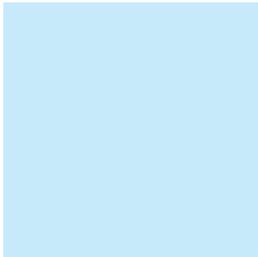
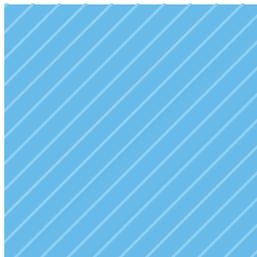
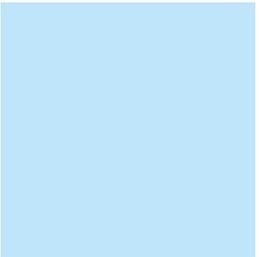




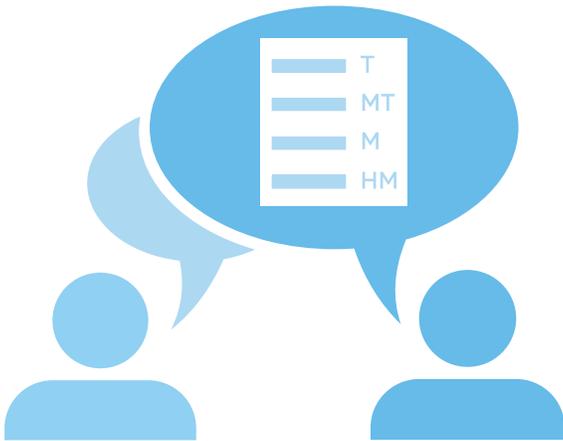
WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LOOKING AT PORN:
A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS



WHAT IS COVENANT EYES?

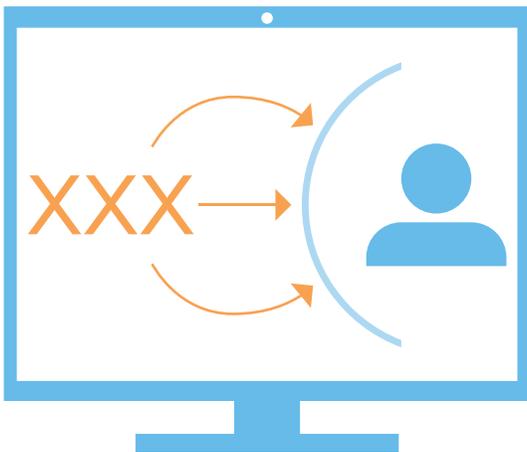
Covenant Eyes provides the tools for you to protect yourself and your family from inappropriate content online.

INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY



The websites you visit, the search terms you use, the YouTube videos you watch... all listed in an Accountability Report that is designed for the conversation.

INTERNET FILTERING



Do you want an extra layer of protection for yourself or your kids? Our Internet Filter blocks content based on age-appropriateness.

LEARN MORE AND SIGN UP
AT WWW.COVENANTEYES.COM



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

YOUR CHILD ISN'T ALONE	6
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK	8
AN INITIAL STEP: PROTECT YOUR HOME	9

PART 1: WHY WE TALK ABOUT IT

CHAPTER 1

A CRASH COURSE ON PORN	12
------------------------	----

PART 2: PREPARING TO TALK ABOUT IT

CHAPTER 2

STAGES OF PORN INVOLVEMENT	18
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER 3

PREPARING FOR THE DISCUSSION	20
------------------------------	----



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 3: TALKING ABOUT IT

CHAPTER 4

STEP 1: OPEN THE DIALOGUE 24

CHAPTER 5

STEP 2: OWN UP TO YOUR FAILURES 27

CHAPTER 6

STEP 3: DISCOVER THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM 28

CHAPTER 7

STEP 4: TALK ABOUT WHY SEX IS GOOD AND PORN IS BAD 31

Transparency is Critical 31

Response for the curious, pre-pubescent child 31

Response for the child/teen engaging in sexual fantasy 33

Bottom Line: Communicate God's Goodness 35



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 4: LIFE BEYOND THE DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 8

TAKING STEPS TO CREATE A “NEW NORMAL”	38
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER 9

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	43
----------------------------	----

Should this all take place in one discussion?	43
What if my child emotionally shuts down during the discussion?	43
Is there merit to any sort of punishment for looking at porn?	44
What if my child came to me to confess?	44
How much of my own sexual past should I share with them?	44
Should mom or dad do this talk?	45
Should I use the word “porn” when I talk to my child?	45
Won’t this conversation awaken more sexual curiosity in them?	45
What if I’ve never spoken with my child about anything sexual?	46
What if my child/teen has been to sexual chat rooms?	47
If my child has been masturbating to porn, how should I talk about the issue of masturbation with him/her?	48
What if my child is addicted?	48
What if I discover my child/teen has been sexually abused?	49



INTRODUCTION

YOUR CHILD ISN'T ALONE

She sat down to enjoy a cup of coffee and check her e-mail on her iPad. Trying to find a website she visited the day before, she opened the browser's history. Instead, what she found completely shocked her. One after the other, a list of sexually explicit titles appeared in the history log. "Young Sluts." "X Videos." "Porn Hub." "Hustler Tube." "Porn Bliz." Page after page, the raunchy titles continued.

Slightly panicked, but paying careful attention to the details, she noticed these sites were all accessed in the afternoon the day before. Her husband had been at work then, so it wasn't him. Then she remembered letting her 10-year-old son borrow the iPad to play some games. Reality sank in. From what she could tell, her son had spent at least an hour or so glancing through these pages.

The question that plagued her was: What should she do now?

PORN BY THE NUMBERS

For good reason, this guide is titled "*When Your Child is Looking at Porn,*" not "*If Your Child is Looking at Porn.*" Seeing pornography is nearly inevitable today. You might hold pornography at bay for longer than some parents, but in today's digital culture, porn is practically unavoidable.

At this moment around the world, there are tens of thousands of youth looking at pornography. If the surveys are accurate, children and teens seeing porn is a very common occurrence.

Current statistics put this into perspective:

- ▶ In the United States, 25% of teens have been exposed to porn online when they weren't even looking for it.¹

- ▶ About 90% of boys and 70% of girls, ages 13 to 14, have reported accessing porn at least once the previous year, and 35% of boys reported viewing porn online “too many times to count.”²
- ▶ According to a survey of freshmen and sophomores in American universities, 93% of boys and 62% of girls said they saw porn online before they turned 18. In fact, 69% of boys and 23% of girls surveyed said they have spent at least 30 consecutive minutes viewing Internet porn on at least one occasion.³

The overwhelming majority of boys not only see porn in their childhood but will also become active consumers of it in young adulthood.

HOW WILL YOU REACT?

Distressing as these trends are, especially for Christian parents, they mean your discovery of your child’s porn viewing is not unique. These are not uncharted waters. Millions of parents have faced this situation. Millions have wondered how to handle this. Millions more will face this situation in the future. The critical question is: Will they face it well?

You, as a parent or guardian, must know at the outset that finding evidence of your child looking at pornography can be very upsetting, but this is not the end of the story.

Do not panic.

There are changes you can make as a family to not only protect your child from the dangers of porn, but also prepare them to grow up in a world saturated with sexual temptations.

As a parent, the wisdom you impart to your kids at this critical time in their lives has the power to lead them their entire lives. Your wise guidance can equip them to turn away from sexual temptations and embrace a life of godly sexuality (Proverbs 5:20-24).

-
1. Lisa M. Jones, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and David Filkelhor, “Trends in Youth Internet Victimization: Findings from Three Youth Internet Safety Surveys 2000-2010,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 50 (2012): 179-186.
 2. “One in Three Boys Heavy Porn Users, Study Shows,” *Science Daily*, Feb 25, 2007. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/02/070223142813.htm> (accessed Aug 23, 2013).
 3. Chiara Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor, “The nature and dynamics of Internet pornography exposure for youth,” *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 11 (2008): 691-693.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book will take you about an hour, give or take, to read from cover to cover. If you feel some sections or chapters do not apply to you, simply skim through them. The chapter titles and section headings are meant as a guide to help you find the most relevant portions for your situation.

That said, I highly recommend you read the entire book before having a discussion with your child or teen about pornography. It is worth being as educated as possible because *your child is worth it*.

- ▶ In the first part you'll learn about **why having a discussion about porn is important**, especially when your child has already been exposed to it.
- ▶ In the second part you'll learn how to **prepare well for this discussion**.
- ▶ In the third part you'll read a **four-step approach to the conversation**.
- ▶ In the last part, you'll learn about **next steps beyond the conversation** and get answers to frequently asked questions.

As parents we must keep in mind that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions to this kind of situation. The goal of this book is not to “fix your kid,” but to provide you a way of thinking about growing your relationship with your child as you provide him or her with guidance.

This book may take you deeper than you desire to go. It may be very uncomfortable at times. Embrace this. When we settle for quick tips and easy answers, the real underlying problems in life are not addressed.



