

Tips for Parents

Promoting Healthy Sexuality: Understanding the Effects of Pornography on Your Children

Raising sexually safe and healthy children is a key to preventing sexual abuse. Parents should not let the pornography industry be a primary sex educator of their children and must speak up, in their homes and in their communities. All children deserve a great childhood and exposure to any aspect of pornography gets in the way of that goal.

Exposure to pornography is harmful to children of all ages!

- Seeing unfamiliar looking bodies engaging in acts that a child cannot comprehend is a confusing and frightening experience for a child or adolescent.
- Children or adolescents may experience autonomic sexual arousal at the sight of pornography, which can confuse them into thinking they “like” what they see, when in fact their bodies are reacting instinctively without the “approval” of their brain.
- Children and adolescents can become “de-sensitized” to pornography exposure and this can result in acting out sexualized behaviors with other children and engaging in high-risk sexual experiences by adolescents.
- Adults who choose to view adult pornography have an obligation to ensure that children cannot possibly access it. Lockup written material, clear browsers, and use every technological resources possible. Use of adult pornography or other sexually explicit materials in a home should never be accessible to children.

Share positive and accurate information with your children:

- Parents can make a vast and positive difference by talking with their children. Like sexuality education in general, the topic of pornography is not one big talk but rather a series of discussions that easily can arise from the content of songs, music videos, video games, movies and unintended or intended exposure to sexually explicit images.
- Parents can clearly state the values they expect to be shown in their family, and help children clarify their own values to help guide behavior. For example, a parent might say, “In our family, we always treat people with respect. There is no respect being shown in these images”.
- Parents and other caring adults need to be able to talk about the impact of hyper-sexualized media in general, and pornography specifically, with children/teens. They can help children develop their media literacy to analyze what they are seeing rather than simply consuming it without question.
- Parents talk with their children about a wide variety of safety concerns from fire to cars, from storms to drugs. They can also talk about the dangers of hyper-sexualized media and pornography. Unfortunately, there is a plentiful supply of teachable moments when listening to music, watching ads, movies, TV shows or video games.

- Parents can acknowledge the pressure some children feel to get attention. Our culture communicates that hyper-sexuality gets attention; children can see plenty of sexually explicit pictures of famous people. They see such images get “likes” on social networking sites and they may be pressured by peers or strangers soliciting on-line to post such images of themselves. They often believe that sharing these images is far more private or controllable than it is.
- Parents can help children stand up to the pressure to produce sexualized images and to think about the consequences of asking other youth for them. Discuss betrayal of trust and legal consequences when producing what could be categorized as “child pornography.”
- Parents can set limits for their children as they are learning to make responsible choices for themselves, including limiting exposure to harmful content, and have proactive discussions that help children make decisions about what they post through social media or webcams.
- Parents can help their children develop a critical eye when viewing media, so they see the lies, and differentiate that fiction from the joy in loving equitable and respectful relationships.

Take a stand in your community:

- If “strip clubs” are accepted as established and harmless businesses and yet the community is also invested in the prevention of sex trafficking, calling attention to the links and risks to the community can help draw attention to this inherent conflict of interest.
- If there are billboards or advertisements that appear to be sexually exploitive of children, write opinion editorials (“op-eds”), ideally signed by your faith-based or social organization in partnership with others, to point out the normalization of sexual harm and the clash with the investment in local prevention efforts.
- If a local business or national chain carries products or uses advertisements that hypersexualize children or underplays the risks related to child sexual abuse or exploitation, speak out by using complaint cards, either paper or on-line, to register your concerns and consider posting a picture of the product or advertisement so others are aware and can add their concerns.
- Social media can be an excellent way to call attention to problematic messages. Share your anger and name the companies that sexualize children in their marketing through your social media accounts or issue calls to action to like-minded parents in parenting blogs.

Parents can provide the information and support for children to grow-up able to have loving and healthy relationships. Help them see that pornography use doesn’t offer them the practice, insight or pathway they need toward loving, caring connections.

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