

PORNOGRAPHY AMONG YOUTH

PROBLEMS, ROADBLOCKS, AND SOLUTIONS

What people do online impacts their lives offline.

Our goal is to equip people with tools that provide protection and encourage accountability and trust in the fight against Internet temptation.

We bridge the gap between technology and relationships.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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NATALIE'S STORY

I grew up in a Christian home with amazing, loving parents. From a young age, I had a personal relationship with Christ. As a teenager, I was even given leadership roles in the church. My senior year of high school should have been an exciting time; I had been given solid roots in my upbringing and I had big dreams for the future. This was the point where I would begin to make decisions enabling me to live those dreams.

Despite all that, it was a horrible year.

The summer before, I had stumbled across erotic literature on the Internet. My parents, as a safety measure, had installed filtering software on my laptop, but somehow the website got past. Afterwards, I told myself it was a one-time thing. But within weeks, I went back for more. I told myself it was okay. It wasn't real porn; it was just stories. There was nothing wrong with what I was doing.

Before long, though, I wasn't just reading stories, but watching videos. Yet it was never enough. By winter, I would spend several hours every night watching and reading. When I had seen everything possible without hacking the filter on my laptop, I turned to my phone. By spring, I couldn't stop. Even if I was exhausted, I had to go one more story, one more video. I couldn't have enough. Before, I had convinced myself that I wasn't addicted—that I could stop anytime I wanted. Now, I wanted to stop, but I couldn't. My life had no purpose. I felt like I had nowhere to go to for help. I was trapped.



As time drew near for me to leave for college, I began to get scared. How was I going to live out my dreams, if I was chained to this monster called pornography? I realized that in the past year, I had not only become addicted to porn, but I had also grown further away from God than I ever had before.

Two weeks before leaving for college, I begged God to forgive me and asked Him to help me break the addiction. I knew I could not possibly do it; He had to help me. For the next two weeks, I refused to take my laptop into my bedroom. I spent time praying and reading my Bible every day. Even though it was hard, life began to look hopeful again.

My first night at college, God placed Christ-like friends around me who lifted me up and within a few weeks knew about my problem. They began to keep me accountable. These relationships made it easy to say “no” to porn. Not only would they ask me how I was doing at resisting temptation, but also they would keep my laptop overnight, stop me from beating myself up when I messed up, and, most importantly, prayed for me. I would not have been able to make it through fall quarter without depending on them.

Over winter break, being away from my accountability, I slipped up several times. At first, I was mad at myself for returning to my old ways. Then, one of my friends showed me that I was still growing and God had forgiven me.

I was able to find the courage to talk to my parents about the problem. Bringing it up with them was one of the hardest things I have ever done, but also one of the most rewarding. Together, we decided that the Internet filter on my computer was not doing any good and decided to try Covenant Eyes. Now, knowing that my parents can see whatever I do online, resisting temptation is much easier.

Before using Covenant Eyes, I did not think it was possible to have an open relationship with my parents. In the past, bringing up personal issues wasn't easy. Now, I understand that they really do want the best that God has for me and don't judge the decisions I make or condemn me when I mess up. Because I understand this now, it's easy to come to them when I have problems in other areas. I can ask for their advice and respect it because they've demonstrated that they're willing to do whatever it takes to see me succeed.

SOME RELEVANT STATISTICS

THERE IS A WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE OF PORNOGRAPHY.

13% of all searches online are for erotic content.¹

According to a survey of hundreds of university students, 67% of young men and 49% of young women agree that viewing pornography is acceptable.²

YOUTH EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY IS UBIQUITOUS.

Before the age of 18, 93% of guys and 62% of girls are exposed to porn. By the same age, 83% of boys and 57% of girls have seen pornographic scenes of group sex online.³

Representatives from the pornography industry told Congress' COPA Commission that as much as 20 to 30% of the traffic to some pornographic websites come from children.⁴

In a survey⁵ of 29,000 college students:

- » 51% of the men and 32% of women said they first viewed pornography *before* their teenage years.
- » 62% of men and 18% of women said they spend some time online *every week* for sexual purposes.

1 Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam. *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, 2011.

2 Jason S. Carroll, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Larry J. Nelson, Chad D. Olson, Carolyn McNamara Barry, Stephanie D. Madsen. "Generation XXX: Pornography Acceptance and Use Among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, January 2008.

3 Chiara Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor. "The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth" *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 2008.

4 Dick Thornburgh & Herbert S. Lin, Eds. "Youth, Pornography and the Internet." *Committee to Study Tools and Strategies for Protecting Kids from Pornography and their Applicability to Other Inappropriate Internet Content*; Computer Science and Telecommunications Board; National Research Council, 2002.

5 Michael Leahy, *Porn University: What College Students are Really Saying About Sex on Campus*, 2009

SEXUALIZED MEDIA, INCLUDING PORNOGRAPHY, IMPACTS HOW YOUTH UNDERSTAND SEXUALITY.

