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Pornography

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A P A R E N T ' S
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Understanding the Porn Threat

axis

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**Pornography is a social toxin that
destroys relationships,
steals innocence,
erodes compassion,
breeds violence,
and *kills love.***

—Pornography and Public Health: Research Summary
by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation

If We Don't Disciple Our Kids about Sexuality, Porn Will Do It for Us

There are few cultural issues more pressing than the problem of pornography. Though extremely damaging to us, porn appeals to powerful urges that God created as good. Sexually explicit material has always been a cultural pitfall, but the internet and smartphones have provided unprecedented access to it.

Meanwhile, the nature of porn and our cultural attitudes toward it have shifted significantly over the past several decades. Material that used to be understood as pornographic is now almost quaint. And while it's refreshing that [various popular celebrities](#) are speaking out about the destructive nature of porn, society as a whole has widely accepted pornography as normal and/or healthy.

This Guide focuses on the general problem of porn in our culture. It should be read first of these 3 guides on porn, followed by the one specifically aimed at women, then the one aimed at men. Know from the outset that you might find some of the information in these guides disturbing. We have done our best to include only what we think you need to know to be aware of extent of the problem of porn so that you can more effectively protect your children and yourself.

— What's porn like these days?

Despite the countless forms it takes, Merriam Webster provides a simple but accurate [definition of pornography](#): “The depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement.” If we sift through our culture looking for imagery or content that is designed to make people think about sex, then it's fairly obvious that our culture is becoming increasingly “pornified.” That is, qualities and behaviors that have been typically associated with porn are becoming more and more acceptable in mainstream culture.

The [National Center on Sexual Exploitation](#) (NCSE) observes:

The pornification of culture (i.e. softcore, hypersexualized imagery) is widespread and evident everywhere, from the grocery store checkout lane to advertising, popular entertainment, unsolicited email, and beyond. It's becoming increasingly difficult—if not impossible—to live a porn-free life.

While our above definition of porn seems fairly straightforward, today's teens and young adults likely have a blurry definition of what exactly it is. For example, people have traditionally referred to porn as being either “softcore” or “hardcore,” and to some extent this terminology still holds. But in the documentary [Over 18](#), anti-porn activist and sociology professor Gail Dines observes that this distinction is becoming less and less relevant.

Softcore porn typically refers to partial or full nudity and “suggestive” situations, whereas hardcore porn refers to graphic depictions of sex, including intercourse. But now, what people would have understood as being softcore porn has simply become part of our culture. Modern pornography is hardcore by definition. So whereas older generations likely perceive *Playboy*, *Hustler*, and *Penthouse* as being pornographic, newer generations of porn users might not even think of these magazines as being

pornographic at all. The **mainstream** pornography that people encounter 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.

If today's teens and young adults perceive softcore porn as being normal, they are likely consuming pornographic content in their media without recognizing it as such. And the rest of us might not be aware of how the norms of porn are influencing our culture. For example, in the summer of 2017, fashion magazine *Teen Vogue* ran an article instructing readers on [how to have anal sex](#). And while it's common for male musical artists to objectify women in their songs, even female artists objectify themselves and other women. We've gone from a time when networks wouldn't air a TV show showing couples sleeping in the same bed to a time when the most popular series contain graphic nudity (e.g. HBO's highly popular *Game of Thrones* or the newer Netflix show *Altered Carbon*).

— What do teens and young adults think about porn?

A few years ago, Josh McDowell partnered with Barna Group to do a study called [The Porn Phenomenon](#). They discovered a key generational difference in how people see porn use, namely that younger people for the most part view it as normal:

Teens and young adults are living in an environment where porn is more acceptable—and more ubiquitous than ever before. As access to pornography has increased, the stigma toward it has seemingly decreased. There is just a general assumption that people are using porn—especially among teens and young adults. And this assumption is not a negative one. When it comes to watching pornography, teens and young adults aren't getting accountability from their friends—they are getting peer pressure.

Barna found that **young people are much more likely to see failing to recycle as more morally reprehensible than using porn**. As far as Christians go, on average only 16% of Christians are actively trying to stop using porn, compared to 9% of non-Christians.

The industry's revenue and online traffic tell us a lot about how much people are viewing porn. It's a global industry, which, according to [data reported in 2015](#), nets around \$97 billion per year worldwide. An estimated \$12 billion of this money comes from the United States. Keep in mind that these estimates are a few years old and are only of traceable porn, so they are probably conservative. When it comes to the internet, [30% of the information online](#) is pornographic content. Put another way, **porn sites get more traffic than that of Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined**.

— Where do people find porn?

The days of kids seeking out and sneaking in smutty magazines are long gone. Instead, pornography is out to find them. Online porn is obviously a huge concern for parents, but let's not forget about the other ways kids can encounter it.

Around a third of people online encounter porn [through pop-ups and ads](#). Some encounter it through [receiving and opening a link](#) that they were not aware went to a

pornographic site. Certain video games [contain pornographic content](#) (and even “safe” video games might show explicit ads). A child could accidentally pull up porn when doing a Google search for something else.

One woman we talked to saw a graphic image on Twitter simply because a pornographic account followed her and had that image in the profile. She blocked and reported the account, but she had already seen the image simply from that user following her. In a separate instance, searching “#california” on Instagram brought up images with nudity. Snapchat is another problematic social media platform because their Stories feature often promotes sexual content (e.g. cleavage “battles” between celebrities).

And yes, kids can still encounter porn offline, such as through cable TV or magazines. If your kids’ friends have access to porn somehow, your children might be exposed through them. [Protect Young Minds outlines](#) several situations in which porn might find kids unaware, as well as measures parents can take to protect their children in those situations. A few notable scenarios are:

- Grandparents’ house
- Sleepovers
- The school bus
- While babysitting

We think it’s worth noting the most common avenues through which people are currently seeking out porn. Pornhub (possibly the largest porn site on the internet) has an exhaustive list of statistics about its users in its [2017 Year in Review](#) [*warning: Pornhub stats are not inappropriate, but they are on the Pornhub domain and are still very disturbing*]. They found that the main devices people use to access its site are smartphones and tablets.

Computers (desktop and laptop) now comprise less than 25% of all of Pornhub’s traffic. The most popular browser for viewing porn on Pornhub is Google Chrome. Pornhub also notes how much traffic it got through gaming consoles such as the ones made by Nintendo, Xbox, and Playstation. **Please note** that if you’ve gotten internet filtering software for your computers and smartphones, but have neglected your gaming consoles, these are potential inlets for porn.

———— **When do people encounter porn?**

People disagree slightly about the average age of exposure to pornography. The creators of *Over 18* cite it as age 12, noting that this means that for every 15-year-old who is exposed, a 9-year-old is exposed as well. Others put the [average age at 11](#), while some say it is [as young as 8](#). Whether or not eight-years-old is the actual average age, eight-year-olds are most certainly at risk of finding porn.

Almost all men and a majority of women are at least exposed to porn by the time they are adults. [One study done in 2008](#) of 560 college students found that 62% of girls and 93% of boys encountered porn by the time they were 18 (and that was 10 years ago!). Protect Young Minds says that 10% of visitors to porn sites [are younger than 10 years old](#). [Covenant Eyes reports](#) that 64% of men and 15% of women who are self-identified

Christians look at porn at least once a month. **Sadly, it's rarer for [people in Generation Z](#) (i.e. [those born around or after the turn of the century](#)) not to have seen porn than it is for them to have seen it.**

———— **How does porn affect users?**

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 even causes [changes in the brain](#), following the same patterns as other addictive substances. Porn has also been linked to sexual dysfunction and decreased sexual satisfaction.