AN INITIAL STEP: **PROTECT YOUR HOME**

You'll want to take a day or two to prepare for this discussion. In the mean time, you should consider what needs to be done to lock down devices to prevent your child from accessing more pornography.

INSTALL COVENANT EYES

Install Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability and Filtering on any device in your home, especially any devices where pornography was found.

Internet Filtering blocks objectionable websites from showing up on the screen. After installing, you should adjust the sensitivity setting of the Filter to correspond to the age or maturity of your children.

Internet Accountability monitors all the websites accessed on each device and sends you a weekly Accountability Report of those websites. You can also generate a Report online 24/7. These Reports contain a summary of these websites and flags the ones that are questionable.

Go to www.covenanteyes.com to get more information.

GET RID OF THE STASH

Make a search of files and apps on computers, tablets, and phones. If you discover porn, permanently delete it.

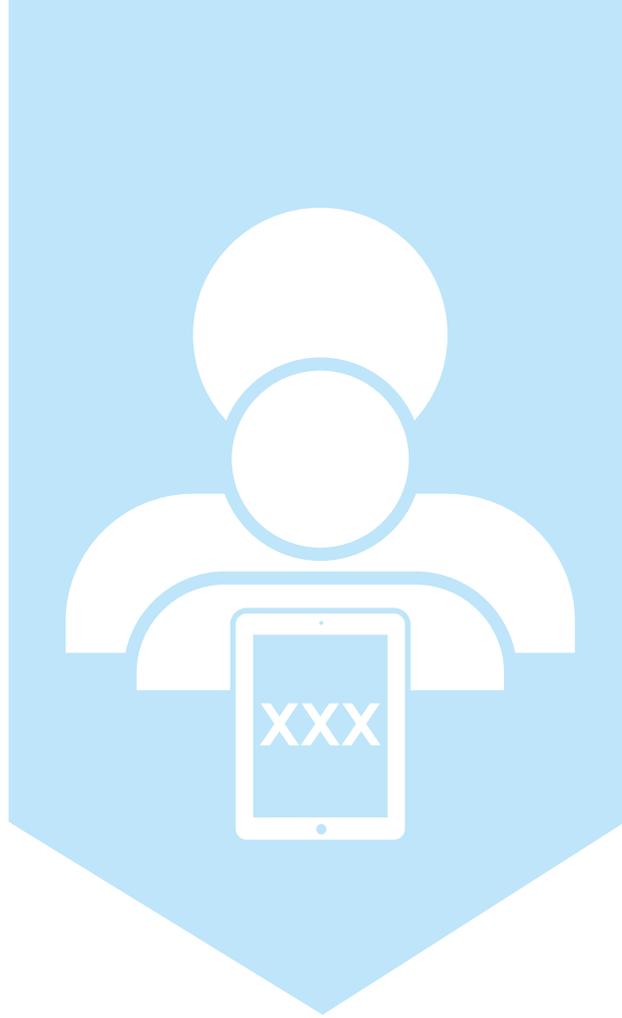
EXPLAIN THE INSTALLATION TO YOUR KIDS

Younger children are not as likely to question the reason for Internet protection software, but teens most definitely will, especially if you are installing it on their personal devices.

First, do not hide the fact that you are installing the software. Spying on your child does not engender trust. If you install something, especially on your child's personal devices, make it known to them what you are doing.

Second, if they ask questions, don't sound accusatory. Explain it by saying, "I found evidence that someone in our home has been looking at inappropriate material online, so I'm doing what I need to do to prevent it from happening again. Once I get more to the bottom of it, I'll talk to you more, and we can set some good precautions in place.

"Until then, just understand that I want to close down access to certain kinds of material online. Don't worry: you can still get to some of your favorite websites. I just need to find out what is going on first."



PART 1:
**WHY WE TALK
ABOUT IT**



CHAPTER 1

A CRASH COURSE ON PORN

“Porn has been around since men were drawing on cave walls,” some say. “It’s nothing to worry about.” Yes, cavemen drew their fair share of below-the-belt artwork, but today’s adult industry has no historical parallel. As technology has advanced, pornography has become more available than ever before. As the porn industry has grown, its products have become more destructive and inescapable.

BOYS AND GIRLS ARE LOOKING AT PORN

Porn used to be hard to come by for young people. Kids would have to stumble on a parent’s or uncle’s “stash” of magazines or video cassettes (or get it from another child who did). Today, this is not the case. The Internet and satellite TV has made sexual content available in nearly every home—and to any age. According to a survey of today’s college students, more than half of men and a third of women say they first saw pornography before their teenage years.⁴

It isn’t just boys, either. If there ever was a time in our culture when porn was an exclusively male habit, that time is long gone. While it is still generally true that girls are less likely to seek pornography, about a quarter of young girls, on at least one occasion, will spend 30 consecutive minutes or more viewing pornography online.⁵ In adulthood, 20-30% of women become regular consumers of pornography or participants in sexually explicit chat rooms.⁶ And girls are actually more likely than boys to become someone

4. Michael Leahy, *Porn University: What College Students Are Really Saying About Sex on Campus* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2009).

5. Sabina, et. al., “Nature and Dynamics.”

6. Jason S. Carroll, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Larry J. Nelson, Chad D. Olson, Carolyn McNamara Barry, and Stephanie D. Madsen, “Generation XXX: Pornography acceptance and use among emerging adults,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23 (2008): 6-30; Gert Martin Hald, “Gender differences in pornography consumption among young heterosexual Danish adults,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 35 (2006): 577-585; Leahy, *Porn University*.

else's pornography by sending nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves online.⁷

LIVING IN A PORN CULTURE

The use and promotion of pornography has become mainstream. The adult industry has successfully “sanitized” pornography in the public eye, re-imagining porn as fun, edgy, and sexy entertainment.

Porn stars are becoming the new crossover artists, regularly turning up on shopping-mall movie screens and prime-time TV. Celebrity magazines, men's magazines, radio, and TV feature the lives of porn stars as if they were mainstream artists. Additionally, pop culture now mimics pornography. One only needs to watch music videos of performers at the top of the charts or see the latest cover of Maxim to find evidence of this.

Surrounded by sex-saturated media, parents must guard and prepare the minds of their children with accurate and godly information about sex. Sharna Olfman, psychology professor at Point Park University, says, “When we deny children access to meaningful education about their burgeoning sexual development, we give them no choice but to glean what they can from a highly sexualized media.”⁸

PORN IS BIG BUSINESS

From the invention of halftone printing in the 1880s (allowing for the creation of the first pornographic magazines), to the silent “stag films” of the early 20th century, to home video players in the 70s, pornography has always ridden on the heels of new technology. Damon Brown, a regular writer for Playboy, correctly states, “If we invent a machine, the first thing we are going to do—after making a profit—is use it to watch porn.”⁹

Unquestionably, it was the World Wide Web in the 1990s that brought about the greatest explosion of porn. The Internet has made pornography more accessible,

-
7. *Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey: Cyberbullying, Sexting, and Parental Controls*, Cox Communications, May 2009. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20023365/2009-Cox-Teen-Online-Wireless-Safety-Survey-Cyberbullying-Sexting-and-Parental-Controls> (accessed October 3, 2013).
 8. Sharna Olfman, ed., *The Sexualization of Childhood* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 14.
 9. Damon Brown, “PCs in Ecstasy: The Evolution of Sex in PC Games.” *Computer Games*, May 2006.

affordable, and anonymous than ever before. Today, about 1 in 8 searches done online is for erotic content,¹⁰ and most of those who consume pornography online only view free material.¹¹

A multi-billion dollar global industry, pornography is a mainstream capitalist business.¹² Porn is no longer the fringe. Internet porn alone is a \$3-billion-a-year business.¹³ Porn isn't just a money-maker for Playboy and Hustler. Major companies—Time Warner, Comcast, EchoStar, and DirecTV—all have a slice of the porn pie.

HARDCORE IS THE NORM

The level of brutality and degradation in pornography today can be startling. Porn is difficult to talk about for the same reason that all sexual violence is difficult to talk about: it's natural to recoil at the thought of something that is sexually objectifying.

As parents, we need to push past this discomfort if we want to talk to our kids straightforwardly about porn.

More and more, psychologists show a growing concern about how callous and merciless pornography has become. In the top-selling pornographic films, 88% of the scenes in those films contain acts of physical aggression (spanking, gagging, slapping, etc.), and 49% of the scenes contain verbal aggression (women being called “bitch,” “slut,” “whore,” or worse).¹⁴

Sadly, before the age of 18...

- ▶ 83% of boys and 57% of girls see group sex online.

10. Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts: What the Internet Tell Us About Sexual Relationships* (New York: Plume, 2011).

11. Kirk Doran, “Industry size, measurement, and social costs,” Presentation at Princeton University, Dec. 11-13 2008. http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Doran_Industry_Size_Measurement_Social_Costs.pdf (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).

12. Paul M. Barrett, “The new republic of porn,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 21, 2012. <http://www.businessweek.com/printer/articles/58466-the-new-republic-of-porn> (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).