“New evidence points to the media adolescents use frequently (television, music, movies, magazines, and the Internet) as important factors in the initiation of sexual intercourse. There is a major disconnect between what mainstream media portray—casual sex and sexuality with no consequences—and what children and teenagers need.” - American Academy of Pediatrics⁶

According to the *Journal of Adolescent Health*,⁷ prolonged exposure to pornography leads to:

- » An exaggerated perception of sexual activity in society
- » The abandonment of the hope of sexual monogamy
- » The belief that promiscuity is the natural state
- » The belief that abstinence and sexual inactivity are unhealthy
- » Cynicism about love or the need for affection between sexual partners
- » The belief that marriage is sexually confining

A study of youth between the ages of 10 and 17 concluded that there is a significant relationship between frequent porn use and feelings of loneliness and major depression.⁸

15% of cell-owning teens (ages 12-17) say they have received sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images of someone they know. This percentage steadily climbs the older youth get,⁹ and is as high as 46% among young adults (ages 20-26).¹⁰

6 Fuld GL, Mulligan DA, Altmann TR, Brown A, Christakis DA, Clarke-Pearson K, Dreyer BP, Falik HL, O’Keeffe GS, Nelson KG, Strasburger VC. “American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy statement—sexuality, contraception, and the media” September 2010.

7 Dolf Zillmann, “Influence of Unrestrained Access to Erotica on Adolescents’ and Young Adults’ Dispositions toward Sexuality” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 27, Iss. 2, Supp. 1, August 2000.

8 Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell. “Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 2005.

9 Amanda Lenhart. “Teens and Sexting” Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009.

10 The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and *CosmoGirl.com*. “Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults” 2008.

“My research has left me extremely concerned. A recent survey showed that 54% of boys found porn ‘really inspiring’ in terms of sexual performance. This worries me, because of the nature of the material they are now watching.” - Dr. Linda Papadopoulos¹¹

PARENTS HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY.

“A warm and communicative parent-child relationship is the most important nontechnical means that parents can use to deal with the challenges of the sexualized media environment.” - Dr. Patricia Greenfield

79% of kids’ first unwanted exposure to porn is in the home.¹²

64% of parents try to monitor where their teens go online by checking their web browsers or looking over their shoulders. Unfortunately, 42% of teens are clearing their browsing history.¹³

THE CHURCH IS NOT IMMUNE TO THESE SAME EFFECTS.

In March 2005 *Christianity Today* published the results of a study called “Christians and Sex” in their *Leadership Journal*. Out of 680 pastors surveyed, 57% said addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation.

In 2002, of 1,351 pastors surveyed, 54% said they had viewed Internet pornography within the last year, and 30% of these had visited within the last 30 days.¹⁴

11 Dr. Linda Papadopoulos. “Sexualisation of Young People: Review”

12 Janis Wolak, Kimberly Mitchell, and David Finkelhor. *Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later*, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2006.

13 “2011 Parent-Teen Internet Safety Report,” GFI Software, June 2011.

14 Pastors.com Survey. Qtd. in “Wounded Clergy.” *Hope & Freedom Counseling Services, Media A-Team, Inc.*, March 2002.

KEY PROBLEMS

KEY PROBLEM FACING YOUTH

PROBLEM:

Youth are led to believe their value is intimately tied to their ability to live up to culture's ungodly sexual expectations.

Sex is more or less worshiped today. A person's sexual prowess and attractiveness, by culture's standards, has become a mark of great value.

Youth have largely bought into this idol of sex, which drives them into (a) sexual activity, and/or (b) sexual and relational fantasies.

ANSWER:

Youth must be led to believe their value is tied to being made in the image of God and being re-made in the image of Christ.

Youth must understand they are sexually and relationally broken and that in Christ they can find God's kindness and forgiveness, despite their sin.

Godly maleness, femaleness, and sexual desire must be taught and modeled.

Christ's virtuous treatment of women must become for youth the model of how men are meant to behave in society.

The covenant between Christ and the church must become for youth the model of godly marriage.

BARRIER:

Media saturation in a post-Christian culture is the biggest barrier to modeling godliness to youth.

SOLUTION:

The church must use the power of story, in person and in media, to inspire and teach youth about holy living.

KEY PROBLEM FACING PARENTS

PROBLEM:

Parents feel paralyzed to prepare their children to have wholesome relationships and face sexual temptations.

ANSWER:

Parents must become empowered to prepare their children with a vision for godly sexuality.

BARRIER:

The lack of experiential knowledge and wisdom is the biggest barrier to parents being empowered to train their children.

SOLUTION:

Experienced parents must be given a platform to teach and model for other families a bold and Biblical vision of training children.

KEY PROBLEM FACING THE CHURCH

PROBLEM:

The Church is unskilled at addressing moral dilemmas of the rising generation and does not use the gospel to train young men and women to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

ANSWER:

The Church must learn to contextualize the gospel for a sex-saturated world, and clearly demonstrate in words and actions how the gospel saves us from the guilt and grip of sin.