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. We go into greater detail on the impact of porn on men and women in the related guides in this bundle.

———— **What's 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.** People who use porn are actually more prone to purchase prostitutes. 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.

In fact, porn users are [four times more likely](#) to patronize prostitutes. Prostitutes 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.”

[When we interviewed](#) Christen Cappatt of the [Asservo Project](#), she cited 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.

———— **How do people rationalize using porn?**

It's Private, So It's Not Hurting Anyone

One of the most common justifications by far for porn use being ok is that because it's private, it's not hurting anyone. We disagree with the underlying assumption in that statement, which is that actions are right or wrong based on whether we believe they will hurt people. But when people make this argument, it's usually because they don't perceive any harm taking place. We might not be able to see the damage our actions are causing, but real harm could still be occurring.

For example, we could indulge in lust in our hearts and say it's fine because we're not acting on our desires by having an affair. But whether we recognize it or not, that sin still impacts every part of our lives, such as our ability to worship God and be in healthy relationships with those closest to us. **Moral values are not determined by what we think hurts people, but are rooted in who God is:** just, merciful, and loving. We must base our morality on God's character, not on our subjective perception of what is hurting us and those around us. ***Porn is objectively wrong because it violates God's character and the rules He gave to protect our flourishing.***

And as we've already noted, porn does hurt its users. It makes them depressed, aggressive, and less empathetic toward women, and it has been linked to sexual dysfunction in both men and women. And as we [have pointed out elsewhere](#), porn is not merely an outlet for sexual desire, but an inlet as well. It increases people's sexual appetites and becomes less satisfying over time.

The Actors Are Participating Voluntarily

This reason is irrelevant. Even if male and female porn stars are participating in porn voluntarily, to watch them is still to take part in their degradation and to treat them as less than human. But again, porn users have no way of knowing whether or not the people—the actresses in particular—are participating voluntarily. A woman in a video might be willingly employed as a porn star, or she might be a victim of human trafficking.

Even if porn actresses are not being trafficked, it's more than possible they are being pressured into doing something they feel uncomfortable with but are tolerating anyway. If you can, we recommend watching the [Over 18 documentary](#) we referenced earlier. It provides a glimpse into the effects of the industry on two female porn stars who were very popular at one time and who joined the industry willingly.

Porn Is Educating Me About Sex

Many people turn to porn to fill in gaps in their sexual education. But porn shows an exaggerated, unrealistic depiction of sex, something that people in the adult film industry admit themselves in their interviews for Over 18. In addition, porn only shows us the physical aspect of sex and ignores the emotional, mental, and spiritual impact it has on those involved (which, in turn, simply highlights the need for Christian parents to be more open and willing to teach kids about healthy, God-honoring sex

starting at young ages. See our upcoming “[Parent’s Guide to the Sex Talk](#)” for more on that.)

It’s Free, So I’m Not Supporting the Porn Industry

It’s easy to see how someone would think this statement is true, but it most definitely is not. When people watch porn, whether it’s free or paid, they are supporting the industry by fueling the demand for porn. If people browse a free pornographic website, [they are increasing its traffic and popularity](#)—and therefore its profits. So even people who don’t pay for porn online are supporting the industry in a real way.

———— **Can’t I just block all porn using strong filters?**

If a computer has no internet filters, all someone has to do to watch porn is type “porn” (or “naked” or “boobs” or similar terms) into any search engine. It’s a free-for-all. So yes, filters do close the floodgates and make it harder to access, especially for younger kids to stumble upon something they can’t even understand. **BUT no filter is an adequate substitute for parents talking often and openly about pornography and its lies.**

Certain internet filters are more effective than others at blocking porn. Look for filters that can handle HTTPS sites, are browser independent, and will not be fooled by anonymous proxies. If you have internet-aware devices that you can’t install filtering software on, such as gaming consoles or iPods, we recommend [OpenDNS Home](#), which has a solid free version that filters all devices connected to your network. We also like [Covenant Eyes](#) because of its focus on personal accountability specifically when it comes to porn. (See our “[Parent’s Guide to Internet Filtering & Monitoring](#)” for help figuring out what’s best for your family.) But again, no matter what filters we opt for, **we cannot rely solely on parental controls to protect our kids from porn.**

If our children want to watch porn, they will find ways to get around our filters (check out “[10 Easy Ways Kids Can Beat Internet Filters](#)” for more on this). Even if they don’t have any interest in porn, it’s possible that porn might slip through the cracks, simply as a fluke or the result of human error. A child could accidentally encounter a pornographic magazine at a friend’s house or by being sent images through chat on a kid-friendly video game or on a chat platform like Discord. We simply don’t know where they might encounter it. So internet filters, while helpful, are not sufficient in and of themselves to combat this issue.

———— **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. Again, see our parent guide on internet filters for more information.

— How can I tell if my kids are looking at porn?

Protect Young Minds says there are several [signs you can look for](#) in your children's behavior to indicate that they might be viewing porn:

- **Clearing their browser histories.** Clearing the history doesn't mean in and of itself that your kids have been looking at porn, but this behavior is suspicious enough that it's worth looking into it.
- **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. Even if your kids aren't looking at porn, being on their devices right before going to bed is a bad habit.
- **Spending a lot of time in the bathroom on their devices.** Really, if you see your kids shutting themselves off anywhere with their devices for periods of time, that's a warning sign.
- **Changing their screens when you come around.** Again, why would they need to do this unless they are trying to hide something?
- **Acting more moody, irritable, depressed, or aggressive.** Watch out for noticeable changes in behavior or if your kids are no longer interested in activities they used to love. Also be aware that porn can be a major factor in causing child-on-child sexual abuse.

— What else can I do to protect my kids from porn?

We can't say this enough: The most important step you can take as you raise your kids is to pray for them. We know of a mom who prayed that if her son were viewing porn, then God would let her find out about it, which is exactly what happened.

Pursue relationships with your kids. Get to know them, and build trust with them. Make sure they know how much you love them. If you invest in them, you earn the right to talk with them about personal issues like porn use. [Psychologist Dr. Patricia M. Greenfield says](#), "A warm and communicative parent-child relationship is the most important factor [in reducing porn use among children]."

We need to have conversations with our kids about sex and about porn **early and often. We cannot afford to think we're going to have "the talk" with them one time when they're about 10 years old.** Many kids are encountering porn before age 10.

The common argument against preparing kids for encountering porn is that raising the subject with them will make them curious and want to seek it out. It is possible that raising the issue of porn could make our kids curious about it. But we can forestall this possibility by being wise about how we have these conversations.

In their "SMART Guide for Parents," [Protect Young Minds says](#) that the following

strategies will help prevent children from seeking out information about porn on their own:

- Make sure they know you are completely open to any follow-up questions they might have.
- Make sure they know the internet is a dangerous place to go looking for answers about porn.
- Regularly follow up with them on this topic.
- Have frequent family discussions on media safety.

The risk of our kids encountering porn is so great that if we remain silent about it, we surrender our opportunity to shape our kids' perspectives on sexuality. Instead, we allow the culture to do so. See Protect Young Minds' "[5 Reasons You Should Initiate Your Kid's Curiosity about Porn \(Before Someone Else Does!\)](#)" for more.

So how do we prepare our children for encountering porn when they are too young to even understand what sex is? First, [this article](#) from Seattle Christian Counseling describes the typical sexual curiosity and behavior of children at different age levels so that we can formulate appropriate strategies based on their ages.

Next, we must consider what we would do to protect our children from sexual predators. If they are old enough to talk and to understand what their private parts are, we can have a basic conversation with them about how no one should be touching them there. If someone does or asks to, we have to make sure our children know to tell us immediately and not be afraid that we'll be angry with them. However, the best way to protect them from physical predators is our presence and our knowledge of where they are when they are not in our presence.