13. Jon Mooallem, “A disciplined business,” *New York Times*, April 29 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29kink.t.html> (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).

14. Ana Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Chyng Sun, and Rachael Liberman, “Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis update,” *Violence Against Women* 16 (Oct. 2010): 1065-1085.

- ▶ 32% of boys and 18% of girls see bestiality online.
- ▶ 15% of boys and 9% of girls see child pornography.¹⁵

Today “gonzo” films dominate the Internet. These films have no pretense of a plot-line or character development. Rather, these “straight to the sex” films communicate the message that all women want sex from all men, that women like all sexual acts that men perform or demand, and if any woman doesn’t, she can be turned on with a little force.

THE IMPACT OF PORN ON MEN AND WOMEN

If it isn’t obvious that children watching graphic sexual images is harmful to their personal and sexual development, study after study demonstrates the negative impact of porn.

In one university study, participants were shown just a few hours of mainstream pornography over a stretch of many weeks. The results are very telling.¹⁶

- ▶ Men and women who view more porn consistently report less sexual satisfaction with their partners because they compare their partners to the images of porn performers.
- ▶ Those who view more porn show a greater attraction to the idea of casual sex, premarital sex, and adultery.
- ▶ Those who view more porn are more likely to trivialize sex crimes, such as rape.
- ▶ Those who view more porn are far more likely to stereotype women as sex fiends, eager to meet any man’s sexual demands.
- ▶ Those who view more porn are more likely to want to watch harder and harder forms of pornography in the future.

15. Sabina, et. al., “Nature and Dynamics.”

16. Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, “Effects of massive exposure to pornography,” in *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (New York: Academic Press, 1984); Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, “Shifting preferences in pornography consumption,” *Communication Research* 13 (1986): 560-578, Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, “Pornography’s impact on sexual satisfaction,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18 (1988): 438-453, Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, “Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography on Family Values,” *Journal of Family Issues* 9 (1988): 518-544.

THE IMPACT OF PORN ON CHILDREN

“If adults are having problems coping with this new mass availability of these types of images, then it’s not unreasonable to deduce that children, who are exposed to exactly the same images, in exactly the same way, must be getting into all kinds of difficulties.” — John Carr, Children’s Charities’ Coalition on Internet Safety¹⁷

Is it any wonder that when a child or adolescent is directly exposed to pornography, the following effects have been documented?¹⁸

- ▶ Having sexual intercourse earlier.
- ▶ Lasting negative and traumatic emotional responses to seeing porn.
- ▶ The belief that the best sexual satisfaction is attainable without having affection for one’s partner.
- ▶ The belief that being married or having a family are unattractive prospects.
- ▶ An increased risk for developing sexual compulsions and addictive behavior.

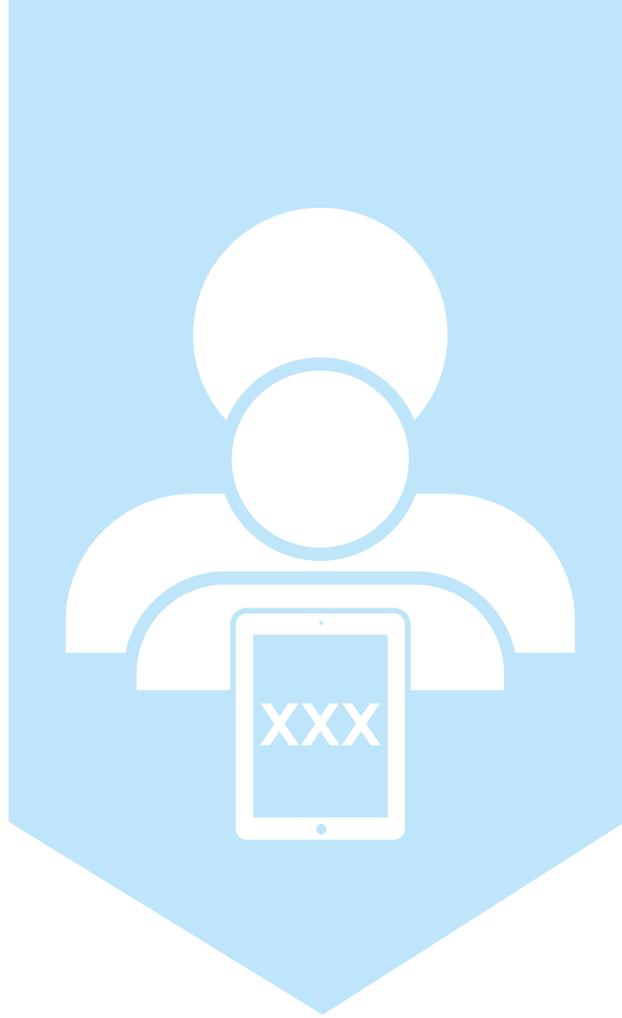
If your child is exposed over and over to incorrect information about sexuality, long before he or she is able to understand this highly graphic information, the result could be a lifetime of hurt.

PARENTS MUST ACT NOW

These facts are not presented here just to be shocking, but rather to bring us a healthy dose of realism. As parents, the time to act is now. As awkward as talking to our kids about porn is, the cost of not talking about it is too high. Sex is too valuable a gift, and we do not want our children to see it cheapened by pornography.

17. Put Porn in Its Place campaign, *Psychologies Magazine*. <http://www.psychologies.co.uk/put-porn-in-its-place> (accessed October 3, 2013).

18. Jill Manning, “Hearing on pornography’s impact on marriage & the family,” U.S. Senate Hearing: Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights, Committee on Judiciary, Nov. 10, 2005. http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=e655f9e2809e5476862f735da10c87dc&wit_id=e655f9e2809e5476862f735da10c87dc-1-3 (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).



PART 2:
**PREPARING TO
TALK ABOUT IT**



CHAPTER 2

STAGES OF PORN INVOLVEMENT

If your child has been exposed to porn, your response should be based, in part, on how deeply your child is into porn and how long it has been going on. Keep these stages in mind as you read the rest of this guide.

STAGE 1: EXPERIMENTATION AND CURIOSITY

Most initial porn viewing that happens in childhood, or even the teen years, is born out of curiosity. Boys want to know what the girls look like with no clothes on, and vice versa. Before puberty, it is natural for boys and girls to be curious about gender and sexual differences. During puberty, as sexual feelings grow, it is also common for boys and girls to be drawn by provocative images online, desiring to see more.

STAGE 2: REGULAR USE FOR MASTURBATION

In this stage, your child has gone from curiosity to “using” porn or online chatting for sexual gratification and orgasm. While this stage is more common among teens, younger children can also enter this stage. In this stage, while there may be feelings of shame, the porn use is seen as recreational.

STAGE 3: RISKY USE

What constitutes “risky use” is not the same for all children. The almost undetectable shift into this stage happens when kids start to seek porn despite the negative consequences. They might stay up late into the night bingeing on porn, losing sleep and the ability to focus during the daytime, only to return to porn the next night. They might start looking at porn in riskier settings (at school, with a parent’s smartphone, when someone could walk in at any moment, when they should be watching a younger sibling, etc.). Getting caught is less of a concern to them, and in fact, the fear of it becomes part of the “high” they get from the experience.

STAGE 4: DEPENDENCE AND ADDICTION

Masturbating to pornography taps into the neurocircuitry of our brains, signaling the release of dopamine, serotonin, opiates, oxytocin, and other hormones and neurotransmitters. This hormonal cocktail is part of our body's natural response to sexual activity, but when combined with graphic porn, the brain experiences a sexual "high" at unnatural levels. Those who have developed an addictive relationship to pornography experience an overwhelming craving for porn, seemingly uncontrollable sexual fantasies, and even withdrawal symptoms. The types of porn that used to satisfy no longer do; harder and more graphic pornography is sought.

There are no hard lines between these stages, but they exist on a continuum.



CHAPTER 3

PREPARING FOR THE DISCUSSION

Realizing your child has been accessing porn repeatedly can be frightening, upsetting, and unnerving, but with some preparation, you can have an informed and productive discussion with your child about it.

If at all possible, delay having the conversation with them for a couple days. If you find out on Tuesday that your child has accessed pornography, there's no harm in waiting until Thursday or Friday to talk with them. You need time to process what you need to say and how you need to say it.

1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

You should know as much as you possibly can about your child's porn viewing experiences before you have the conversation.

Check the browsing history of any Internet device in the home. If you have multiple browsers (like Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome, etc.), open them all and access the history. Look back several weeks, or even months if you continue to find evidence of porn viewing. Take note of the types of sites that were accessed. Check any browsing apps on mobile devices as well.

If the history logs on these Internet browsers appear to be blank, this is an indication that someone has tampered with the data. This might have been your child, which means they are not only savvy enough to cover their tracks, but also desire not to be caught. Among teens this is very common today. According to a recent survey, 71% of teens have done something to hide their online behavior from their parents.¹⁹

19. "The Digital Divide: How the Online Behavior of Teens is Getting Past Parents" McAfee. June 2012. <http://www.mcafee.com/us/resources/misc/digital-divide-study.pdf> (accessed Aug 23, 2013).