BARRIER:

Sexual compromise and a lack of transparency among church leaders are the biggest barriers to demonstrating the power of the gospel.

SOLUTION:

Church leaders at every level must be themselves transformed by the gospel, be transparent about their great sin, and boast in their great Savior.

TIPS FOR PARENTS IN A PORNIFIED WORLD

1. TALK ABOUT SEX.

Talk early. Don't wait until adolescence to bring these things up. Don't let the Internet or media teach them before you do.

Talk often. Remind them again and again what the Bible says about the purpose of sexuality.

Talk openly. Encourage them to ask questions. Don't let your silence or attitude turn sex into a taboo subject.

Talk personally. Get into discussions about attraction and sexual desires. Don't underestimate the fact that your sons and daughters are sexual beings. Be alert to their curiosity about the opposite sex and take advantage of specific situations to teach.

Talk positively. Your attitude will demonstrate whether you are ashamed to talk about sexuality or whether you see it as a God-given gift that should be guarded.

Talk practically. Don't pretend that purity isn't a struggle. Talk about sexual thoughts and desires and how to deal with them.

Talk soberly. Tell them sex and sexual desire powerfully connects us to another person. It should be taken seriously.

Talk to their hearts. Purity is more than abstinence. It's about thoughts, motives, and desires.

2. TALK ABOUT PORN.

Talk about lust. Remind them about how powerful sexual and relational fantasies can be. They can make us feel very good for a while, but they are no substitute for the reality of marriage.

Talk about masturbation. When paired with fantasy, masturbation trains us to be *inward* with our sexuality. Help them understand their sexual desires are not just for their own pleasure, but something to be shared with their future spouse.

Talk about everyday sexual media. This is the perfect bridge to eventually talk about pornography. Your sons and daughters aren't blind: they see sexually charged magazine covers, TV, movies, music videos, and Victoria's Secret outlets. Remind them that the reason these things exist is because of the power of sexual desire. Mass media uses sexual images to get us to look and buy. Teach them not to take in sexual media passively but instead see it with a critical eye, as a counterfeit pleasure.

Ask them about media they've seen. Allow them to be specific about things they've seen on TV, in movies, and online that have been sexual. Don't be quick to judge. Find out what they've seen specifically. Was the exposure intentional or unintentional?

Talk about addiction. Explain that sexual media "supercharges" our fantasies. It's like a drug: the more we see, the more we want to see.

Talk about exploitation. Pornographers often prey on women and girls with low self-esteem. Tell them not to be a consumer of media that exploits others this way.

Talk personally. Be honest about your own struggles. Talk with them as a fellow struggler, not a "perfect parent."

Talk about guilt and shame. When we fill our minds with lust, this provokes a great deal of guilt and shame in us. In our shame, we hide from one another, afraid of what others might think, and we medicate the pain of our shame with more lust. Talk to your children about this vicious cycle and the importance of opening up about their struggles to others.

3. LET THEM KNOW THEIR WORTH.

Tell them they are made in the image of God. This is what defines their worth.

Tell them personal worth isn't defined by sexual prowess or looks. If you are obsessed about their physical appearance or your own appearance, you will train them to attach great importance toward outward attractiveness. Many people pursue wrong relationships or engage in sexual fantasies because they desire to feel attractive, seductive, or manly.

Tell them you love them (and tell them a lot). This especially goes for dads. Sons and daughters who know they are valued are less likely to look to others (real or digital) to fill the void in their hearts.

4. PROTECT THEM FROM PORNOGRAPHY.

Don't consume sexual media yourself. Get rid of your movies with sex scenes. Get rid of pornographic magazines. Get rid of your erotic novels. Don't view porn on the computer. All of these are access points for your sons and daughters.

Use software. Don't give them unrestrained access to the Internet. Put good parental controls on all computers and cell phones. Put accountability software on all Internet devices to teach them to be discerning about what they do online.

Place safeguards on TV. Be aware of what each channel brings into your home.

Your kids are only as safe as their best friend's house. Know what protections other parents are putting in place.

5. HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE.

Monitor what they do online. Be conscious of what they are exposed to on the Internet. Purchase accountability software to help you.

Teach them how to make good online choices. When you see small red flags, use these as an opportunity about online responsibility and personal purity.

6. ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING.

Be open. You must be approachable. They need to know you want to talk.

Be understanding. You were there once, too. You can (still) be tempted just as they can. Let them know you identify. Don't come across as naive.

Be forgiving. If they've made mistakes, don't treat them lightly, but don't condemn either.

Be loving. They need to know you love them no matter what temptations the world throws their way.

Be helpful. If they've already gotten in over their head with temptation, find them some help or counseling. Talk to someone you trust who can point you in the right direction.

Be the parent. You are not their buddy. Take charge. Let them know you are there to protect and guide them.

Be prayerful. Pray with them and for them. Make a habit of it.