It's quite possible to have similar conversations with younger children about the internet without being too explicit. If they ever see someone's private parts online, they need a strategy. Make sure they know to tell you and not be afraid or ashamed. If they ever view something that scares or disturbs them, they can tell you about it. No strategy is fail-safe, but at least you can open the door to talking about pornography with your young children without being graphic. What's more, you can do so at an age when they're more open to talking to you than they will be in their teenage years.

Nevertheless, as early as possible, we have to talk to our children about what healthy expressions of sexuality look like and educate them on the potential that porn has to harm people. **We need to start these conversations on some level as early as 6- to 8-years-old, if not sooner.** One tool you might look into for starting these discussions with your kids is the book [Good Pictures, Bad Pictures, Jr.](#) by Kristen A. Jenson, which is a resource for talking to 3- to 6-year-olds about porn in an age-appropriate way. Also, check out [this resource from the Australian government](#) about how to talk to children under eight about porn.

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 and we then broach the topic of porn with them after they're already teenagers, it's extremely unlikely that they will be open with us. If they are viewing porn at that point, they will probably just lie to us about it.

It's easy to be tempted to hide our own failings so that we don't lose credibility with

our kids. But being dishonest or inauthentic is what will actually cause us to lose credibility with our kids. None of us is immune to sexual temptation because none of us is immune to our fallen nature. 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. Your stories of overcoming temptation can also be a great encouragement to them. Communicate how much you love them and that you don't want them to be hurt.

When Queen Esther had a request to make of the Persian king that would affect all of the Jewish people, she and the Jews fasted and prayed for three days before she approached him. Take these conversations with your kids seriously enough that you prepare with prayer and even fasting, if you feel so led.

Here are some **questions to consider raising with older kids**:

- How would you define porn? 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?
- Why is porn so appealing to people? What good part of God's creation is porn twisting and corrupting?
- Do you believe that God's vision for sexuality is really more beautiful and desirable than porn's?
- Can people struggle with lust without looking at porn? What does it look like to struggle with lust? How do you know if you've crossed the line from sexual attraction into lust?
- People often masturbate while viewing porn. Is masturbation wrong? Why or why not? Support your answer from a biblical framework.
- What can you do to protect yourself from giving into lust or looking at porn? (Parents, 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?

Conversation is huge, but there is more we can do to protect our kids from porn. It's essential that we model healthy marriage for our kids whenever possible. Apart from culture, the main place they will get their vision for male-female relationships is from the example we set for them.

Set healthy boundaries in your family, especially when it comes to technology. Participate in a community that provides accountability with vulnerability and trust. Educate your children on the impact of porn on those who view it and on those who don't. Serve the victims of the porn and sex trafficking industries. And above all, don't give up.

Conclusion

We could say much more on this sobering topic. Yet despite all of the discouraging news out there about porn, Barna's editor-in-chief Roxanne Stone [points us toward hope](#): "The porn phenomenon is not a time for apocalyptic and hysterical rhetoric, but an opportunity to advance the life-giving messages of the gospel." The best tactic for overcoming the power of porn is offering the much better and more fulfilling vision for sex, sexuality, relationships, and flourishing that is found only through Christ. We have to give our children something better to strive for and work toward (real love, good sex, abundant life, healthy relationships, God's glory), not just tell them what to avoid (porn, lust, trafficking, exploitation, unfulfilling sex).

We are all sexually broken on some level, and God's grace is sufficient for all of our brokenness, no matter how deep it goes. If you are addressing this issue with your children, you are already miles ahead of many parents out there. Rely on the Father for your strength, and don't give up.

Additional Resources

["Keep Kids Safe! How Pornography will Target Your Kids in 2017,"](#) Protect Young Minds
["The Terrible Cost Of Porn,"](#) *The American Conservative*
[Hope for the Sold](#) [website]
[Gail Dines](#) [website]
[Porn Fact Sheets](#), Set Free Summit
["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]
[Covenant Eyes Blog](#)
[RTribe](#) [website]
[Fortify](#) [website]
[Pure Desire Ministries](#)
["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?"](#) FTND
[The Porn Phenomenon: New Research of Global Importance](#), Set Free Summit
["The Great Tech Panic: the Inevitability of Porn,"](#) *Wired*
["The effects of pornography on children and young people,"](#) the Australian Government
["Parent Resource: Internet Safety,"](#) Shared Hope
["How Pimps Recruit: Harmony's Story,"](#) Hope for the Sold
["When Your Kids Look at Porn,"](#) Authentic Intimacy
["Masturbation: Is It Wrong?"](#) Authentic Intimacy
["A Challenge from the Song of Solomon,"](#) Authentic Intimacy
["The Importance of Sexual Discipleship™"](#) Authentic Intimacy

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Talking to Girls about Porn

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#TimesUp on Culture's Message That Female Objectification Is Empowerment

“Society’s stereotype is all wrong when it comes to this issue. It’s time for society to finally come to the realization that porn is no longer just ‘a guy thing.’

With the increased availability of internet porn in the last decade, women are becoming just as active on XXX sites as men. This isn’t just a guy problem. It’s a human problem.” — [Fight the New Drug](#)

Male porn use certainly takes a heavy toll on women, but it’s a serious mistake to think that pornography is a “guy’s problem.” While research shows that more men than women view porn, [female porn use is on the rise](#), particularly among young adults and teenagers. [According to Fight the New Drug](#), “Probably one of the biggest and longest-held myths in our society is that it is normal for guys to watch porn, and included in that false belief is the idea that girls don’t watch porn.”

It’s crucial that we talk to our daughters about pornography. Even if they don’t struggle with looking at porn themselves (and we shouldn’t assume they don’t or won’t merely because they are female), they are living in an increasingly pornified culture. They are surrounded by the lies that porn is telling women about their sexuality. It is quite possible they struggle with lust and other sexual temptations aside from porn. And the chances are extremely high that they will date and/or marry a man who has struggled with a porn addiction. It is important that we prepare them for that reality and help them navigate it well.

— Don’t women mainly like erotica?

When many people think about women using porn, they assume most of them are reading steamy novels. Erotic stories do tend to be a type of porn that appeals to women, as the highly popular [50 Shades of Grey trilogy](#) demonstrates. *50 Shades* is a series of erotic romance novels featuring a sadomasochistic relationship. The books, commonly dubbed “mommy porn,” have been made into three movies.

Despite the growing number of women who are viewing porn online, we think it’s worth acknowledging that women do tend to be drawn to sexual content framed within the context of romance, something we might call “emotional porn.” When we say women are drawn to “emotional porn,” we mean they derive pleasure from romantic and sexual feelings that should only happen between two people within the intimacy of marriage. Emotional porn awakens romantic, sexual desires separate from a real-life situation and portrays sexual love in an [unrealistic and impossibly fulfilling light](#).

While physical objectification tends to be more of a temptation for men, we could argue that emotional objectification is (generally) a greater temptation for women. Women need to guard themselves, not only against sexual fantasies but also against only valuing men for what they can do for them romantically. If a woman forms patterns of thinking about men as a way of fulfilling her romantic desires, she is building habits for how she perceives all men, i.e., as a means to an end. Both physical and emotional objectification are selfish. Both treat people as objects instead of as human beings.

— What is culture telling women?

One of the major points in our “Parent’s Guide to Understanding the Porn Threat” is that culture is being “pornified.” Behaviors and scenarios once only acceptable within porn are becoming normalized in pop culture. Women are getting the message through countless avenues that objectifying themselves sexually is empowering. One example is Beyonce’s performance at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards. Her performance included stripper-inspired dancing, as well as a feminist quote that said that women are sexual beings. This message is extremely confusing, particularly because of its partial truths.

