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Stephen Rossi, M.A., L.P.C.

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CHILDREN AND THE INTERNET



We live in an amazing age of information and advanced technology. The computer and world wide web have blown things wide open. You can talk to anyone in the world on the internet via email, Internet phone, Webcam, chat rooms, and personal websites. We can access valuable, unlimited information instantly from the internet.

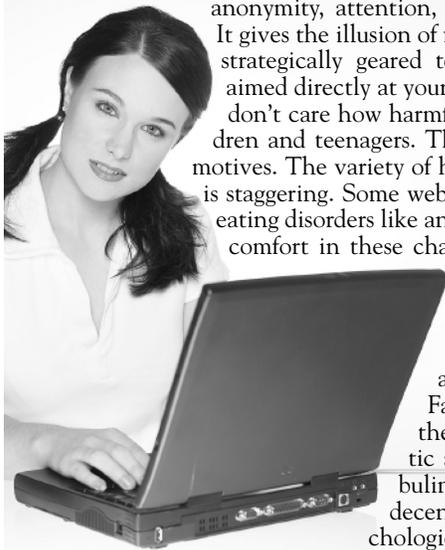
The internet is one of the greatest inventions and blessings of all time. It connects us with people and resources which make our lives easier and more efficient. The internet can also be used as a gateway to evil. A person can use the internet to access pornography, prostitutes, sexual predators, pedophiles, and all kinds of harmful people, things and activities. Innocent lives have been lured into disastrous circumstances and destroyed through the internet. Alarming numbers of children and teenagers are succumbing to internet abuse and experiencing serious resulting problems. More serious repercussions exist today, as people pursue greater pleasure, excitement, fantasy, violence, and sexual stimulation. Depraved people are eager to accommodate anyone pursuing these interests. They look for fresh victims. The pornographers target the curious web surfer no matter what their age or background. I have seen an increasing trend in my practice over the past six years of more children and teenagers coming to therapy because they abused the internet and are addicted to pornography. Their parents are shocked and devastated. I have also seen more children and young teenagers addicted to hard core homosexual pornography and assumed they themselves must be homosexuals. It's a living nightmare for these parents and their children. There is hope, help, and ways to prevent these problems from occurring. Children and teenagers can heal and resolve these issues. There is also help for those struggling with their sexuality, homosexual thoughts, fantasies, and behaviors.

Problems

The internet has a multitude of potential traps to seduce young people. It lures young people in with the promise of excitement, exploration, stimulation, exposure to "forbidden fruits", fulfillment, variety, escape,

anonymity, attention, belonging, and relationships. It gives the illusion of filling a void. Bad websites are strategically geared to ensnare people. Many are aimed directly at your children and teenagers. They don't care how harmful their sites are to your children and teenagers. They are driven by evil, selfish motives. The variety of harmful influences on the web is staggering. Some websites and chat rooms promote eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. Girls seek comfort in these chat rooms and message boards.

They share pictures, poetry, and music. Websites like these encourage its followers to assume anorexia or bulimia as a lifestyle (Focus on the Family 2005). They strengthen these illnesses. They are fatalistic about recovery. Pro anorexic-bulimic teens often embark on a decent to serious medical or psychological problems (Jay MacInnes



Van Anrooy, Focus on the Family, 2005). Children and teenagers can easily access sites that promote witchcraft and satanic worship. Many of these sites are subtle and deceptive in their presentation. They deny any association with these subjects, but their agenda is the same. They want to steer your children away from God and lead them down a path of pain and destruction. Cults and demonic organizations seduce young people every day. They promise power, meaning, freedom, escape and acceptance. These organizations can be extremely dangerous in taking teenagers and children into a deep, dark, world of sin, evil, illicit sex, and violence. The internet offers potentially very dangerous encounters through websites, chat rooms and dating sites. Children and teenagers get into these forums looking for safe friendships, acceptance, and excitement. Unfortunately, many become involved in unhealthy discussions and relationships. A growing number of children and teens eventually become the victims of sexual predators and pedophiles this way. Cyber dating (online dating) is very popular today. It can be addicting too. It's easy and appears risk free. This format enables people to bypass the "getting to know you" stage of normal dating relationships and accelerates the process. Online dating relationships typically move too quickly and deeply. They disclose too much and bond intensely. This can damage both parties emotionally psychologically, and spiritually.



Children and adolescents are becoming addicted to porn on the web at disturbing rates. Porn sites have many free high-detail "sample" images. Kids don't always need a credit card to see hardcore porn. Pornography is invasive and progressive. Pornographic images can captivate a boy full of hormones. His excitement turns to boredom after awhile, and he is drawn into more hard core material. Eventually he gets bored with seeing "normal" things that a man and woman can do together, and excitement comes from seeing deviant sexual/violent behavior with people, animals and objects (Harms and Howden, Oregon Family Policy Council, 2002).

Warning Signs

Internet Abuse:

- Loss of interest in social activities (withdrawal from friends, family).
- Uses of new (unusual) vocabulary, heavy with computer terms, satanic phrases, or sexual reference or sudden interest in related posters, music, etc.
- Look for related doodling or writing. Use of words such as: hacking, phreaking (or any words with "ph" replacing "f").
- Lack of interest in self and appearance or indications of lack of sleep.
- Computer or modem running late at night (even when unattended), especially if the screen shows a series of four-digit numbers (the computer is trying to identify calling card PIN numbers), or a series of 16-digit numbers (the computer is trying to validate credit card numbers)(Harms and Howden 2002).



Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell talk about pornography addiction in their booklet *Dare to Dig Deeper "Toxic Porn"* (Focus on the Family, 1996). They contend that not everyone who sees porn will become addicted to it, but that some will develop toxic ideas about women, sex, marriage and children. This kind of damage is still bad. They also believe that porn is not the only ingredient in addiction. They claim that those who become addicted have some kind of emotional opening that enables the addiction to really take hold. Pornographers want their addicted customers to keep coming back for more. They deliberately place images that excite, and arouse. Dr. Victor Cline says that sex and pornography can be a more difficult addiction to break than cocaine. Pornography addiction is very serious.

Pornography Addiction Stages:

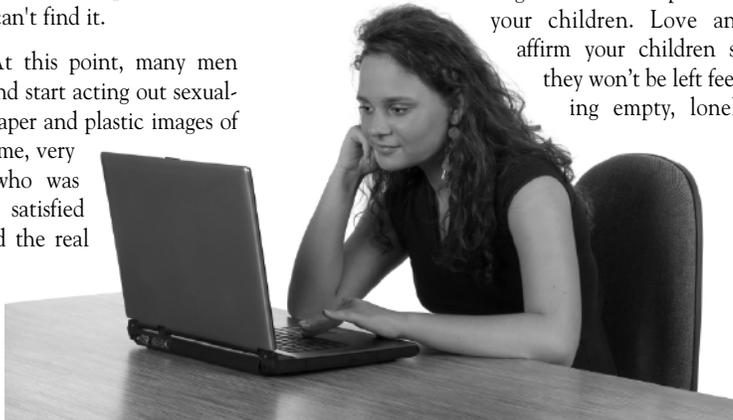
Early exposure. Most guys who get addicted to porn start early. They see it when they are very young.

Addiction. The addiction comes later. The addict keeps coming back to porn. It becomes a regular part of his life. He is hooked. He cannot quit.

Escalation. After awhile, escalation begins. He starts to look for more and more graphic porn. He starts using porn that would have disgusted him when he started. It excites him now.

Desensitization. Eventually, he starts to become numb. The most graphic, degrading porn does not excite him anymore. He becomes desperate to feel the same thrill again but can't find it.

Acting out sexually. At this point, many men make a dangerous jump and start acting out sexually. They move from the paper and plastic images of porn to the real world. Some, very sadly, like Ted Bundy who was addicted to porn wasn't satisfied enough anymore, he tried the real thing — rape, and then murder.



Solutions

You cannot fully protect your children from internet pornography unless they work with you. Kids can find porn anywhere. Help them realize how negative, degrading, and dangerous it is. They really need to be motivated from within to avoid porn when they are tempted. Make it clear that internet pornography on the home comput-

er will not be tolerated and they will lose their internet privileges for awhile if they disobey you. A firm, compassionate presentation of this limit will help them see that this is for their protection. Parents, I urge you to become knowledgeable about the computer and internet so you can establish healthy parameters for your children. Go to Focus on the Family's website www.troubledwith.com and look up parenting teens and internet concerns. Look for *Taming the Internet* by John Harms and Michael Howden (Oregon Family Policy Council, 2002). They cover the whole internet issue and protection in their book. *Find Safety in Cyberspace* by Steve Watters (Focus on the Family, 1998). He also outlines good ways to protect your children from internet abuse by building good boundaries and avoiding trouble spots. Read *Becoming Detectives* (by John Harms and Michael Howden/ Oregon Family Policy Council, 2002). This is an excellent article explaining the technical side of the internet and how to protect your children.

Healthy, Godly parenting and strong parent-child relationships make the difference in preventing internet abuse and pornography addiction. Talk to your children about porn. Tell them about God's plan for sex within marriage and that pornography can rob people of intimacy and self-control later on in marriage. Help them establish boundaries in their minds when they have impure thoughts (Focus on the Family, 1999). Nurture your relationships with your children. Get involved in your children's lives. Spend time connecting with them around many different types of activities. Repair damaged relationships with your children. Love and affirm your children so they won't be left feeling empty, lonely

and bored, and at risk for going on line to fill these needs. Live out your faith and obedience in God for them to see. Let them see your fruit. Raise them to love the Lord and seek strength and refuge in Him in all circumstances. Pray with them. Always keep the lines of communication open with them. Talk openly about all kinds of subjects, especially the tough ones and how they relate to Christian living. Allow open dialogue, listening, understanding and exchanging information. Do this in love. Godly kids who feel safe, connected, validated, loved, and protected by their parents are less likely to fall prey to the dark side of the internet. Approach your child or teen with love and compassion if you discover he or she has abused the internet or is addicted to pornography. This is difficult, it's hard not to feel angry, disappointed, and betrayed, but they will need you as an ally to help them come through this. Seek qualified Christian counseling for them as soon as possible.

THERE'S HOPE AND HELP

Christ will empower you to help your children avoid internet pitfalls and heal from any problems they may already have in this area. Let God help you accomplish this. You really cannot monitor your children 24 hours a day. Work with your children to establish healthy parameters in using the internet. Educate them on the potential problems in this area. Trust God. Maintain good communication and Godly relationships with your children and be there for them if they fall. Children and teens can recover from internet abuse and pornography addiction. It may be a long hard road, but I have seen God restore lives broken by pornography addiction. God will give you the strength to endure. God will change you in this process too. You will be a tremendous support and witness for parents whose children struggle with these problems.

F.Y.I.

Steve Rossi, M.A., L.P.C.

THE CHRISTIAN COUNSELOR

9525 Katy Freeway, Suite 311
Houston, Texas 77024
(713) 395-1555



SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

INFO: 713.395.1555

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