



Web Pornography

Protecting Your Child
From the New Drug

Everyone—including your child—is potentially one click away from having a virtual sexual interaction or being exposed to pornographic material.

Supporting Your Child

Proactive Parenting

Most likely, many factors can buffer young people from online pornography's negative effects, say researchers.

Psychologist and technology researcher Larry Rosen, PhD, of California State University, Dominguez Hills, is looking at one such shield: **parents**. In an as-yet-unpublished study, he found that young people's actions on social media including looking at others' risqué poses, displaying their own, and tapping into porn links—are strongly influenced by parenting styles.

His team asked parents and young people to rate the way parents monitored their youth's computer use, dividing parents into four categories:

- 1. authoritative**, combining warmth and control;
- 2. authoritarian**, melding control and low warmth;
- 3. indulgent**, displaying warmth and low control;
- 4. neglectful**, combining low warmth and low control.



Authoritative and **authoritarian** parents were much more likely than **indulgent** or **neglectful** ones to limit their youngsters' use of the internet, for example by keeping tabs on their children's social media pages and requiring them to keep the computer in family room. In turn, the children/teens appeared to internalize those messages by, for example, not looking at suggestive poses of fellow media users as much as those with indulgent or neglectful parents.

"Basically you're looking at clear, obvious differences in parenting styles, even in what kids see on social media," says Rosen. These kids have rules, and they're following those rules."

So How Do We Talk About This?

For J. Carlos, a writer from Pasadena, Calif., the need for the pornography conversation emerged when he and his 14-year-old son were hiking in the mountains of Virginia. While borrowing his son's smartphone to look for a restaurant, he noticed the search history, and immediately realized, "Oh, it's time to have that conversation."

He wished they'd had it earlier, he said. The search terms that popped up seemed both naïve and potentially troublesome, and he worried that his son might unintentionally violate child pornography laws by looking for images of girls his own age.

But the conversation that followed was, according to educators, an ideal response.

Rather than angrily confronting his son, J. Carlos waited for a calm moment when they could have a casual conversation. He emphasized that it was natural to be interested in sex, but pornographic images are not representative of relationships and that his son should feel comfortable asking him about anything he had seen.

“He asked me what things were like when I was younger,” J. Carlos said. “He felt safe talking to me about it, so that felt really great.”

Many parents don’t react so calmly, said Ms. Schroeder, of The Answer Organization.

They may wonder what is wrong with their child or if what the child has seen will forever traumatize him or her. Neither assumption is correct, she said. The greater potential harm — and shame — can come from a parent’s reaction.

“If we flip out, freak out, or go crazy about it, we’re giving a very set message,” she said, one that may prevent children from feeling they can ask their parents questions without being judged or punished.

But the most common mistake parents make, experts said, is to wait to have the conversation until some incident precipitates it.

“All of this is so much easier if it’s taking place not as the first conversation parents have about sex, but the 10th or the 20th,” said Marty Klein, a family and sex therapist in Palo Alto, California, who encourages parents to be frank and direct in conversations with children.

Richard Esplin, a father of four in Lindon, Utah, said he has had regular conversations with his children, unlike his own parents, who talked to him about sex rarely — once when he was a teenager, and again before his wedding.

“That’s not the way my wife and I do things,” he said, “because it’s always coming up.” From an actor in a bathing suit to videos of kissing, he added, the culture creates many opportunities for his family to discuss questions of modesty and sexuality within the context of their religious beliefs.

Sometimes danger lurks where parents don't expect it.

Jeanne Sager, a blogger, assumed it was safe to let her 6-year-old daughter, Jillian, watch “My Little Pony” videos. But when she left the room for a moment, she heard something that didn't sound anything like a cartoon. Her daughter had stumbled upon a graphic video by clicking on a related link listed to the right of the video player.

It is one of the most common complaints of parents who discover that their children have been exposed to sexually explicit material online – that a few clicks on *YouTube* can land a child in unexpected territory, like a subgenre of pornography where popular cartoon characters, like Batman or Mario Bros., are dubbed over with alternate soundtracks and editing to show the characters engaging in explicit acts. In this case, Ms. Sager simply told her daughter, “There are some videos we shouldn't be watching,” and made sure her daughter knew she hadn't done anything wrong. Later, she set up a separate computer login for her daughter, with bookmarks to her favorite sites, and no *YouTube* allowed.



Dana, a divorced mother of three in Massachusetts, assumed her sons would seek out pornography and thought it was normal for her 9-year-old to want to look at pictures of naked women. But when he was 13, he asked why women liked to be choked. She then realized she needed to explain to him that pornography isn't real and that the people are paid actors. She compared it to WWE wrestling matches, which her son knows are fake. Unlike many parents, Dana had an opportunity to help her son understand what had upset him, which is why therapists say that keeping the lines of conversation open is the best safeguard against any potential harm.

Some researchers have stated that the average age of exposure to pornography is down to eight.

Without guidance from parents and educators, few children are thinking through the implications of their online actions.

The Internet has also become the leading technology for distributing hard-core pornography, grossing \$13 billion annually.



FRISCO
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Student Services-Guidance and Counseling

469-633-6583

www.friscoisd.org

Adapted from material by American Psychological Association and by AMY O'LEARY in the Public Insight Network from American Public Media.
Additional resources: <http://fightthenewdrug.org/get-the-facts/>