More recently, Christina Aguilera collaborated with Demi Lovato on female empowerment anthem “[Fall in Line](#),” a beautiful song about not giving in to others’ standards (“You are not beholden / You do not owe them / Your body and your soul”). This was released just after another of her singles, “[Accelerate](#),” which is full of sexual innuendo (and whose music video is highly sexualized).

Additionally, women are bombarded by the same hypersexualized images that men are. But the message women are getting is that they need to be like the women in those images. They need to be physically beautiful (according to a culture’s arbitrary standards). If a man does not desire them sexually, then they are not valuable. If guys don’t ask to see their nude pictures, don’t want to date them, or don’t want to sleep with them, then they are unworthy in some way. (Note: The topic of pornography is closely related to that of sexting, so check out our “[Parent’s Guide to Sexting](#)” for more.)

It’s ironic that the popularity of *50 Shades* has roughly coincided with the #MeToo campaign, which is helping draw awareness to sexual abuse. Anti-porn website Fight the New Drug [recently featured a quiz](#) where users could read passages that were either excerpts from *50 Shades* or were #MeToo posts. The two are disturbingly similar. This juxtaposition highlights the deep hypocrisy of what our culture is communicating to women.

Anti-porn advocate [Gail Dines describes a conversation](#) she had with a convicted child rapist [*warning: the linked video contains strong language and disturbing content*]. Sexual predators often “groom” their potential victims, i.e., they prepare them to receive a sexual offense. The child rapist told Dines that he really didn’t have to do much to groom his victims because “the culture did a lot of the grooming for me.” Dines also quotes a pornographer who observes that culture is preparing women for porn, causing girls to “come to the set porn-ready.”

— What is porn telling women?

If culture tells women that they are sexual objects, porn heightens the intensity of this message. 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 typically portrays men as dominating and women as submissive. So you might think that the message women get from porn is that they need to debase themselves and be extremely submissive. However, the message porn is actually communicating

to women is consistent with the one that culture is giving them: Sex is power. It might look like submission, but according to porn's narrative, the beauty and desirability of women is the key to having power and control.

—— What's the current state of female exposure to porn?

The [National Center on Sexual Exploitation \(NCSE\) reports](#) that “teenage girls and young women are significantly more likely to actively seek out porn than women 25 years old and above.” Almost half of women who are young adults [see using porn as normal](#). 62% of women have been exposed to porn by the time they are 18 years old. [Another study of women](#) who were college-aged found that over half of them had encountered sexually graphic content by the time they were 14.

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.

—— So why do women watch porn?

1. Accident and Curiosity

Jason Dean, founder of and counselor at the United Kingdom's main porn counseling service, says that [both male and female porn addiction](#) follow the same basic patterns. Men and women are exposed somehow, become addicted, and then search for increasingly graphic content. One difference, however, is that women tend to feel much guiltier than men do.

Singer and songwriter Audrey Assad (b. 1983) has spoken publicly about her own experience as a porn addict before God set her free. We highly recommend checking out one of her talks [here](#). Assad ran across porn accidentally when she saw it on TV in her parents' basement. Her curiosity piqued, she continued watching it for two years even as she was highly involved in her church.

2. It's Addictive

Porn has a powerful impact on the brain. It releases a dopamine rush and has an effect similar to that of [other addictive substances](#). A key reason, therefore, why women watch porn is because of its addictive properties. The [NCSE reports](#):

Researchers...extrapolated that, when compared to those addicted to gambling or drugs, problematic pornography users experience more powerful and faster conditioning to anything associated with their use (computer, being alone, pop-ups, etc.).

The power of porn to cause an addictive habit is such that women might continue

watching it, not because they want to so much as it's just what they do at particular times or in certain places.

3. No One Is Discipling Women About Sex

Silence about sex and porn increases the likelihood that women will fall prey to sexual addiction or sexual abuse. Despite its lies, culture is right about this: Women are sexual beings, and their sexuality is powerful. **Women need mentors to acknowledge, validate, and steward this aspect of their natures.** But many churches don't talk about sex at all, apart from communicating that sex is for marriage and that women are supposed to be pure outside of it.

Culture, on the other hand, is constantly talking to women about what their sexuality is and how to use it. Assad believes that her struggle with porn was severely compounded by the fact that her church never talked about sex. It was also harmful that, when she heard authority figures talk about porn, they always assumed that only men struggled with it. To make matters worse, Assad had virtually no sexual education as she entered puberty, so she didn't have terminology for understanding sex, her own body, or much less pornography.

4. Coping with Trauma, Wired for Intimacy

One of the reasons why people develop addictions to drugs or alcohol is because they turn to those substances to deal with trauma, shame, or failures in their lives. People turn to porn for the same reasons. If girls or women are experiencing pain in real life, porn offers them a fantasy where they can escape and where they are accepted. It provides a type of outlet, a way of dealing with pain if they are not dealing with it well for some reason. Porn use can also simply be a response to boredom.

In our "Parent's Guide to Talking to Boys about Porn," we note that culture's portrayal of men as strong and stoic can make them vulnerable to using porn because they have no emotional outlets. Assad believes that something similar set her up for porn use. For various reasons, she learned from a young age not to open up emotionally or personally. This set her up to struggle in isolation with her addiction.

As [Dr. Juli Slattery points out](#), women are oriented for relationships. Women want to be seen, loved, and found beautiful. Pornographic stories like *50 Shades* offer women the ability to indirectly experience being desired and being pursued, even if in a twisted way. For a woman who is lonely and longing to feel loved, it can be easy to justify consuming such books or movies, especially since that content is "not affecting" anyone else.

6. Sexual Abuse

Culture tells us that the more sexually liberated a woman is, the more empowered she will be. But even *Vice* magazine, in its article, "Why Are So Many Women Searching for Ultra-Violent Porn?" suggests it is troubling that so many women are viewing porn that portrays violence against women [Note: we have deliberately not linked to this article because of the inappropriate images within it.].

[This study](#) on the relationship between porn and violence against women found the following:

Female students exposed to family psychological violence and to sexual violence were significantly more likely to watch pornography, especially violent pornography, than those

who had not been exposed. No such association was found among male students.

There seems to be a connection between sexual abuse and porn use, specifically with women. While this is worth noting, it's just one of the reasons why women watch porn.

———— **How does porn impact the women who watch it?**

It Affects Them Physically

As we observed, porn affects people in the same ways as other addictive substances. Porn use 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](#). So when someone feels a helpless "need" to use porn and loses motivation in other areas of life, there are actually neurological reasons why.

Because the human brain doesn't finish developing until the mid-20s, [young women are especially susceptible](#) to becoming addicted to porn. 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. While there has been a lot of evidence showing the connection between porn and erectile dysfunction, porn use has also been tied to [lower sexual performance and satisfaction in women](#).

See Covenant Eyes' resource [The Porn Circuit: Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits in 90 Days](#) for a breakdown of the neurochemistry of porn addiction.

It Affects Them Psychologically

Because porn teaches women that they are sex objects, it follows that women who use porn [experience negative body image](#). 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.

Porn even leads to a greater likelihood that the user will question his or her sexual values and orientation. Audrey Assad says that even though she wasn't attracted to women in real life, she was aroused by watching the women in porn perform sexual acts. So when she was viewing porn, she questioned her sexual orientation.

It Increases the Likelihood of Sexual Victimization

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 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.

It Destroys Relationships

[Porn damages romantic relationships](#). It's destructive to marriages 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.

