

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO
PORNOGRAPHY

**SCREEN
+ SANITY**™


MODERN PORNOGRAPHY

WHAT IS MODERN PORNOGRAPHY?

Whereas older generations likely perceive Playboy, Hustler, and Penthouse as being pornographic, newer generations of porn users might consider it to be quaint. Modern pornography is hardcore by definition, with **94% of scenes portraying men being physically violent towards women.**

THE STATS

- The average age of first exposure is **as young as 8**, oftentimes via **pop-ups and ads**, or a quick Google search for an inappropriate word they heard friends use at school.
- Mainstream pornography now includes depictions of things like aggressive anal sex or scenes where three men simultaneously penetrate a woman orally, anally, and vaginally before ejaculating on her face. Many scenes also feature gagging, choking, slapping, and other violence.
- While the main devices used to access porn are tablets and smartphones, it can also be accessed through gaming consoles such as the ones made by Nintendo, Xbox, and Playstation.
- One study found that young people are much more likely to view failing to recycle as more morally reprehensible than using porn.



30%
**of ALL the information
online is pornographic
content.**

THE DEAL WITH PORNHUB

- Pornhub is the largest porn site on the internet, and uses social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter to attract users.
- Visiting Pornhub is a daily routine for more than 120 million people.
- **Porn sites get more traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined.**

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CAN I PREVENT MY CHILD FROM VIEWING PORNOGRAPHY?

Pornography use has become a normalized, acceptable behavior in teen culture—so at some point your child or their friends will be tempted by the ease, sexual release, and safety (no risk of pregnancy OR face-to-face rejection) that pornography offers. While you cannot fully prevent your child from using porn, you have a serious advantage if you take a [driver's ed approach](#) to smartphone and social media introduction. At Screen Sanity, we call this “Ride. Practice. Drive.” Before you hand your child the keys to a car, they spend many years shadowing you in the backseat, learning the rules of the road. Before you give your child full-access to the online world, proactively initiate conversations about sex and porn early and often—as these are common road hazards on digital highways.

HOW EARLY DO I NEED TO START TALKING TO MY CHILD ABOUT PORN?

The risk of our kids stumbling onto porn is so great that if we remain silent about it, their first impression will serve as an unhealthy template which will shape their understanding of sex. (Please note: this definition will include violence.) Organizations like Protect Young Minds have resources to help you [initiate the porn conversation](#) before someone else does.

- [As early as ages 6-8](#), talk with your children about what healthy expressions of sexuality look like, as well as the potential that they will stumble upon harmful content online.
- Make it clear that when they see someone's private parts online; they should not be afraid or ashamed to tell you. Let them know you will not be surprised, and you will always be on their team.



Our biggest age range of people committing sexual assaults are children ages 11-15 years old. Let that sink in for a minute. These kids aren't even old enough to drive. Yet, they are committing the most sexual assaults in our region. Often, these kids are singly influenced by watching porn on their device.”

HEIDI OLSON | CHILDREN'S MERCY HOSPITAL

WE RECOMMEND

- [Good Pictures, Bad Pictures](#) by Kristen A. Jenson. This is a gentle resource to help you start discussions—and there is a junior version to use with 3- to 6-year-olds. you will always be on their team.
- [Check out this resource](#) from the Australian government about how to talk to children under eight about porn. you will always be on their team.



Learn more at [SCREENSANITY.ORG](https://www.screensanity.org)

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SIX TIPS TO EQUIP KIDS TO IDENTIFY AND RESIST PORN USE

- 1 If your child has social media, install a monitoring app like **Bark**, an app that monitors and flags inappropriate content.
- 2 Share online passwords with parents.
- 3 Only allow a small number of friends and family when they start texting.
- 4 When they start a new social media account, make sure it's private.
- 5 Create device-free zones —like bed rooms overnight, which is prime time for making impulsive, irrational decisions and bathrooms, which give privacy to act on impulsive ideas.
- 6 Engage with your child's online activities, showing them how to identify and block harmful solicitations (you can do so anonymously), reject messages from strangers, and report inappropriate content immediately

SAFETY NETS

No internet filtering solution is 100% foolproof, but you'll sleep better with a safety net in place. This isn't a sign of a lack of trust—but rather a safety feature, like a seatbelt.