It is relatively easy to use Internet browsers in “incognito” mode (sometimes called “private browsing”). This is a setting that can be easily turned on and off, giving the user the power to hide all their Internet activity from the history logs.

If you have Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability, you should have access to an un-erasable log of information such as search terms that were used, videos that were watched, and websites that were accessed. Take note of what they are and when they were accessed.

Look not only for telltale sexual terms but also any evidence of using chat rooms. Many chat rooms are sexually themed.

Use a browser’s “autofill” feature to give you some hints. Often, previously searched terms will appear as you start to type in the search bar. Walk through the alphabet, typing a couple letters at a time, and see what search terms may have been used.

Perhaps your daughter was searching for “what is sex.” Perhaps your son has a crush on a cheerleader at school, so he typed in “cheerleader.” Perhaps your child saw a billboard for Hooters and looked it up. Perhaps your child heard a sexual word at school that they wanted to know about. Or maybe your child has been into porn or erotic chatting for a while, and he or she is searching for more graphic terms.

The goal of this knowledge is not to say “Gotcha!” When you question your child about what they were looking at and why, you are likely to hear the phrase like, “I don’t know,” a couple dozen times. Having this conversation will probably be very difficult for your son or daughter. The more information you can volunteer, the less of a burden he or she will have explaining everything to you from start to finish. “I noticed you were searching for _____,” you might say. “What made you curious about that?”

2. TALK IT THROUGH

If you are married, talk with your spouse about the situation. Listen to one another’s perspectives.

If you have trusted mentors or pastors you can speak with, confide in them about the problem. Listen to how they might approach the situation. It goes without saying, these are people you need to be able to trust not to gossip about this information with others.

As you listen to others, take time to “rehearse” the thoughts going through your mind out loud. Get feedback from others about what you say and your tone.

If you find yourself bewildered by what your child is looking at (i.e. a feeling of “I just don’t get why my child likes looking at this stuff”), try to find someone who can relate to this area of temptation.

3. PRAY ABOUT IT

The most important thing you can do to prepare is to ask God to give you a “redemptive attitude” about this situation. If your gut instinct is fear, ask God to take away your timidity. If your gut instinct is a sense of parental failure or shame, ask God to instill in you a deeper sense of trust that His grace can cover any of your mistakes or sins as a parent. If you are angry, ask God to fill you with a deep sense of compassion for your child.

Pray that God will change your attitude into one that will not distance your son or daughter from you or the Lord.

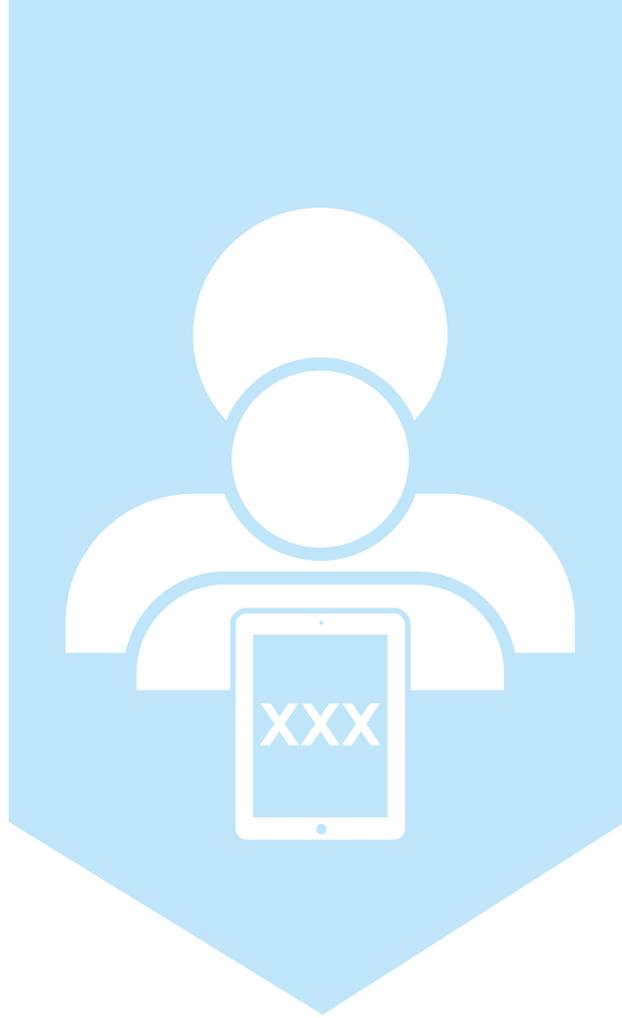
4. BRACE YOURSELF FOR MORE THAN ONE CONVERSATION

The end goal is not having one conversation with your child, but maintaining a type of relationship with your son or daughter that communicates safety and acceptance. This paves the way for future conversations.

Since there is a lot that can be said about pornography and sexuality, the material in the pages that follow might need to be stretched over several conversations.

5. REMEMBER: TONE IS EVERYTHING

Well, almost everything. Certainly what you say to your son or daughter is important, but how you say it will be critical. It is likely that your child or teenager is experiencing some fear, uncertainty, shame, or guilt about having viewed pornography. It is very important that in your conversations with him or her you do not approach the situation with sharp criticism or an overbearing sense of fear, bewilderment, or shame.



PART 3:
TALKING ABOUT IT



CHAPTER 4

STEP 1: OPEN THE DIALOGUE

Don't surprise your child or teen with this conversation. Talk to your son or daughter beforehand. Say, "I notice you don't have anything on your schedule on (planned date), so there are a few things I want to talk to you about. I need some of your time."

When you begin the conversation, start with what you know. Tell the story of the discovery of the evidence and why you believe he or she is the one who was looking at the sexual content.

Give him or her time to respond. Ask if your observations are correct.

The point of this step is to feed them whatever you know to help them begin talking. They may admit to everything and talk for quite a while. They may be very silent, unsure of what to say. Don't feel the pressure to make them say anything specific. This step is just about helping them to open up.

WHAT IF THEY DENY IT?

Some children or teens will respond by lying, denying they are the ones who saw the sexual images.

If this happens, it is important not to lose sight of the bigger goal. This is a teachable moment between you and your child. It is a time for you to impress on him or her important lessons about sexuality. It is a time to build your relationship and keep the door open for future discussions.

Don't become easily angered if you believe they are lying to you. Remember, minimizing or denying something is not an *adolescent* response to sin—it is a human response. It is what we all tend to do. Recognize, this is how you might respond if you were the one in the hot seat.

Don't call him or her a liar. Ask your son or daughter who they think accessed the websites. Shift your approach and model vulnerability for them. Talk about a time in your life when you were exposed to porn or when your sexual curiosities got the best of you. You might say something like this: "I wanted to ask you about this because I know how tempting this stuff can be. When I was a child/teenager..."

If you suspect your child is in the curiosity phase, talk how you were curious when you were young and how tempting it was to search for answers, sometimes in the wrong places. If you suspect your child is past the curiosity stages and is masturbating to pornography or watching it habitually, talk about how easy it was for you to be tempted to lust.

The goal is to help them understand that you are a safe person in which to confide. If they continue to deny it, don't feel a need to press them for a confession. Use it as an opportunity to tell them that if they ever see pornography or sexual images, they can talk to you about it. If they ever are curious about sexuality, they can ask you.

LISTEN. REALLY LISTEN.

No matter what, don't lose sight of the person sitting across from you. When you ask him or her a question, don't be quick to fill the awkward silence with your voice. Give your son or daughter time to respond. There's likely to be some awkward silence, so constantly remind yourself to hold your tongue and give your child space to talk.

Listen with a compassionate heart. Don't use silence as a means to "glare down" at your child in disappointment. Let your eyes communicate tenderness.

Meet your child or teen exactly where he or she is. You've done your homework. You are equipped with at least some information about what your son or daughter has seen or done online. As more information is divulged, listen for questions, curiosities, or emotions in what your child says or the tone of his or her voice.

Remember: *this conversation is not ultimately about porn*; it is about you getting to know your child. This initial conversation is about unearthing your child's motivations for viewing pornography. As you listen, try to pick up on any fears, lust, insecurities, questions, guilt, or shame you see in your son or daughter.

Before you launch into anything about pornography itself (Step 4), get your child talking about what he or she found tempting, interesting, or even enjoyable about it. Don't act disgusted or shocked by what your child or teen says, even if your child seems

unremorseful about looking at porn. Be genuinely curious. Ask him or her what was confusing about it. Get raw, uncensored responses.

Encourage openness whenever possible. If he or she admits to something, even something small, praise your son or daughter for the honesty. Say, “Not many people would be willing to talk about this. I love how honest you are being right now.”

Listen with your face. Look your child in the eye. Respond with affirming words. Repeat phrases your son or daughter uses, showing you really are hearing what is said.

Be a great listener and don't lose sight of the big picture.



CHAPTER 5

STEP 2: OWN UP TO YOUR FAILURES

Perhaps you've had a number of conversations with your son or daughter about sex, sexual desire, and sexual curiosity. Perhaps you've spoken to them about pornography already. If so, you are among a minority of parents today. Congratulations.