— What can I do to help my daughter(s) not fall prey to porn?

Invest in Your Marriage and Your Family

Your daughters will get their first lesson on the relationships between men and women based on your marriage/relationship. It's crucial that you are actively investing in having a loving and godly marriage (if possible).

In an interview, Christian speaker and author [John Eldredge observes](#) that research shows that fathers are the ones who most strongly shape gender identity in their children. And the key question all women are asking is, "Will I be chosen?" At their core, our daughters want to be seen and cherished for who they are. Fathers, are you emotionally distant from your daughters or do you spend time getting to know them, telling them you love them, and telling them they are worthy of unconditional love? Girls are getting the message over and over again that their beauty is physical and depends on certain standards. Do you tell your daughters they are beautiful even when they are not dressed up? Do you make it clear that what you mean is they are beautiful for who they are, not just for how they look? When you see your daughters successfully living out their femininity, say by trusting in the Lord during difficult circumstances, encouraging others, or by showing strength of character, do you affirm those qualities and praise their inner beauty?

Moms, your daughters need your love and affection as well, and they need for you to vulnerably live out what it means to be a godly woman. We know one woman whose mother habitually sought God through Bible study, prayer, and fasting all throughout the daughter's childhood. When the daughter was an appropriate age, her mother told her about her past, including her sexual brokenness. The mother shared the lessons God taught her as she healed from those experiences (which took a long time). Even in the daughter's adulthood, her mother is still persevering in her faith and still wrestling honestly before God. She's simply working through her personal challenges and doesn't see herself as doing anything particularly special. But her example is a significant testimony to her daughter of how to authentically seek the Lord.

Does your family have a culture of love or is it performance-based? Do your daughters know that, no matter how much they fail, your love for them will never go away? Or do they think your love is based on their behavior? Even if you know that your love is unconditional, your daughters need to repeatedly hear and see that from you. Are you pursuing relationships with your daughters? If you don't have relationships based on love and trust, they will not feel safe sharing their personal struggles with you.

A note about sexual abuse. Sexual abuse does not mean your daughters are going to

turn to porn, nor does using porn automatically mean your daughters will be sexually abused. However, given the evidence pointing to a connection between the two among females, it would be wise to be extra vigilant about porn addiction if your daughter has ever been abused. If she has, we strongly recommend getting professional counseling if you are not already seeking it.

Recognize That Women Are in Prison Alone

People widely recognize that men struggle with lust, but tend not to think it's an important subject to address with women. This ignorance puts women at a significant disadvantage because they lack the accountability and support that men often have. Audrey Assad uses the analogy of a prison and says, "Men are in jail together." Men might be in the jail cell of sexual bondage, but they are supporting each through their situation. Women are in the same prison, but they are in solitary confinement. [One trained counselor](#) "calls women's addiction to pornography 'widespread and silent.'"

Bear in mind that, while this guide is on porn, it is completely possible to struggle with sexual fantasies and masturbation without ever looking at porn. No matter what, your daughters need you to disciple them about their sexuality.

Don't Just Have "the Talk," but Many Talks

We cannot afford to have just one "sex talk" with our daughters. We need to have ongoing conversations as they grow up on sexuality, lust, what it means to be a woman, and so on. See our the first guide in this bundle for how to talk about sex in age appropriate ways. Following are some ideas for questions you might discuss with your older daughters, always remembering that **these conversations must take place in the context of much prayer and [a trusting relationship](#).**

Discussion Questions

- What do you think it means to be a woman?
- What are some of culture's messages about what it means to be a woman?
- What do your male and female friends think it means to be a woman?
- What guidance does the Bible provide about being a woman?
- What does porn say it means to be a woman? What is porn's vision for a woman's purpose and identity?
- What is porn teaching you about men?
- Do you know the data that shows how porn affects women?
- All persuasive lies have some truth in them. What are the truths about men and women that porn is twisting?
- How does porn's vision compare with God's vision for His children, and for women specifically?
- Do you believe that God is calling you to a better story than porn's/culture's story?
- How do you think people should handle their sexual urges if they can't act on them by having sex or by viewing pornography? Does the Bible give us any guidance on what to do? What is the value of abstinence and how might it help your children develop other forms of discipline as they grow older?

— What do I do if my daughter has looked at porn?

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

1. Be Calm and Tell Her You Love Her

Don't succumb to anger or despair. React in love, not condemnation. You will obviously be grieved, but it is crucial that your daughter immediately knows you still love her very much. If she has voluntarily come to you and confessed, that is huge. HUGE! Express how thankful you are that she was willing to trust you. If she confesses and then gets the message that you really aren't a safe place to go, she won't come to you any more with her struggles. Your love for her in that moment is a powerful example of the [love that Christ has for all of us](#).

2. Seek Accountability in Community

[The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection](#). Your daughter 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. If your church doesn't have a resource that could help her, consider looking into a 12-step program in your area. It also is not a bad idea to seek out professional counseling. Some online resources we recommend, both for accountability and for gaining information, are:

- [Pure Desire Ministries](#)—focuses on overcoming sexual addiction, offers support groups, has extensive resources on the site.
- [Celebrate Recovery](#)—Christ-centered 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.

3. Get Serious

You and your daughters need to approach recovery 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. When Jesus talked about lust in Matthew 5, He said if our right hand offends us, then we ought to cut it off. This was not a statement meant to be taken literally, but rather to express the seriousness with which we need to take our sin. This could mean totally cutting out certain friendships. We know some women who are recovering drug addicts. They have recognized that if they are truly not going to use anymore, they need to cut certain friendships out of their lives. There is no hesitation or question in their minds that if they do not, they will go back to using and dealing drugs.

4. Identify Triggers, Set up Boundaries

Sit down with your daughter and identify the patterns and circumstances surrounding her porn viewing. What are her triggers? Is it boredom? A certain place or time of day? Does she need to give you her smartphone at night? Maybe if she continues 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 her room at night and the consequence is she loses her phone for a week. If she brings her phone into her room at night, even if she doesn't look at porn, she still gets the consequence of losing the phone for a week. The idea is that she experiences the consequences before even getting to the point of viewing porn again.

Some people might question the strategy behind setting such consequences, seeing them as ignoring the grace God offers us. But the purpose of these measures is to retrain addicts and rewire their brains to associate porn with a negative feeling. In the heat of the moment, your daughter is not likely to consider the long-term consequences of using porn. She is, however, more likely to want to avoid an immediate consequence like losing her phone. Over time, this repercussion helps build up her brain's willpower so she can better resist temptation. We all need accountability and self-discipline for our various struggles, and training ourselves to be obedient to Christ does not negate the abundant grace He gives us when we fail.

5. Get Educated, Educate, and Serve

Help your daughter to get education about porn, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking. Encourage her to educate others in some way about porn's consequences. Find ways to serve victims of sexual exploitation. It's harder for us to stay addicted to a sexual sin if we're constantly talking to other people about how harmful it is.

6. Don't Assume You're Out of the Woods

Sometimes God miraculously heals people, but addiction is a cycle, and you should expect that it will take time to break it. 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 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 daughter practices wise habits, no matter long she has been living a porn-free life.

7. Be Consistent in Your Family Habits

Evaluate the media you consume as a family, and commit not to watch anything that sexualizes or objectifies people. Be consistent in all areas of your life.

8. Utilize Older Siblings!

Older siblings are a formidable but easy-to-overlook resource. If you have more than one daughter, make sure the oldest knows the influence she has over her younger sisters. The oldest sister has this influence whether she abandons it or uses it for good. If she is willing, she can be a mentor to her younger sister(s) and help protect them from porn addiction.

