or other individuals
- Divorce
- Incarceration
- And even suicide or death

No one is immune to the harm pornography use can cause. The damage may be subtle or more obvious, but if you are using pornography, you are being affected in some way.

9) Education is a big part of prevention.

If your children have access to a computer and/or the Internet, you need to discuss with them the dangers of pornography. Don't wait because they are younger and only like to visit juvenile websites. If they are on the Internet, they are participating in an adult world. One accidental misspelling, one curious click on a link, or one “funny” email from a friend, and they could be exposed to absolute filth that they will find confusing and alarming. Use age-appropriate language to warn them about pornography and the Internet. Let them know that if they accidentally stumble upon some pornography, they should tell you immediately. These accidents are excellent opportunities to teach your children right from wrong and why they should avoid pornography.

10) Nothing can replace good, old-fashioned parental supervision.

Deploying an Internet filter or firewall is a good first step for securing your home. However, filters and firewalls have limitations. They cannot block everything. In fact, the best filters are only expected to block 91% of all pornographic content on the Internet, leaving thousands of adult websites and millions of pornographic images and videos unblocked.

Furthermore, today's super-tech-savvy population can bypass a filter or firewall easily, using a number of methods that are common playground knowledge. Something as simple as your children keeping pornography on a CD or USB thumb drive, might be enough to fool you into thinking that your home is safe.

You should absolutely use a filter to avoid accidental exposure, but nothing can replace good, old-fashioned parental supervision. You need to know what your family is doing on your home computer; how they are using the Internet; what websites they are visiting; if they have CDs, DVDs, thumb drives, or external hard drives; what other web-enabled devices do they have; where are any wireless networks in your community; and much more.

You have no choice but to take the time to learn about computers and the Internet so that you can properly supervise their use. Local colleges, business and community centers offer a variety of courses that can help you learn how to protect your family and monitor your home computer.

There are also a number of tools that you can use, such as SurfRecon's pornography-detection software, to help you quickly detect any pornographic content hidden on a computer or other digital device/media. Besides helping you to find hidden pornography, pornography-detection tools can act as a deterrent within your home, helping family members act more responsibly when using the Internet.

One last word of warning

If discussing the topic of pornography has made you curious, and you are entertaining any thoughts that you might want to see it for yourself, **STOP**. Dabbling with pornography “just to see” is like shooting up with heroin ... just to see what it is like. If you are predisposed to addiction, you are going to find out quickly, and the consequences can be devastating. Stay away from pornography, keep your family away from pornography, and be aware of how and where it can attack you and your family.

Hopefully, this information has given you some ideas for how you can better protect yourself and your family. More importantly, the next time someone asks you why you think pornography is “bad,” not only will you have some answers for him, but you can also help him understand why he should stay away from pornography as well.

