

Pornography and Your Teen

The Oxford dictionary defines pornography as
“printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.”



Any material that would normally fall within the definition of ‘pornography’ that involves or depicts a child or children is not regarded as and should not be referred to as pornography. **Such material involving children is child abuse material** (see fact sheet ‘Will my child be held legally responsible?’).

It is important to note that pornography in many of its forms is not illegal when viewed or used by adults.

It is **illegal** to expose a child to indecent material, including **ANY** form of pornography.

Does your teen have access to a smart phone with Internet access? If yes, then they have free and unrestricted access, at the push of a button, to pornography.

It is not normal for children to be exposed to pornography.

Today’s pornography bears no resemblance to what used to be purchased in brown paper bags. Today’s pornography involves disturbing material that includes fetishes, violence, bondage, and the most abhorrent acts an adult mind can conceive. It is available online and, in most cases, free of charge.



STATISTICS

Pornography is BIG business. It is estimated that the online pornography business will earn more than \$2.8 billion in 2015 (more than \$3000 per second). It is in the industry’s best interest to not

stop young, impressionable people from viewing porn online. **That's your job as a parent or carer.**

It is incredibly difficult to collect reliable research on pornography, teens, and its effects. The only real way to know its impact is to take a group of children that have never been exposed, expose them to pornography, and then measure changes in behaviour and attitude. Obviously, this is not ethical (or legal). It is safe to say prolonged viewing of pornography overstimulates parts of a teenager's developing brain in ways we just don't fully understand at the moment.

PORNOGRAPHY ACCESS

The proliferation of pornographic materials and their ease of access are such that it is not a matter of whether a young person will be exposed to pornography but when. Exposure may be inadvertent (such as through unsolicited emails or an accidental encounter with pornography online) or intentional.

(Australian Institute of Criminology 2009)

http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/tandi_pdf/tandi368.pdf

There is every chance your child has viewed or accessed pornography given the amount available and the ease of access.

Most instances can be dealt with easily, effectively, and quickly. Most isolated instances are not serious and are not a cause for panic. However, every child and circumstance is different; therefore your actions will be moulded to the situation.

Exposure can occur in a number of ways:

- Going directly to a website through searching or typing the site into the address bar (The Naughty Search)
- A misspelt Internet search or accident (although correct parental controls should make this unlikely – see videos)
- An innocuous or apparently innocent link



- Opening an email attachment
- Being directed to the material by another user (friend or stranger)
- Spam messages in the programs your kids use
- Introductions through gaming (images, chats, and activities necessary to gain points—often violent)

RISKS AND EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY

Children that view pornography regularly may be motivated by curiosity, loneliness, isolation, or, eventually, compulsion.

Children are frequently exposed to pornography before they have personal experience with a healthy sexual relationship.

EFFECTS

- Impacts future relationships
 - What they see in pornography can be a cause of confusion and lead to a disassociation of relationship (intimacy, empathy, care, and meaning) from the act of sex. It becomes very difficult for any real relationship to meet their expectations.
- Desensitisation
 - They may be so accustomed to regular access to self-gratifying experiences and images of unrealistic scenarios that they have unrealistic expectations about the frequency and intensity of normal adult relationships.
- Depictions of aggressive males and violence towards women
 - Normalisation of male/female roles that contradict our morals often depict violence, both physical and verbal.
- Addiction
 - A cycle of preoccupation (a desire for more contact with the stimulus), a deep need to act on the compulsion, acting out/poor emotional self-regulation, shame, remorse, guilt, depression, and isolation. Not all teens become addicted. (See the infographic link to teenology



supplied in the toolkit of this course. It is really useful for this topic.)

- Increases the risk of dealing with illegal activity, images, or videos
 - Pornography is not necessarily illegal, until it is viewed by or shown to someone that is under the age of 18.
- Makes them vulnerable to unwanted sexual solicitation

ACTIONS TO PREVENT

- Talk to your teen about pornography.
- Outline your family beliefs, values, and rules regarding pornography.
- Time limits – The longer your children are online, the higher the chance of exposure or involvement. (Remember, it's available on their phones—no phones in bedrooms.)
- Let your child know that if they accidentally view pornography, it is not their fault, and they won't get into trouble.
- Inform your child to immediately stop looking at the material.
- Empower your child to report to you if they have been sent or have viewed pornography on the Internet.
- Use family filtering/monitoring settings or programs (see parental controls videos).
- Don't allow technology in bedrooms or behind closed doors in your home.

TO DETECT USE - INDICATORS YOUR CHILD IS VIEWING PORNOGRAPHY

These behaviours should only be considered as a possibility. Some are normal for teens, and some may indicate an unrelated issue.

- Secrecy both online and in the physical world
- Clearing of website histories or cookies

- Or forgetting to do this, and you check history and find evidence of such viewing habits
- Sexually related pop-ups on their devices
 - Google remembers what has been looked at on the device and will send related advertising.
- Over-reluctance to discuss matters of a sexual nature
- Social indicators – sleeplessness, nightmares, changes in mood/anger, health, diet
- Extended periods online in private
- Not wanting to associate with friends as much
- Over-sexualised behaviour (BIG warning sign)

REACTING IF YOU DISCOVER YOUR CHILD IS LOOKING AT PORNOGRAPHY

- Stay calm.
- Display trust and understanding. (Act protectively to preserve your relationship while stopping the situation.)
- Ensure access is stopped.
- As always, support and talk to your child.
 - It is common for teens to access pornography out of curiosity, and it is very embarrassing for them when discovered by a parent or carer. In some instances, this can be an effective deterrent for reoccurrence in the future.
- Assess the situation to find out the following:
 - What type of porn was being accessed?
 - How did they access the site? (directly or indirectly)
 - How long has this been going on?
 - Was this accidental or was it sought out?
 - What gave them the idea to access?
 - Is anyone else involved?
- If installed or set, check filtering/monitoring results.
- Clear history in the browsers used on all devices.



- Use virus protection to identify and delete spam or infection.
- If the content is illegal or if another has purposely exposed your child, consider notifying police.

Report offensive or illegal material through the Children's Safety Commissioner: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/complaints-and-reporting/offensive-and-illegal-content-complaints/i-want-to-report-offensive-or-illegal-content>.

- If necessary, seek welfare assistance, particularly if your child appears to be affected by the experience (see the 'Where you can get help fact sheet').

Seek professional medical assistance if:

- You discover that the exposure was not accidental and that it has been occurring regularly.
- The exposure has had a significant negative effect on your child.
- Your child cannot break the compulsion to view pornography without assistance.

Addiction to pornography is usually part of other underlying issues, all of which require some assistance.

References and additional information:

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/teens-and-internet-pornography/>
http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/tandi_pdf/tandi_368.pdf
<http://helpyourteennow.com/how-pornography-addiction-affects-the-teenage-brain-infographic/>