If you're like most of us, you've been caught a little off guard by your child seeing or using pornography. As the conversation progresses, take a moment and own up to not preparing him or her well.

As a parent or guardian, it is *not* your responsibility to shield them from every known evil in the world, but it *is* your responsibility to prepare them for the issues you can anticipate.

To someone in the curiosity phase, you might say, "These naked pictures and videos are all over the Internet, and I probably should have talked to you about them before today. I am sorry I didn't help you with this earlier. What I should have said to you before is that if you see any images online that make you uncomfortable or anything that cause you to ask questions, you can always come to me. I want to hear your questions. I want to see if I can answer them. I don't want you to have to learn answers from people who are trying to put bad stuff out there."

To a child you suspect is using pornography for masturbation, you might say, "I should have talked to you about pornography long before today. I am sorry I didn't. I know that watching images like this can really stir sexual desire in you. But I should have talked to you more about these kind of desires before this. I apologize."

This apology will help to set the tone for the rest of the conversation. You want to show yourself in a supportive role.



CHAPTER 6

STEP 3: DISCOVER THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

In order to have an age-appropriate conversation about pornography (Step 4), you must first know your child. Every child is different and develops emotionally and physically at different times.

HAS PUBERTY BEGUN?

Researchers are noticing children expressing sexual thoughts and feelings at younger and younger ages today. Of course, healthy sexuality is a very important part of our development as people, but today children are having sexuality inappropriately *imposed* on them. This comes through television, music, movies, video games, and pornography. The early onset of puberty can be due to many factors, including abuse, obesity, a sedentary lifestyle, or even exposure to hormone-disrupting chemicals in the environment.²⁰ Either way, don't be surprised if your child seems to be developing sexually before you remember yourself developing.

For girls, pre-puberty changes begin between 8 and 11, although a small number start before age 7. In girls, signs that puberty is around the corner include the development of breasts, growing pubic hair, and later body odor, acne, and vaginal discharge. A menstrual period usually begins around 12 or 13 years of age, though this can begin earlier. These physical changes usually continue through age 16.

Boys start puberty between 9 and 11. In boys, signs that puberty is beginning include body odor, growth of one's penis and testicles, body hair growth, and later acne, cracking voice, and the beginning of nocturnal emissions. These and other physical changes will continue through age 18 or 19.

20. Olfman, *Sexualization of Childhood*, 51-62

HAS SEXUAL ATTRACTION BEGUN?

Like puberty, sexual attraction does not turn on like a switch. It is a gradual thing. In childhood, the opposite sex is simply *different*. Once puberty begins, the opposite sex is *compelling*. Children or teens don't have to necessarily want sexual intercourse (or even understand it completely) before sexual attraction begins. For many, it is simply a feeling of: "He/She notices me. I like that."

UNSURE? START WITH A QUESTION

If you aren't sure whether your child or teen is "into" the opposite sex yet, ask a question such as, "Do you know a (guy or girl) you think is really cute? Do you ever imagine yourself with that person, holding their hand or kissing them, or even picturing them naked?"

CURIOUS OR "USING"?

Your child or teen may not have an accurate grasp of their involvement with porn, but it is worth it to ask them. Say, "How many times do you think you've looked for these kind of pictures or videos online?" They will likely not be able to answer, so give them some options: "Would you say you've been looking at this stuff for the last month or longer than that?" "How many times have you seen it in the last week or two?" These prompting questions will get them thinking.

For some children, especially younger children, they will be in the stage of experimentation and curiosity. For others, they will be regularly using porn to masturbate, and they may have even progressed from that stage to something akin to an addiction (see chapter 2, "Stages of Porn Involvement").

Understanding your child's sexual development and their involvement in porn enables you to move on to the next step.

OTHER SEXUAL EXPERIENCES?

As awkward as it will be, this is the time to ask about other sexual experiences. You might start with asking, "Have you ever done anything in real life—like what you've seen in these images or videos?"

Perhaps your son or daughter has been sexually active, by choice, through coercion, or

even by force. Ask them specifics one at a time, from the most benign to the most severe. “Have you ever kissed anyone on the mouth?” “Have you ever touched someone else in their private areas?” “Have you ever had sex?” “Has anyone ever asked you to get naked in front of them?” “Has anyone ever touched you or forced you to touch them in their private areas?”

Sadly, some children or teens are first exposed to pornography in a sexually abusive setting. An abuser might show them pornography—even child pornography—and this can lead victims to seek more pornography due to their trauma. (See more in Chapter 9 “Frequently Asked Questions,” about this issue.)



CHAPTER 7

STEP 4: TALK ABOUT WHY SEX IS GOOD AND PORN IS BAD

At this point, it is fitting to have an age-appropriate talk about why your son or daughter felt drawn to porn. Below are some “scripts” for you to follow and adapt for this conversation.

TRANSPARENCY IS CRITICAL

Critical to this step is your own openness. The more this sounds like a lecture, the less receptive your child or teen will likely be. The more you use personal examples from your own life, and the more transparent you are, the less likely he or she will be to shut down emotionally.

What does transparency look like? Don't be afraid to share the temptations you faced or still face when it comes to sexual sin. Don't shy away from statements like, “When I was growing up, I remember how difficult it was for me when...” or “The tough part for me with this is...” or “I didn't always get this right growing up.”

RESPONSE FOR THE CURIOUS, PRE-PUBESCENT CHILD

Your child may not be thinking about the opposite sex in a sexual way yet. This child is likely in the curiosity phase of looking at porn.

If this is the case, here are some ways to talk about why he or she is drawn to pornography and why it is a trap.

1. PULL:

THE HUMAN BODY IS ATTRACTIVE AND INTERESTING.

“The human body is a beautiful thing. When human beings were created God made us male and female, just like it says at the beginning of Genesis. We are made in the image

of God, which means everything about us, inside and out, reflects the God who made us. It is perfectly normal to want to know what the human body looks like, because just as the Psalms say, we are made wonderful and complex (Psalm 139:14).”

At this point you could have a conversation about some of the differences between men and women.

2. PRIVACY: NAKEDNESS IS MEANT TO BE A PRIVATE THING.

“The human body is also private. We shouldn’t go around the neighborhood, peeking in people’s windows, trying to see if they are getting undressed, right? That’s because the human body is so special, we wouldn’t want to show it off to just anyone. Husbands and wives see each other naked, but they don’t get naked in front of anyone else. We also shouldn’t look at pictures of naked people. The people taking those pictures are taking something very special—an image of a naked body—and showing it off for the whole world to see.

“God isn’t upset about your curiosity, and neither am I. But God wants us to guard our eyes when we see images of people who don’t have clothes on or who are almost naked. We should turn our eyes away and think, ‘Nakedness is a private thing. I’m going to look away.’”

3. PARENTS: MY JOB IS TO HELP YOU CHILD UNDERSTAND HOW GOD MADE US

“It is great that you want to know more about the human body, but I don’t want you to seek those answers on the computer [or TV or wherever the pornography was seen]. I’m happy to talk to you any time if you have questions about our bodies, what it looks like, or the way it works.”

Now would be an appropriate time to answer specific questions about gender and sexuality.

RESPONSE FOR THE CHILD ENGAGING IN SEXUAL FANTASY

If your child has entered puberty (see the previous chapter) or if you suspect he or she has started “using” pornography (for the purpose of masturbation and fantasy), then it is time to speak with your son or daughter about porn in the light of healthy sexuality and in the light of Scripture.

There are four essential points to give your son or daughter.

1. PLEASURE: SEXUAL AROUSAL FEELS GOOD, AND IT SHOULD

“Your attraction to the opposite sex is very good and normal. God designed you that way. Wanting to experience sexual pleasure is also good and normal.

“Speaking through King Solomon, God said that men should enjoy their wives. ‘Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you be captivated by her love.’ (Proverbs 5:19). In Solomon’s great love song, the woman sings about the pleasure of having sex with her husband: ‘Kiss me and kiss me again, for your love is sweeter than wine’ (Song of Solomon 1:2). God has made sexual experience very pleasurable. The desire you feel when you look at porn is part of a drive God gave you, and it is an important part of who you are.”

2. PURPOSE: YOU’RE BECOMING A MAN/WOMAN, AND THAT’S GOOD

“Your body has been going through a lot of changes. Your body is becoming less like a child’s and more like that of a man/woman. Sometimes this is very confusing and frustrating, I know. But remember, there’s a purpose to this.

“You can enjoy knowing that God is changing your body and your mind so you can serve him in the future as an adult leader. Just like Jesus when he was a young teen, you are growing in body and wisdom (Luke 2:52). As you mature as a man/woman, you can serve God as a loving older brother/sister to others, and some day as a spiritual father/mother to others (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

“The changes in your body are preparing you for sex when (and if) you get married. The Bible says that as you have sex with someone over the course of your life, you become

‘united into one’ with him/her (Genesis 2:24)—you are united to that person in a very intimate way. Your changes also mean your body is maturing to be able to create children, just as the Bible said we should do (Genesis 1:28).