Consider **OpenDNS Family Shield**, which has a solid free version that filters all devices connected to your network.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

As your child gains access to new apps or devices, it should feel like a “learner's permit”—with you logging hours by their side, calmly responding when they stumble upon inappropriate content, coaching them with ongoing support and assistance. You'll want to start with strong limits, and release them slowly, giving them more responsibility as they demonstrate competence.

Develop a gameplan for **situations** where your child might be extra vulnerable to porn exposure, including sleepovers, the school bus, while babysitting, and grandparent's houses. Consider sharing your plan with the adults in charge of these situations.

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HOW DO I APPROACH THIS CONVERSATION WITH MY OLDER CHILDREN?

When having these conversations—especially as our kids get older—it's crucial that we are willing to be vulnerable and sincere.

If we haven't established trust with our kids, it's extremely unlikely that they will be open with us about porn use as teenagers. If they are viewing porn at that point, they are likely to lie about it.

So. Even though it is tempting to hide our own failings so that we don't lose credibility with our kids, it's important to know that being dishonest or inauthentic is what will actually cause us to lose credibility with our kids.


Share about your weaknesses if they're old enough. Your willingness to be open can be extremely powerful in helping them to listen to you. **Communicate how much you love them and that you don't want them to be hurt.**

SOME CONVERSATION STARTERS TO TRY:

- Do you think the average person is ok with consuming media that could be defined as pornographic?
- Do you think that porn is harmful? Do you think it's acceptable in any situation?
- Many people think porn is ok because it's a way of getting sexual release without involving another person. What do you think about that?
- Do you have any friends who use porn? Have you noticed that porn is affecting them in any way?
- Have you ever seen porn online? If so, where? How did you react to it?
- Do you feel like you can talk to us about this issue? Why or why not? How can we help you feel comfortable with approaching us?
- What can you do to protect yourself from looking at porn? (This is likely a conversation best had between fathers/sons and mother/daughters if possible, but we recommend you are open about what you do to protect yourself from your own struggles with lust.)
- Is it possible to overcome lustful desires/a porn addiction? How?

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY KIDS ARE LOOKING AT PORN?

Protect Young Minds suggests several **[signs you can look for](#)** to indicate your child might be viewing porn:

- Clearing their browser histories or changing their screens when you come around.
 - Spending a lot of time online at night. Pornhub found that in 2017 the most common time its users viewed porn was between 10pm and 12am, and the most trafficked day of the week was Sunday.
 - Spending a lot of time in the bathroom or in private places on their devices.
 - Acting more moody, irritable, depressed, or aggressive. No longer interested in activities they used to love.
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HOW DO I HELP MY SON OR DAUGHTER WHO HAS BEEN VIEWING PORN?

Protect Young Minds has an excellent resource called the “SMART Plan Guide for Parents,” which gives advice for how to react if you discover your kids are looking at porn. You can download it [here](#).

Be Calm and Respond with Love

Don't succumb to anger or despair. It might be good to take some time to cool off before jumping into a conversation. You will obviously be grieved, but it is crucial that your grief doesn't increase the shame your son or daughter already feel. Immediately let them know you still love them, very much. If they have voluntarily come to you and shared this struggle, that is huge. **HUGE! Express how thankful you are that they are willing to trust you.** If they confess and then get the message that you really aren't a safe place to go, they won't come to you any more with struggles.

Get Serious

You need to approach recovery as you would treat an addiction, recognizing that you'll have to seriously deal with the issue over an extended period of time. **This means setting boundaries that might seem extreme.** Similar to recovering drug addicts, your son or daughter will possibly need to cut certain friendships out of their lives. Many addicts share there is no question in their minds that if they do not, they will go back to using and dealing drugs.