9. Don't Forget That It's a Heart Issue

Overcoming addiction or even curiosity requires immediate behavior modification. But remember that the root issue is one of the heart. If your daughter does not have a change of heart in what she loves and how she sees herself, no amount of effort to help her change her behavior will be effective in the long run.

10. You Can't Help Your Daughter If You Need Help Yourself

Finally, we want to recognize that many parents and/or their spouses are struggling with porn addictions. If you or your spouse is using porn, you will not be able to give your daughter the help she needs. Follow the advice we've provided here insofar as it applies to you, especially the recommendations to get counselling and join a local recovery program.

— Caveats for the Marriage-Minded

Before we conclude, we want to mention a couple of encouragements for young women who hope to marry one day. Several young men we know have encountered Christian women who are not willing to even consider dating a guy who has been addicted to porn in the past. These men find this mentality extremely discouraging. They have repented of their porn addictions, are following Christ, have sought accountability in supportive communities, and now hope to find godly wives. But some women would reject them outright solely because of their past sins. It would definitely be foolish to pursue a relationship with someone who currently is addicted to porn. But porn is so rampant that—while it is possible—it is frankly unrealistic to expect to find a guy who has **never** struggled with it.

On the other hand, because porn use is so prevalent and normalized in our culture, your girls might believe that all guys look at it and that's just how it is. They might believe that it's impossible to find a man who is actively resisting the temptation to view porn. This is an insidious lie. Your daughters do not need to settle for a man who thinks looking at porn is ok. While God never guarantees us anything, including a lifelong, godly marriage, they need to know that there are men who are pursuing Christ and rejecting porn. Make sure your daughters have a vision for finding such a man and not for settling for less.

— Conclusion

According to Audrey Assad, Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft has said that the reason why porn is so harmful is that it attempts to do the same thing death does: separate the body from the spirit.

The good news is that Christ has unequivocally defeated death and its hold over us. The women who have struggled with a porn addiction are many, but the women who have overcome porn addiction through the power of Christ are also a great cloud of witnesses! You are not without resources, and you are not alone. Pursue your daughters, and don't let them battle sexual temptation on their own.

— Additional Resources

- [Pornography Conversation Kit](#), Axis (watch with teens to get them thinking and talking about porn in a new way)

- [“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]
- [The Porn Effect](#) [website]
- [“How to Deal with Porn Struggles When Dating,”](#) Authentic Intimacy
- [“Starting Women’s Groups,”](#) [podcast episode] Pure Desire Ministries
- [“Study Shows Connection Between Reading ‘Fifty Shades’ And Health Risks In Young Adult Females,”](#) Pure Desire Ministries
- [“Church Hurdles,”](#) [podcast episode] Pure Desire Ministries
- [“A Christian Mom, Her Sexual Addiction, and Forgiveness,”](#) Authentic Intimacy (paywall)
- [“They’re Right. Abstinence-Only Education Doesn’t Work,”](#) Authentic Intimacy

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Talking to Boys about Porn

axis

It's Not a Question of If, but *When* Our Sons Will See Porn

“Pornography exposure among college males is now almost universal.”
—[Pornography and Public Health: Research Summary](#) by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation

It's not really news that men struggle with lust. It's also not news that the internet has made sexually explicit material available to anyone within a single click. But many parents are unaware of just how pervasive porn use has become, particularly among men, or of how young boys are when they first see it. Whereas boys used to have to make an effort to see a dirty picture, the internet has now made it difficult to avoid seeing graphic sexual images, even when trying to avoid it.

In this guide, we want to honestly look at how porn is impacting men and those around them. But we also want to point you toward the very real hope that Christ offers to anyone who has ever sinned, not least of all boys and men struggling with porn addictions.

— What is culture telling men?

Western culture is becoming increasingly hypersexualized. Anti-porn advocate [Gail Dines observes](#), “I want you to think what it means to be male and grow up in a culture where, before you can even speak, females are offering themselves to you: Come get me, come get me” [warning: the linked video contains strong language and disturbing content]. Anyone who has paid any attention to advertising knows exactly what she is talking about. Men in American culture are constantly bombarded with sexualized images of women.

While culture is communicating many mixed messages about what it means to be a man, one of the major ones is that in order to be truly successful, men should be getting an abundance of sexual attention from beautiful women. If a man is able to brag to his peers about how often he is “getting laid,” he has status in their eyes. This idea goes much deeper than appealing to a man's sex drive. It is an underlying message about identity and purpose. A man has power and value in the eyes of others if he has this attention from females, especially if he's so “strong” that he doesn't let that attention affect him emotionally.

— What does porn tell men?

Porn portrays an overblown fantasy in which the above ideal is fulfilled. It 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.”

— What is the current state of male exposure to porn?

In 2001 (i.e. *seventeen* years ago) [the Kaiser Family Foundation found](#) that 70% of adolescents aged 15–17 had seen porn online accidentally. Finding a young man who has never seen porn is now far more difficult than finding one who has. [One college survey](#) found that 93% of males had viewed porn while they were growing up. Other research found that nearly half of college-aged males were first exposed to porn before they were age 13. Evidence suggests that the younger a boy is when he is first exposed to porn, the more likely he is to consume it later on, as well as let it inform his sexual behavior.

Many put the average age of [male exposure to porn](#) at 11- to 12-years-old, and possibly as young as 8-years-old. Remember that this is an **average**, so whatever middle number you go with, there are boys who encounter porn at even younger ages.

— Does male porn use have any widespread effects?

People who approve of porn use often justify it by saying that viewing porn is private and causes no harm to others. But just because we say that doesn't make it true. Porn has a real and serious impact not only on those who view it, but also on those who don't. Consider the comment below from [Pornhub's 2017 Year in Review](#) [*warning: this content is on the Pornhub domain and is disturbing and NSFW*].

To give context: There is a type of porn known as “hentai,” which is a sexually explicit genre of [anime](#). In the comments below the article, some Pornhub users were questioning why anime porn was so popular in 2017. One user responded as follows:

Prettier women. There are a lot of beautiful pornstars, yes, but those won't cross the limit of them being human. Hentai women are drawn and animated which is why they're much prettier (and cleaner) than real women, and they naturally have more sex appeal.

This statement is devastating. It reveals the deep isolation and slavery this person (presumably a man) is in. So long as he has bought into porn's lies, he can never have a meaningful relationship with a real woman and will not even want to have one. It's harmful enough for women to believe they can't be valuable unless they look like porn stars. Now even the porn stars are excluded from being considered beautiful, not because they're plain, but because they're too human and flawed.

Or consider what happened to a couple of female friends of ours recently. On separate occasions, they each experienced catcalling that went far beyond the casual whistle—they mentioned explicit, specific, and degrading things they wanted to do to the women (though we won't make you read it). The two instances happened in different parts of the country, but both women were in public and in broad daylight. (And if men are willing to say these types of things in public, you can imagine the extent of what many men are willing to say on the internet from behind their screens. . .)

We can't prove that the men who behaved this way routinely look at porn. But we

doubt it's a coincidence that this sort of behavior is occurring at a time when male porn use is almost ubiquitous. While not every man who views porn will behave this way, these actions are consistent with porn's portrayal of sexual behavior and how porn desensitizes its users to their fellow human beings.

We could go on. [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.

—— Why do guys look at porn?

1. Accident and Curiosity

Many boys who develop porn addictions were not seeking porn out. It's common to hear that a boy accidentally encountered it somehow and then continued viewing it after his curiosity was piqued.

Clearly the appeal of porn is the arousal it causes. Those who create porn design it to overstimulate the viewers. As we said earlier, male and female body parts are exaggerated, as are the scenarios depicted. Porn is intended to be consumed as quickly as possible for as long as possible, with novelty being part of the attraction.