“The changes you are going through to become a man/woman are wonderful, so don’t see them as a curse, but as a blessing.”

3. PASSION: **BURNING PASSION IS RIGHT, BUT NOT RIGHT NOW**

“Your maleness/femaleness is a God-given quality, and your sexual attraction is a God-given drive. But when we allow passions to be stirred up in our fantasies, this is called lust. Jesus said if we look at someone with lustful intent, it is like we are committing adultery in our hearts (Matthew 5:27-28).

“It is like a fire. We love sitting in a living room with a fire in the fireplace. But if we take that same fire and put it in the middle of the floor, it could burn the house down. That’s the way sexual passion is. There’s a fitting place to start that fire—in the setting of marriage—but if you stir up that passion outside of marriage, it only ends up hurting you.

“Sexual passion is designed to create oneness with a person. This kind of oneness should only be experienced when you are totally united to a person in lifelong commitment. Marriage is the fireplace where sex warms and blesses our lives.

“Until then, you shouldn’t *deny* you have this passion inside you. Instead, *use* it to ‘build your fireplace.’ Work to become the kind of man/woman who can serve and love someone else as a husband/wife. Get wisdom from me and other adults about how to become a godly man/woman with sexual desires. Learn when is the best time and way to start dating or get married.”

4. PORN: **SEX ON SCREEN ONLY CHEAPENS THE GOODNESS OF SEX**

“There are many reasons why using porn is sinful.

“First, porn is *selfish*; sex is *giving*. When you watch porn, you get to imagine that you are the star of the show. You get to imagine yourself being with beautiful men/women or being an attractive man/woman. You are the focus of their attention in the fantasy. But having sex in a loving manner is about both receiving and giving pleasure. You don’t

want to train your mind to love masturbation more than sex with a real person. You don't want to train your mind to see the opposite sex as a thing to be used rather than a person to be loved.

“Second, porn bonds you to an *image*; sex bonds you with a *person*. You are physically and emotionally wired for intimacy. That's why God made sex so pleasurable, because it bonds a man and woman together. But when we lust after pornography, we are bonding to those images, not to a person.

“The people in porn are all playing a part. They are actors and actresses in a movie. Then the films are edited to take out all the boring parts and make the actors look their best. All the hormones that surge through your brain when you watch porn or fantasize about sex are the same hormones you experience when you have sex. Just like sex is designed by God to help you bond with your future husband/wife, when you masturbate to porn you are bonding with the images of people on the screen. When the time comes to get married, what if your husband/wife doesn't look or act like all the scenes you've seen in pornography? No person is as clickable and customizable as a person on a screen. This only takes away your enjoyment of sex in the future.

“Third, porn is *abusive*; marital sex is *nourishing*. What you don't see when you watch pornography is what it's like when the camera stops recording. Often, men and women in porn don't like the work they do. They have to take drugs and alcohol just to be able to have sex on screen. Many times the women were abused when they were young, and they continue to be used and abused in the industry. By watching pornography, we only give incentive to those who abuse these women to keep doing it. Porn stars are paid to make their lives look fun and glamorous, but many of them are dying on the inside.

“Fourth, porn *dishonors* God; marital sex honors Him. God has told us His will for us is to abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterers because He wants the marriage bed kept pure (Hebrews 13:4). As a young man/woman of faith, don't dishonor Him with your body by filling your mind with images of sin.”

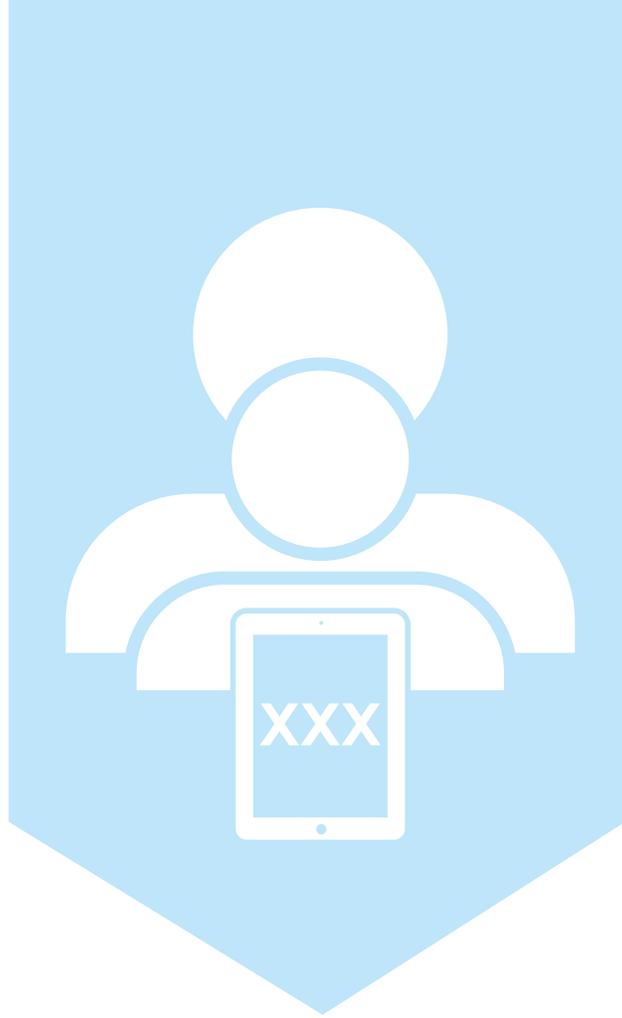
BOTTOM LINE: COMMUNICATE GOD'S GOODNESS

You want your child or teen to stop using porn. Fair enough. But remember what inspires real repentance in a person: “His *kindness* is intended to turn you from your sin” (Romans 2:4, italics added).

Yes, your child may be guilty of selfish fantasy and lust. Yes, if he or she has been lusting after pornographic images, your child or teen has sinned against God and against his or her own body. But God is rich in “kindness and forbearance and patience.”

In every law He gives, He gives it not only for His honor but for our good: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. And you must always obey the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today *for your own good.*” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13, italics added).

God does not simply want your child to avoid pornography. In His kindness, He is pointing your child toward something far better—becoming a mature man or woman of God, capable of loving others well.



PART 4:
**LIFE BEYOND
THE DISCUSSION**



CHAPTER 8

TAKING STEPS TO CREATE A “NEW NORMAL”

A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AT HOME

Use Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability and Filtering to monitor all the websites your children see. This is called “accountability” software for a reason: the goal is not merely monitoring what your children do, but actually having conversations about it.

You can have weekly reports sent to your e-mail with a summary of what your children have been seeing. This not only reduces temptation for your child, but it also provides you with up-to-date information about your child’s Internet habits for informed conversations.

Don’t impose Internet protocols for your children only. Use Accountability for yourself as well. Improper use of the Internet is not just a teen problem—it is a human problem. When your child or teen sees that you are also held accountable to where you go online, they will feel less “targeted” and understand that Internet accountability is simply what the whole family does to stay safe online. Have your Accountability Reports sent to someone you trust.

Kids should live in a culture of accountability in the home, modeled by loving parents.

NEW TECHNOLOGY BOUNDARIES

Parents should work to protect their children by closing potential access points to pornography. There are a number of effective ways to do this.

If you have younger children, spending time with them on the computer can be a very effective way to direct their online interests in a positive direction. Choose appropriate sites that will be fun and educational. It also provides an opportunity to remind them

about the unpleasant things on the Internet and the importance of staying away from them.

Anonymity (secrecy) creates an open door for temptation. When your child believes no one will know or find out about his or her behavior, temptation increases greatly. Have a “no privacy” policy in your home: you may check computers, cell phones, text messages, or online profiles at any time.

Limit computer usage when no one else is around. If that means creating household rules about where laptops and cell phones can be used, make those rules. If you need to take away iPods and phones at night so there is no Internet access in bedrooms, do so. (Kids say they need their phone as an alarm clock. No, they don't. They still sell alarm clocks at the store. Buy them one.)

Know all the passwords to all of your child's online accounts: e-mail, social networks, and apps.

Find out about other places where your child may be tempted. School computers? A friend's home? Is there a certain time of day or night when temptation strikes? Knowing this helps you to set boundaries.

Here are some important points to keep in mind when it comes to technology boundaries:

- ▶ A good Internet filter will help to prevent at least accidental exposures to pornography. However, as children get older, reliance on a filter isn't preferable. You are not just trying to protect your children right now but preparing them for a world without filters. Set your Internet filter to a more sensitive or restrictive setting when your children are young, then let up on the restrictions as they get older and prove their ability to be responsible online.
- ▶ Remember, as you adjust your Internet filter, always keep tabs on your children through Internet Accountability. This will help you to have continued conversations about where they are going online, including the morally “gray areas.”
- ▶ Set boundaries *with* your kids, not just *for* your kids. When setting boundaries about when and how computers, cell phones, and tablets can be used, involve them in the discussion and get their input. This helps them feel a sense of ownership.