Identify Triggers, Set up Boundaries

Sit down with your child and identify the patterns and circumstances surrounding their porn viewing. What are the triggers? Is it boredom? A certain place or time of day? Do they need to give you their smartphone at night? Maybe if they continue a relationship with a certain friend, they only meet in public places. Set consequences, not just for viewing porn again, but for breaking the boundaries. For example, say one of the boundaries is no phone in the bedroom at night and the consequence is they lose their phone for a week. If they bring the phone into their bedroom at night, even if they don't look at porn, they still get the consequence of losing the phone for a week. The idea is that they experience the consequence before even getting to the point of viewing porn again.

Get Educated, Educate, and Serve

Help your child to get education about porn's consequences, and if possible teach others about them. As you educate your sons about the negative impact of porn and how it hurts women, show them how they truly are the heroes and protectors of women when they reject using porn.



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Don't Assume You're Out of the Woods

If your daughter is or becomes a recovered porn addict, it's crucial you do not assume that the struggle is gone for good. **It takes 90 days for the brain to rewire and ongoing accountability not to slide back into old habits.** What's more, living in recovery from addiction is a lifelong process. You should never assume your son or daughter's struggle is gone for good. We know of two addicts who were each sober for about 20 years before they relapsed. It's essential that your child practices healthy digital habits, no matter long they have been living a porn-free life.

Start with Yourself

Evaluate the media you consume as a family, and commit to not watching anything that sexualizes or objectifies people. Also, if you or your spouse are struggling with a porn addiction, you will not be able to give your child the help they need. Consider the ways these steps can be helpful in your own life, especially the recommendations to get counselling and join a local recovery program.

Seek Accountability in Community

The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection. Your child needs accountability within a community. This community must be trustworthy and it must be founded on honesty. It needs to be a safe place where people will not be shamed for their failures, but are willing to lovingly call each other out. Consider looking into a 12-step program in your area or seek out professional counseling. Some online resources we recommend, both for accountability and for gaining information, are:

- **Celebrate Recovery**—a 12-step program for people struggling with addiction.
- **RTribe**—an app for those who struggle with pain or addiction; provides accountability in community, as well as other resources.
- **Fortify**—web-based platform; provides online community for overcoming porn addiction.
- **Covenant Eyes**—online porn filter; accountability focus, extensive online articles.

HOW DO KIDS HIDE PORN?

Some people hide pornography on their computers by having misleading file names or by **encrypting their files**. They might conceal viewing porn online by looking for it in a private browsing mode. They might save it on their devices by using an app **designed to hide pictures**. Another option for concealing online activity is using a **virtual private network** (VPN) or an anonymous browser, such as **TOR**. Keep in mind that if your internet filter only filters your WiFi network, your kids could potentially bypass those restrictions by getting on your neighbor's network, public WiFi, or by using cellular data.



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HOW DOES PORN AFFECT THE BRAIN?

Sadly but not surprisingly, porn does an incredible amount of damage to its users and to those around them. Researchers have linked porn to increased depression, antisocial behavior, and promiscuity. It impacts the brain's prefrontal lobes, which govern a person's willpower. When **dopamine** (which regulates pleasure and reward in the brain) continually floods the brain as the result of compulsive porn use, the dopamine actually "reshapes" the prefrontal lobes and **causes the neural cells there to decrease.**

Because the human brain doesn't finish developing until the mid-20s, porn (or anything with addictive properties) is **particularly harmful to teenagers.** Young people are anywhere from two to four times more sensitive to dopamine than adults are. This means that addictions can take a much more powerful hold over teens than they can over adults. So when someone feels a helpless "need" to use porn and loses motivation in other areas of life, there are actually neurological reasons why. See Covenant Eyes' resource **[The Porn Circuit: Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits in 90 Days](#)** for a breakdown of the neurochemistry of how someone's brain gets addicted to porn.

Porn has also been linked to erectile dysfunction (ED) and **decreased sexual satisfaction in both males and females.** Research has shown that porn makes people more aggressive, narcissistic, and misogynistic. **People who consume porn** are less likely to marry and less likely to seek out sexual consent from their partners. They are more prone to be unfaithful to their partners and more likely to commit sexual crimes.

HOW DOES PORN IMPACT WOMEN?