2. It's Addictive

A major reason why guys watch porn is that it's addictive, and they've started a habit that's highly difficult to break. The circumstances surrounding and shaping that habit are significant. The [National Center on Sexual Exploitation \(NCSE\) reports](#):

Researchers...extrapolated that, when compared to those addicted to gambling or drugs, problematic pornography users experience more powerful and faster conditioning to anything associated with their use (computer, being alone, pop-ups, etc.).

The power of porn to cause an addictive habit is such that men might continue watching it, not because they *want* to so much as it's just what they do at that time of day. It becomes an incredibly compelling, harmful habit.

3. Coping with Trauma

The reasons why men view pornography often go deeper than sexual stimulation and brain chemistry. It's common for men to turn to porn to cope with pain or trauma in their lives. As we noted, our culture presents a certain picture of masculinity, and one aspect of that picture is that a successful man is strong, powerful, and surrounds himself with beautiful women. If a guy feels like he has failed in some area of his life, say academically or by being rejected by a girl, porn offers a quick escape with zero emotional commitment where he can live out the fantasy of succeeding. Porn is a way of coping with trauma (even the trauma caused by first seeing porn), loneliness, or depression. In the same way that someone might turn to drinking, video games, or being a workaholic to escape painful experiences, porn provides an escape from the pain of life. Porn might also be a way for a guy to feel like he's getting "revenge" for not gaining attention from women in real life.

4. Emotional Support

Guys can be especially susceptible to turning to porn if they don't know how to process their emotions well. Another common message our culture gives men is that being angry or happy is normal, but that other emotions are only for "weak" men. So men either don't know how to process their emotions in a healthy way or they feel shame for trying to do so. But they still need some way of dealing with what they're going through, and whether or not they realize it, they turn to porn as a way of dealing with their feelings.

5. Other Factors

Other factors that can influence why guys look at porn include but are not limited to:

- Enjoying the challenge of looking for it even more than the porn itself;
- Wanting to be like peers;
- Boredom;
- To educate themselves about sex; and
- It's "edgy" or cool.

———— How does porn impact men who view it?

It Affects Them Physically

Porn, which seems safe because it doesn't involve sex with another person, actually harms men physically. Multiple studies have linked porn use to a [decrease in sexual satisfaction](#) and to erectile dysfunction (ED). It's notable that compulsive masturbation has also been connected to sexual dysfunction.

Porn use 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](#). So when someone feels a helpless "need" to use porn and loses motivation in other areas of life, there are actually neurological reasons why. 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 a porn addiction can take a much more powerful hold over adolescents than it can over adults.

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.

It Affects Them Psychologically

There's a lot of data focusing on how porn objectifies women. But 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.

Porn also increases [male violence and aggression](#). There is a strong connection between pornography use and loneliness, as well as increased depression and poorer working

memory in men. In young people, porn leads to a weaker emotional bond with the user's caregivers. Finally, people are more likely to question their sexual values if they use porn, meaning they are more likely to be promiscuous or to question their sexual orientations.

It Increases Sexual Victimization and Destroys Relationships

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. 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 can I do to help my son(s) not fall prey to porn?

Invest in Your Marriage and Your Family

Our sons will learn how men and women relate to each other based on our marriages, so we need to assess what our marriages (or dating relationships if not currently married) are modeling to them. Remember, porn is teaching men to be aggressive and to dominate women. A guy could draw many erroneous conclusions from this message: He might learn to be aggressive toward women, but he also might conclude that any kind of male leadership hurts women. As a result, he might overcompensate by being passive toward them. Let the love and respect that you demonstrate in your marriage present a more beautiful alternative than the narrative porn is offering.

Boys desperately need examples of healthy masculinity. Dads, what example are your sons seeing of what it means to be a good husband and father? Are you leading your wife and children spiritually? Are you pursuing relationships with them? Are you both modeling and teaching your sons what it means to be a man? They might not show it to you, but your sons are watching you, and they care about whether you spend time with them.

In an interview, Christian speaker and author [John Eldredge says](#) that the key question all boys are asking is, "Do I have what it takes?" He says that parents need to provide opportunities for boys to answer this question with a resounding, "Yes!" Dads especially need to make this a priority by creating challenges for their sons that are stretching, but attainable. Maybe it's building something. Maybe it's running a 5K. Find out what your son's passions are and cultivate them. Guys need a mission, so have adventures with your sons. Sons also need to hear their dads say, "I'm proud of you," and they need to hear it often.

As we noted earlier, boys need to learn how to process emotions in healthy ways. This education starts with their fathers and other male role models demonstrating how to process their own emotions well. One dad we talked to said, “Dads, it’s okay to be angry, but when you’re angry, don’t yell or walk out of the room. Talk through emotions, and practice having a larger emotional vocabulary than happy or mad. Talk regularly about how you feel.” Ask your sons not just about what happened to them that day, but about how they felt about what happened to them.

Moms, you have an invaluable role as the first and most important woman in a boy’s life. It’s through relating to you and learning from you that your sons will determine how to treat the other women they meet. Mothers tend to be very perceptive about what their children are going through. You can be an incredible source of advice, wisdom, and encouragement for your sons as they grow up. You can also encourage and cheer your sons on as they live out their masculinity in healthy ways.

What is the culture of your family like? Do your sons know that if they fail, they can come to you? Or do they expect that you will shame them for their failures? It’s crucial that you build relationships with your sons based on love and trust, or they will never feel safe sharing their struggles with you.

Be Vulnerable about Your Own Failures

We want our kids to love God and have a relationship with Him. We want them to experience true life and joy. The most effective way we can lead them toward true life is by living out our faith, including our struggles and failures, in front of them. It’s a more powerful lesson for our kids to [see God’s faithfulness in our failures](#) than for them never to see us fail. Our children *will* be wounded as they grow up; that is simply one of life’s painful realities. John Eldredge emphasizes that we must go after our children’s wounds, saying, “One of the most effective ways you can help them navigate their wounds is to talk about yours.” If we don’t, these wounds can subvert every other good parenting tactic we try.

Dads, you in particular might feel a temptation to conceal your weaknesses so that your sons will respect you. If you do, your sons will know you are being dishonest. If they do think for now that you are infallible, they will be extremely disillusioned when they find out that you have your weaknesses and failures, just like every other human being. Because you were not open with them about your brokenness, they might conclude that Christianity is ineffective at helping people deal with their problems. It might seem counterintuitive, but your sons will actually respect you more if you are honest about your weaknesses. By opening up at appropriate times about your own sins, especially the sexual ones, you pave the way for your sons to open up about theirs.

Not “the Talk,” But Many Talks

Get used to the idea of having recurring conversations with your sons about porn. Culture is having a non-stop conversation with them about it, so we need to as well. It’s important that fathers are the ones who lead the conversation on porn (when possible), even if the mothers are present and even if the mom was the one who caught the son looking at porn. These discussions need to take place within the context of a trusting relationship that you’ve been building with them, as well as in the context of prayer. Again, if you have no foundation of trust with your kids, they have no reason [to be vulnerable with you](#).

In our “Parent’s Guide to Understanding the Porn Threat,” we listed quite a few questions you could raise with your kids about porn. We also discuss how to have those conversations in age-appropriate ways. Here are some ideas for questions you could ask your teenage sons specifically.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think it means to be a man?
- What are some of culture’s messages about what it means to be a man?
- What do your male and female friends think it means to be a man?
- What guidance does the Bible provide about being a man?
- What does porn say about what it means to be a man? What is porn’s vision for a man’s purpose and identity?
- What is porn teaching people about women?
- Do you know the research that shows how porn affects men?
- All persuasive lies have some truth in them. What are the truths about men and women that porn is twisting?
- How does porn’s vision compare with God’s vision for His children, and for men specifically?
- Do you believe that God is calling you to a better story than porn’s story?
- How do you think people should handle their sexual urges if they can’t act on them by having sex or by viewing pornography? Does the Bible give us any guidance on this?