SEX ED: CONTINUING THE DISCUSSION

As parents, we need to have a clear “theology” of sexuality in our own minds. Think of the biblical values that inform how you talk about sex, both its blessings and its dangers. Find a good resource to read about this so you are equipped to think rightly about sex from a biblical point of view.

One of the best things you can do to teach your children about sexuality is to model a healthy marriage in front of them. Seeing mom and dad treat each other with respect, love, and tenderness is some of the best education your child can receive about how they are to treat the opposite sex. As you converse about our sexualized culture and pornography, you can paint a vivid contrast between the values communicated by pornography and the values communicated through a loving marriage.

If you aren’t married or your marriage is less than ideal, there are other ways this can be modeled for your children. Getting your children involved in a church community where married couples rub shoulders with youth can provide a venue for them to learn godly romance and intimacy.

Knowing Bible chapters and verses about sex or being able to explain the biology of sex is important. But just as important is having a good conversational relationship with your children. If your child has been looking at pornography, this is not just his or her problem: it is a *family* problem. It is not just your son or daughter who needs to change; the family needs to adapt. Using pornography is not a sin that occurs in a vacuum.

There isn’t a book, a conference, a getaway, or any other tips and tricks that will replace a good conversational relationship with your child. Do you enjoy spending regular time with your child? Do you enjoy activities together? Do you take time, routinely, to be with your child to talk about all matters of life? Do you plan deliberate times for teaching and praying together as a family? This kind of relationship is foundational to any “sex talks” you will have.

As a part of this relationship, your children need to see you model what repentance looks like. A good relationship isn’t only about you “getting to know them,” but about them getting to know you: your weaknesses, your failures, and your need for God. They need to hear you say the words, “I’m sorry. Please, forgive me,” when you are out of line or sin against them. They need to hear how you take your own weaknesses and failures to the Lord. They need to understand that your home is a place where family members can acknowledge their struggles.

RESOURCES:

As you go deeper with your child, discussing biblical sexuality, masculinity, and femininity, here are some resources you can utilize.

- ▶ *Sex is Not the Problem, Lust Is*, by Joshua Harris — This is a great PG book on sex for your kids or teens. The book also addresses not just behaviors but also heart motivations.
- ▶ *Meet Mr. Smith: Revolutionize the Way You Think About Sex, Purity, and Romance*, by Eric and Leslie Ludy — This is a PG book teaching teens a holy alternative to the over-romanced, casual-sex lifestyle popular in today's world.
- ▶ *The Sacred Search*, by Gary Thomas — This book is a fresh look at dating, teaching young people to abandon the notion of a “soul mate” and realize that a good marriage is a partnership dedicated to Christ.
- ▶ *The Purity Code: God's Plan for Sex and Your Body*, by Jim Burns — This book is written to teens and preteens about making a commitment to sexual integrity at a young age and addresses specific questions about sexual activities and sexual attraction.
- ▶ *Closing the Window*, by Tim Chester — This book is great for young men or women who feel ensnared by, or even addicted to, pornography. Chester addresses how to begin seeing pornography in a new light, how the gospel helps us to overcome sexual brokenness, how to avoid temptation, and how to find biblical accountability.
- ▶ *Straight Talk with Your Kids About Sex*, by Josh and Dottie McDowell — This book helps parents gauge their children's emotional and spiritual readiness for mature topics and teaches parents to stay alert to teachable moments, helping parents to frame sexuality in a biblical context.
- ▶ *Planned Purity for Parents*, by Jennie Bishop — This is a book for parents about laying a good foundation for talking about purity in the home, beyond just sexual issues. This book brings the topic of purity back to its biblical definition (a matter of the heart) and addresses ways parents can help children guard their own hearts, even from a young age.
- ▶ *A Chicken's Guide to Talking Turkey with Your Kids About Sex*, by Dr. Kevin Leman and Kathy Flores Bell — This is a guide for parents who want to discuss

sex and sexuality with their 8- to 14-year-olds covering a wide variety of topics and frequently asked questions.

- ▶ *God's Design for Sex*, a series by Stan and Brenda Jones — This series of four books helps parents address sex and sexuality from young age (3 years old) through the early teen years. The series includes two picture books (*The Story of Me* and *Before I Was Born*) and two books for your child to read and discuss with you (*What's the Big Deal?* for 8- to 11-year-olds and *Facing the Facts* for 11- to 14-year-olds).
- ▶ *Learning About Sex*, a series from Concordia Publishing House — This series of books and DVDs walks parents and children through learning about gender and sex from a young age (4 years old) through the teen years.
- ▶ *Passport2Purity*, by Dennis and Barbara Rainey — This weekend retreat kit includes everything you need for a weekend retreat with your preteen, including CDs with talks by Dennis Rainey speaking to your child about sexuality.
- ▶ *Captivated: Finding freedom in a media captive culture* — This documentary introduces families to the need for limiting media input, and not just sexualized media. Learn about how the medium of video changes the way our brains work and how we relate to the world around us.



CHAPTER 9

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SHOULD THIS ALL TAKE PLACE IN ONE DISCUSSION?

The discussion about porn can be done in one sitting. Of course, if your child volunteers more personal information or asks a lot of good questions, you might need to postpone parts of this conversation for a later date. Having a really good discussion that needs to be split up due to time constraints is not a problem; it's very encouraging.

If you do have to postpone parts of this conversation, make sure to put it on your personal calendar so you don't let the opportunity slip away.

If you are unaccustomed to sitting alone with your child for times of instruction or discussion, this conversation will seem like an uncomfortable stretch, but it is a necessary one. If your tone is compassionate, if you are transparent and personal, and if you listen well, the conversation will seem much less like a lecture.

Keep in mind, this should be the first of many discussions about sex, sexuality, intimacy, and lust. This discussion will only help to set a pace for future conversations. This another benefit of using accountability software—when Covenant Eyes delivers a weekly report of everything your child or teen is doing online, it reminds you to talk with him or her about the temptations found on the Internet.

WHAT IF MY CHILD EMOTIONALLY SHUTS DOWN DURING THE DISCUSSION?

Don't press the matter. If they seem completely closed to the conversation, they may just be embarrassed. During Steps 1 to 3, if you notice your child shutting down, you might choose to cut the conversation short until later.

Say something like, "I can see this is very uncomfortable for you right now, so I don't want to press this today. Instead, let's end this discussion for the day. But I do want to finish talking to you about this soon."

“Before we go, I want you to understand something: I love you very much and I don’t want anything to hurt you. You may not want to talk about this with me, but if we ignore this, I would be letting you go down a dark path that can have terrible consequences. I want to talk to you about this because I want the best for you.”

IS THERE MERIT TO ANY SORT OF PUNISHMENT FOR LOOKING AT PORN?

This is a complicated question. As a general rule, if this is the first discussion about pornography, avoid punishments. Rather, take responsibility for not preparing your son or daughter adequately. Don’t place all the blame on him or her.

Yes, your child may feel guilty for looking at porn, and he or she may have intuitively known that looking at it was sinful. Affirm this gut response in their conscience as a good reaction. Though obscured by sin, God’s law is written on hearts of all people (Romans 2:15), so be encouraged if they show signs of guilt.

But this area of disobedience is surrounded by an enormous amount of shame today. In these early conversations, your primary goal is to keep the lines of communication open and to foster a sense of comfort in talking about this topic. Don’t compound this shame with immediate punishment.

Only when your child has breached specific household rules and expectations should punishment come into play. *Where there is clear defiance after clear discussion*, only then are consequences fitting.

WHAT IF MY CHILD CAME TO ME TO CONFESS?

This is the ace in the hole. Praise your child for being brave and telling you about this. Express how proud you are of them for taking that step, even though it must have been uncomfortable.

HOW MUCH OF MY OWN SEXUAL PAST SHOULD I SHARE WITH THEM?

Authenticity and transparency with your child or teen is key. You are not only speaking to your son or daughter as a parent, but as a fellow sinner. Your child needs to know he or she is not alone in temptation. You should not speak as one “above temptation.”

Contrary to popular belief, by sharing our weaknesses, we are not giving license to our kids to make the same mistakes we did. We are not the standard for our kids. Christ is the only standard of perfection.

Still, use discretion when talking to your son or daughter. Your child is not your accountability partner who needs to know all the gory details of your sin. Keep your confessions relevant to the issue at hand. You don't need to talk about all the kinds of porn you've seen, all the people you slept with, all the erotic novels you read, or how many times you visited a strip club.

If you used to watch porn, it is appropriate to say so, and it is appropriate to talk about how difficult it was for you. But in the end, the focus should be on how God, in His grace, has forgiven and transformed you. You want to impress on your son or daughter your desire for a pure heart and a pure marriage and that pornography is not the answer.

SHOULD MOM OR DAD DO THIS TALK?

You know your child best, but generally, if it is your son you are concerned about, dad should talk about it, and if it is your daughter, mom should talk about it. There are enough nuances to male and female sexuality that dads and moms might be more effective speaking to the same-gendered child.