In **[Pornhub's 2017 Year in Review](#)** (warning: these stats are on the Pornhub domain and are very disturbing), the website (one of the biggest porn sites in the world) proudly observes that the

number of searches for "porn for women" on its site is on the rise. Pornhub found that women make up roughly 26% of visitors to its site, pointing out that the number of female users on the site grew over the past year by 359%. Disturbingly, in Pornhub's analysis of the most popular search terms among men and women, "gangbang" was the seventh most searched term among women, but didn't even make it into the top 15 most popular searches among men.

Gail Dines describes meeting modern young women who are trying to date and are encountering men who think they should be able to treat their girlfriends the way women are treated in porn. These men think women expect and even enjoy being dominated or treated violently during sexual activity. This is shocking, but it really should not be that surprising when the vast majority of men in the U.S. are letting porn shape their vision for sexuality and relationships.

Because porn teaches women that they are sex objects, it follows that women who use porn experience **negative body image.** Women in porn are overly sexualized, their body parts exaggerated. If they are not outrageously beautiful (according to porn's standards), they have no value. Porn also causes women to feel more pressure to mimic pornographic scenarios in real life. Even though porn has been tied to making women more vulnerable to oppression, it also makes them more aggressive, both physically and verbally. Evidence shows that porn use leads to poor self-esteem, loneliness, and depression.

Not only does sexual abuse make women more vulnerable to using porn, but porn also makes women more vulnerable to experiencing sexual abuse. **Fight the New Drug** reports that female porn users between the ages of 14 and 19 "were at a significantly greater likelihood of being

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victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault.” This evidence makes sense because porn teaches its viewers that women enjoy sexual violence. Women are also **more likely to accept rape myths** and have sexual fantasies about rape if they view porn.

Porn use is **destructive to romantic relationships** and has been linked to a greater likelihood of affairs and higher divorce rates. Porn causes people to try out riskier sexual behavior, be more promiscuous, and to have earlier sexual debuts than they would have otherwise. Porn users are less likely to use condoms and are at a higher risk of STIs. Ironically, women experience less real-life sex with their partners as a result of viewing porn.

HOW DOES PORN IMPACT MEN?

Men in American culture are constantly bombarded with sexualized images of women, offering them a false sense of identity and purpose. Porn depicts men as strong, dominating, and detached. In porn, men are physically and sexually exaggerated (as are women, who only matter for their physical features). Women in porn are submissive and do whatever the men want. According to porn’s narrative, women enjoy being aggressively, sexually dominated, and they enjoy being objectified and used. They have an endless appetite for sex and never need or want to say “no.” And, if they do say “no,” it really means “yes.”

While men have the power over women in porn’s narrative (keep in mind we’re generalizing and not including every subgenre of porn), **men are also being objectified**. In adult content, men are valued mainly for the size of their genitalia and how long their erections last. So it shouldn’t be surprising that porn has been linked to poor male body image, and multiple studies have linked porn use to a decrease in sexual satisfaction and to erectile dysfunction (ED).

Data shows that porn affects a man’s personal relationships, as well as how he relates to society at large. The younger a boy is when he’s first exposed to porn, the more likely he is to want power over women. Because porn teaches men that women enjoy sexual violence, it’s logical that porn use increases male delinquency and criminal activity. Fraternity men who viewed porn were found to have a greater chance of committing rape if they thought no one would catch them. On the flip side, youth who view porn have been found to be more vulnerable to being victims of sexual abuse.

In addition, pornography causes anxiety in romantic relationships. There is a strong connection between pornography use and loneliness, as well as increased depression and poorer working memory in men. It hurts marriages and increases the likelihood of divorce. Porn users have a greater willingness to try out risky sexual behavior and have a greater likelihood of having affairs. Men who use porn actually experience less real sex with their partners. They are less likely to use condoms and are at a higher risk of STIs.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PORN AND SEX TRAFFICKING?

It would not be unusual for a young person today to be outraged at human trafficking, while at the same time seeing porn use as perfectly acceptable. But the truth is that porn and sex trafficking are inextricably linked.