— My son is addicted to porn. What do I do?

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](#).

1. Be Calm and Make Sure He Knows You Love Him

It’s essential that your reaction is one of grace and love instead of condemnation. You will be grieved, but watch out that your grief doesn’t increase the shame your son already feels. We talked to one guy whose mom started crying uncontrollably when she found out he’d been viewing porn. This reaction is completely understandable, but it seriously increased the shame he already felt. He suggests it might be a good idea for the parents to take some time to cool off if needed before having a conversation with their sons about their discovery. One expert even recommends that parents [practice their responses ahead of time](#).

If you react badly, it’s not as though you’ve caused irreparable damage. You can apologize. Whatever happens, your son needs to know it’s safe to talk to you about his sexual struggles. In the same way that our Heavenly Father loves and receives us exactly as we are, love your kids where they are and help them move toward where they ought to be.

2. Seek Accountability in Community

We often think that the opposite of addiction is sobriety, but [the opposite of addiction is actually connection](#) and community. Your son needs accountability within a community. This community must be **trustworthy**, and it must be founded on **honesty**.

It should be a safe place where people don't shame each other for their failures, but they also need to be willing to lovingly call each other out. If your church doesn't have a resource that could help your son, consider looking into a 12-step program in your area. It's also not a bad idea to seek out professional counseling. Some online resources we recommend, both for accountability and for gaining information, are:

- [Pure Desire Ministries](#)—focuses on overcoming sexual addiction, offers support groups, has extensive resources on the site.
- [Celebrate Recovery](#)—Christ-centered 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.

3. Get Serious

You and your sons need to approach recovery recognizing that you will have to seriously deal with the issue over an extended period of time. This means setting boundaries that might seem extreme. When Jesus talked about lust in Matthew 5, He said if our right hand offends us, then we ought to cut it off. This was not a statement meant to be taken literally, but rather to express the seriousness with which we need to take our sin. This could very well mean totally cutting out certain friendships. We know some recovering drug addicts who have recognized that if they are truly not going to use anymore, they need to remove certain friendships out of their lives. There is no question in their minds that if they do not, they will go back to using and dealing drugs.

4. Identify Triggers, Set up Boundaries

Sit down with your son and identify the patterns and circumstances surrounding his porn use. What are his triggers? Is it boredom? Is it watching a certain TV show? Maybe he needs to surrender his devices at certain times of the day or all night. Set consequences, not just for viewing porn again, but for breaking the boundaries you set. For example, say one of the boundaries is no phone in his room at night, and the consequence is he loses his phone for a week. If he brings his phone into his room at night, even if he doesn't look at porn, he still gets the consequence of losing the phone for a week. The idea is that he experiences the consequences before even getting to the point of viewing porn again.

Some people might question the strategy behind setting such consequences, seeing them as ignoring the grace God offers us. But the purpose of these measures is to retrain addicts and rewire their brains to associate porn with a negative feeling. In the heat of the moment, your son is not likely to consider the long-term consequences of using porn. He is, however, more likely to want to avoid an immediate consequence like losing his phone. Over time, this repercussion helps build up his brain's willpower so he can better resist temptation. We all need accountability and self-discipline for our various struggles, and training ourselves to be obedient to Christ does not negate the abundant grace He gives us when we fail.

5. Get Educated, Educate, and Serve

Help your son get educated about porn's consequences and, if possible, teach others about them. There's no better way to learn something than by teaching someone else

about it. Find ways to serve victims of sexual exploitation. It will be harder for your son to participate in a sin if he is constantly helping the people that the sin is harming. 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.

6. Don't Assume You're Out of the Woods

Sometimes God miraculously heals people, but addiction is a cycle, and you should expect that it will take time to break it. If your son is or becomes a recovered porn addict, **it is crucial you do not assume that the struggle is gone for good.** Guys especially might think that once they've been successful for a little while, then they're free and clear. But it takes 90 days for the brain to rewire, and they need ongoing accountability not to slide back into their old routines. What's more, living in recovery from addiction is a lifelong process. You should **never** assume your son's struggle is gone for good. We know of two addicts who were each clean for about 20 years before they relapsed. It is essential that your son practices wise habits, no matter long he has been living a porn-free life.

7. Be Consistent in Your Family Habits

Evaluate the media you consume as a family, and commit to not watching anything that sexualizes or objectifies people. This might be your family's equivalent of cutting off your right hand. Be consistent in all areas of your life.

8. Utilize Older Siblings!

Older siblings are a powerful but easy-to-overlook resource. Younger siblings look up to their older brothers or sisters. If you have more than one son, make sure the oldest is aware of the influence he has over his younger brother(s). The oldest brother has this influence whether he abuses it or uses it for good. If he is willing, he can help his younger siblings not get caught up in porn.

9. Don't Forget That It's a Heart Issue

Overcoming addiction needs to start with behavior modification. But remember that the root issue is one of the heart. If your son does not have a change of heart in what he loves and how he sees himself, no amount of effort to help him change his behavior will be effective in the long run.

10. You Can't Help Your Son If You Need Help Yourself

Finally, we want to recognize that many parents and/or their spouses are struggling with porn addictions. If you or your spouse is using porn, you will not be able to give your son the help he needs. Follow the advice we've provided here insofar as it applies to you, especially the recommendations to get counselling and join a local recovery program.

Conclusion

Pornography destroys people's lives, but Jesus has eternally conquered sin, death, and shame. This is not a light or flippant statement, but one whose truth impacts every dark, hidden inch of our lives.

We can't give you all the advice you might possibly need on how to talk to your sons

about porn. But take heart that God's grace, love, and power to save go as deep as our deepest brokenness. Never give up on your relationships with your sons, no matter what happens. Pursue them with your love just as God pursues us with His.

Additional Resources

- [Pornography Conversation Kit](#), Axis (watch with teens to get them thinking and talking about porn in a new way)
- [“Sex, Tech & Porn: A Shocking Look At What Teenagers Are Dealing With Today,”](#) Fight the New Drug (FTND)
- [“Faith Leaders: When We Blame Lust, We Intensify Sexual Sin,”](#) Covenant Eyes
- [Proven Men](#) [website]
- [Heart to Heart Counseling Center](#), Colorado Springs
- [“How the Porn Industry Hijacks Natural Sexual Curiosity and Hooks Teens,”](#) 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,”](#) FTND
- [“3 Real Guys Reveal How Giving Up Porn Changed Their Lives,”](#) FTND
- [“‘HOPE’ Through a Men’s Accountability Group,”](#) Shared Hope International
- [X3watch](#) [website]
- [“Your Kids Need Your Husband to Be Their Father,”](#) Authentic Intimacy
- [“How Do We Help Students Resist Our Pornified Culture? Part 1,”](#) Sean McDowell
- [“How Do We Help Students Resist our Pornified Culture? Part 2,”](#) Sean McDowell
- [“Avoiding Sexual Junk Food,”](#) Authentic Intimacy (paywall)
- [“Why We Don’t Experience Victory,”](#) Authentic Intimacy
- [“Why We Must Be Surprised by the Healer,”](#) Authentic Intimacy
- [Every Young Man’s Battle](#), Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey (Note: parents, we recommend you review this book before giving it your sons. It might be best for older teens and could be triggering to young men who struggle with porn addiction.)

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