If you are a single parent speaking to an opposite sex child, don't let this throw you for a loop. While preparing for this talk, use an opposite sex friend as a sounding board to help you get a grasp on what you need to say.

SHOULD I USE THE WORD "PORN" WHEN I TALK TO MY CHILD?

Generally speaking, the words "porn" or "pornography" are appropriate, especially if the child is older. "Pornography" is a word he or she will hear at some point in the future, if not already. For younger children, you can use more descriptive terms like "naked pictures" or "videos of naked people."

If you do use the word "porn," don't expect your child or teen to know what it is. It should be clear from how you use the word what you are talking about.

WON'T THIS CONVERSATION AWAKEN MORE SEXUAL CURIOSITY IN THEM?

The fact that your child/teen has been exposed to porn has *already* provoked a curiosity about sexual matters. This is not the time to hold back because you are afraid of speaking too soon. Your son or daughter needs your wisdom, not your silence.

Dr. Margaret Stager from Case Western Reserve wisely says that "too much too soon" is a rare circumstance in today's world. The opposite extreme—your children not knowing your values as they pertain to sex—is far more common and far more dangerous.

“Because of the society we live in,” she writes, “the consequences of avoiding these conversations far outweigh the consequences of giving too much information too soon.”²¹

Research shows that when adolescents are comfortable talking about sexuality with their parents, and when parents are proactive in teaching their children about sex, teens are far less likely to have early sexual intercourse and more likely to talk with their parents about important issues in their lives.²²

WHAT IF I’VE NEVER SPOKEN WITH MY CHILD ABOUT ANYTHING SEXUAL?

If this is true, then this conversation will be making up for a lot of lost time. It is best to admit this to your child: “I should have been talking to you a lot sooner about these matters. I apologize for not being prepared.”

From infancy, children should grow up in a home where sexuality and gender differences are not taboo subjects. In their earliest years, use the correct names for body parts. Even young children, if they are attentive and can understand basic terminology, are old enough to be taught about the mechanics of sex as well as the value you place on marriage and intimacy. Every child is different, in terms of maturity and attention span, but there is nothing wrong with a young boy or girl knowing what sexual intercourse is when framed around Biblical values.

Ideally, children should grow up in a home where they receive many small conversations about sexuality, procreation, intimacy, love, and how we should guard our eyes from inappropriate images. Then when they are developing as preteens or adolescents, conversations about their sexual development seem far more natural.

You may be playing catch-up as a parent, but it is better to start now rather than never. The most important thing you can do as a parent is to get over your own insecurities of talking about sex around your children (they will see insecurity coming from a mile away).

And remember, God’s grace is bigger than your parenting oversights. Your mistakes are opportunities for God to work.

21. Quoted in Josh and Dottie McDowell, *Straight Talk with Your Kids About Sex* (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 2012).

22. “Silence Breeds Babies,” Campaign for Our Children, Inc., 2008, <http://www.cfoc.org/index.php/parent-resource-center/talking-with-your-kids-about-sex/> (accessed Aug 27, 2013).

WHAT IF MY CHILD/TEEN HAS BEEN TO SEXUAL CHAT ROOMS?

Chat rooms are online locations where conversations take place between individuals who often do not know one another in “real life.” Sometimes, chat rooms are forums for all manner of sexual discussion. In fact, some chat rooms are dedicated to erotic conversations.

Many erotic chats are text-based, but webcams also provide a means to chat through live video.

Aside from the lust-driven conversations, chat rooms are dangerous for multiple reasons. First, children who use them are becoming someone else’s pornography. Individuals who view or capture pictures and videos of children in sexually provocative situations are consuming child pornography, which is crime in many nations of the world.

Second, erotic images are difficult—even impossible—to erase once they are in another person’s hands. Some children’s and teens’ reputations have been ruined by just one image let loose online. Children need to be warned about this.

Third, erotic images or conversations can be later used as blackmail. While it is rare, there have been many cases where adults or teens blackmailed others using the videos or photos sent to them online.

Fourth, and most disturbing, are the kinds of relationships that can be forged online. Teens who meet adults on the Internet can develop deep emotional attachments. Adults who meet teens online often use chat rooms or social networks to introduce themselves, and through a slow process of “grooming,” the adult can endear himself to a teenager, securing that teen’s trust and friendship. By exploiting common teenage vulnerabilities, predators can manipulate teens online, making them feel “special,” slowly introducing sexual topics into conversations, whittling down that teen’s defenses. Finally, the adult invites the teenager to meet him offline. In the vast majority of cases, when the teen finally meets with the adult, these are not instances of abduction. Rather, in most cases the victim willingly meets with the adult for sexual purposes on more than one occasion and would even describe him/herself as friends with or “in love” with the predator.²³

If you notice your child or teen venturing into chat rooms, these are important facts to mention.

23. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV71.pdf>

IF MY CHILD HAS BEEN MASTURBATING TO PORN, HOW SHOULD I TALK ABOUT THE ISSUE OF MASTURBATION WITH HIM/HER?

This might be better for a separate discussion that follows on the heels of a discussion about porn.

Different church traditions treat masturbation in different ways, but one approach that may be easiest is to piggyback on the themes of this discussion about pornography.

At first, it may be helpful not to focus on the act of masturbation itself, but rather what goes on in your son's or daughter's mind during masturbation. Often what they are fantasizing about could be called "pornography of the mind." Fantasizing about sex to achieve orgasm is problematic for many of the same reasons that porn is problematic. If your child understands why pornography should be avoided, they can also naturally understand why sexual fantasy should be avoided.

Masturbation is just fruit from a rotten tree. Maintaining self-control of one's sexual thoughts is the primary issue.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS ADDICTED?

If you discover your child has developed a habit of looking at porn, or even something that looks like a full-blown "addiction," ask for help. You may not feel equipped to handle this situation, and that's okay. When habitual sin has taken over our lives, we often need help from spiritual leaders to restore us (Galatians 6:1-2).

What drives an addiction to pornography? Certainly there is a biological component at play. Through overexposure to pornography, a person's brain releases a rush of hormones and neurotransmitters, and in some cases, these are similar to the chemicals released during the use of illegal drugs. A drug addict and porn addict are similar in that both, in a sense, are addicted to the high their brains produce. Sin doesn't just affect our mind. It also affects our bodies and brains (Romans 7:23; James 4:1).

Therefore, like other addictions, there are methods that are helpful for allowing a person to "detox." A good counselor can help give your child resources.

Addiction to pornography is also a matter of the core desires of the heart. Pornography is often not a stand-alone issue, but is a symptom of much deeper, more hidden sins. For instance...

- ▶ A boy might live his young life feeling rejected and inadequate, so instead of

turning to God, he turns to the fantasy world of porn to feel accepted by the women on the screen who never tell him no.

- ▶ A young woman might struggle with a deep insecurity about her body-image, so instead of turning to God for her sense of worth and identity, she turns to the fantasy world of porn to make her feel desirable.
- ▶ Teens might desire to be in romantic relationships, but they fear the vulnerability of getting close to someone else. Instead of trusting in God to work through their relationships—even their failed relationships—they turn to the “safe” digital world of porn where they can feel “connected” to images that don’t require them to be vulnerable.

Of course, other traumatic circumstances can also cause teens to turn to porn as a refuge—divorce, family dysfunction, abuse, and many other problems.

There are many underlying sins and issues that might turn a young boy or girl to pornography, but once children are using porn habitually, it is no longer mere curiosity that is driving their behavior. They are getting wrapped up in “the story” pornography is telling them, the fantasy world where they can escape and “feel right,” if only for a brief moment.

Unpacking these underlying sins and beliefs should likely be handled by a skilled counselor or pastor who has experience in this area.

WHAT IF I DISCOVER MY CHILD/TEEN HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED?

Sadly, child sexual abuse is common today. Conservative estimates say 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are victims of sexual abuse. Children are most vulnerable between the ages of 7 and 13.²⁴

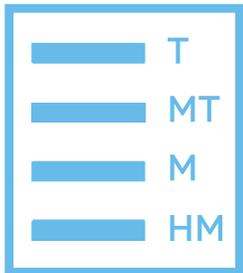
Some sex abuse victims seek out pornography, not out of sexual curiosity or lust, but triggered by the sexual trauma itself. If your child is victim of sexual abuse, this must be dealt with first before concerns about pornography are addressed. If your child tells you about an episode or many episodes of abuse, set aside any agenda you have about coaching them on sexuality or pornography. Respond with compassion and tenderness, affirm that the abuse was not their fault, and immediately seek out professional help for your child.

24. *Child Sexual Abuse Statistics*, The National Center for Victims of Crime, <http://www.victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/child-sexual-abuse-statistics> (accessed Sept. 17, 2013).

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Gain insight into your kids' online world. With Internet Accountability, you get a report of the websites your kids visit so you can have informed conversations about good online habits.

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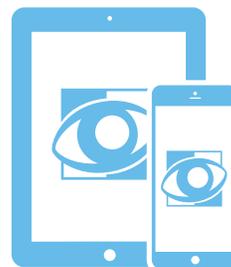
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