Some people argue that porn allows them to have sexual release without involving another person, making porn a “safer” alternative to acting out sexually with someone in real life. But the research shows the opposite. In fact, porn users are **four times more likely** to patronize prostitutes.

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According to the NCSE: *An analysis of 101 sex buyers, compared to 100 men who did not buy sex, found that sex buyers masturbate to pornography more often than non-sex buyers, masturbate to more types of pornography, and reported that their sexual preferences changed so that they sought more sadomasochistic and anal sex. Other research also demonstrates an association between purchase of commercial sex acts and pornography use.*

themselves report that their clients are requesting them to enact the scenes their clients have seen when watching explicit content. There is also a direct connection between porn use and **violence against prostitutes.**

Additionally, the NCSE states that, “Pornography may meet the legal definition of trafficking to the extent that the pornographer recruits, entices, or obtains the people depicted in pornography for the purpose of photographing commercial sex acts.”

Christen Cappatt of the **Asservo Project** cites data that 70% of underage victims of sex trafficking have said that porn was made of them while they were in slavery. She notes that there is no way of knowing whether a porn actor or actress is participating voluntarily or was forced or pressured into those actions. **Rescue Freedom** reports an instance where a major porn star was in fact a victim of human trafficking, and the people creating the film were not aware of it.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Our Kids Online: Porn, Predators & How to Keep Them Safe](#)

Documentary

[Good Pictures, Bad Pictures](#)

by Kristen A. Jenson

[Bark](#)

An app for tracking texting and social media activity

[OpenDNS Family Shield](#)

An internet filtering solution

[“Keep Kids Safe! How Pornography will Target Your Kids in 2017”](#)

Protect Young Minds

[“The Terrible Cost Of Porn”](#)

The American Conservative

[Gail Dines](#)

Website

[“Growing Up in a Pornified Culture”](#)

(strong language)
TEDx Talk by Gail Dines

[“How to hide VR porn on your Gear VR”](#)

VRHeads

[Fight the New Drug](#)

Website

[RTribe](#)

Website

[Fortify](#)

Website

[Talking to teens about pornography](#)

Australian Government

[“Resource Hub: Parents”](#)

Novus Project

[Go for Greatness Facebook Page](#)

[The Protection Project: Journal of Human Rights and Civil Society](#)

Issue 5

[“Does the Porn Industry Use ‘Tobacco Industry Tactics’ to Hide the Dark Truth?”](#)

Fight the New Drug (FTND)

[The Porn Phenomenon: New Research of Global Importance](#)

Set Free Summit

[“The Great Tech Panic: the Inevitability of Porn”](#)

Wired

[“Fifty Shades of Grey: It doesn’t take a genius to realize that Christian Grey is a domestic abuser”](#)

Independent

[“Sex: Women ‘just as easily hooked on online porn as men’](#)

The Telegraph

[“True Story: I’m A 17-Year-Old Girl Who Struggles With Porn”](#)

FTND

[“Women’s Rape Fantasies: An Empirical Evaluation of the Major Explanations”](#)

Archives of Sexual Behavior

[Love People, Use Things](#)

Podcast

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The Porn Effect

Website

“The effects of pornography on children and young people”

The Australian Government

“How Pimps Recruit: Harmony’s Story”

Hope for the Sold

“Sex, Tech & Porn: A Shocking Look At What Teenagers Are Dealing With Today”

Fight the New Drug (FTND)

Heart to Heart Counseling Center

Colorado Springs

“How the Porn Industry Hijacks Natural Sexual Curiosity and Hooks Teens”

Fight the New Drug (FTND)

“6 Ways to Raise a Sex Addict”

Covenant Eyes

“Personal Pornography Viewing and Sexual Satisfaction: A Quadratic Analysis”

Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy

“18 Shocking Stats about the Porn Industry and its Underage Consumers”

Fight the New Drug (FTND)

“3 Real Guys Reveal How Giving Up Porn Changed Their Lives”

Fight the New Drug (FTND)

“HOPE’ Through a Men’s Accountability Group”

Shared Hope International

X3watch

Website