

## Teenagers & pornography;

In recent times I have had a number of concerned parents consult with me about the access their teenagers children have had to pornography. One parent found pornographic images on her 13 year olds lap top left there accidentally by her older teenage brother. Another mother asked me to examine her own lap top because of her fear about what she might find after she came across images left there after her sons use of the computer. Both parents were concerned about what their teenagers were up to. They did not quite know how to handle the situation so were seeking guidance as to what might be the best way to approach this upsetting scenario.

Both of these examples illustrate how the sex industry now has the ability to penetrate right into the living rooms of every teenager, child, and family in Ireland. This is done through the internet and most often unbeknownst to parents. There is a hidden iceberg of disturbing influences affecting our teenagers and children which has gone entirely unaddressed by our governments responsible for protecting children and families.

So what would I say to parents about their children's relationship with pornography? These are some of the main points I would make;

1. The question for every parent of older children and teenagers is not "what should I do if I find my teen has been viewing pornography", the question needs to be "what should I do as a parent knowing that my teenager is exposed to pornography".
2. We as parents can have the same attitude as society at large, if we pretend it's not there then we won't have to deal with it. The responsibility therefore is as follows: *Deal with it.*

It is everywhere. Teenagers have it on MP3 players, DVD's, CD's, memory sticks, cameras, and mobile phones. They can get it anywhere and pass it to each other electronically. So, when it emerges, or when the opportunity arises, or when you find your teen has seen or been exposed to pornography you might:

1. Address the issue with confidence and assertiveness operating on the assumption that they have seen it, had access to it, or are around people who deal with it.
2. Do not shame your teen with an over-the-top dramatic confrontation that creates great distress for the teenager. Rather, confront the issue with an unflinching confidence, openness, and information.

The information you need to assimilate should include the following:

1. That viewing pornography becomes addictive.
2. It becomes addictive because, like all addictions, it is accompanied by a physical rush, excitement, or thrill that wants to be repeated. It is this physical response that makes it addictive, the teen once experiencing it wants more of it.
3. It also becomes addictive because of the experience of *power* that goes with it. If you allow yourself to think of it – the extraordinary power that is experienced by the young person in being able to, at will, have access to a whole secret adult world of eroticism and perversion is addictive. There is some primitive draw toward that feeling and exposure. Just like a little child becomes fascinated with a dead animal, or adults are fascinated by watching medical operations, there is this fascination with the invisible underworld of life. The power to be able to do this and the negative effect of that power cannot be overstated.
4. Most teenagers know, both physically and morally, that it is wrong. It *feels wrong* because of the secrecy that surrounds it and because it breaches a natural taboo regarding

exposure to the intimacies of sex. The taboo is not just a social, cultural, or religious one, it is a natural one seen across cultures and even species. Just as physical violence against another person is *felt* and known to be against nature, there are other activities that are wrong because they are not in accordance with our nature. The teenager actually knows this in his or her body.

5. Access to, interest in, and involvement in pornography is not just an activity of young boys - girls are also perversely drawn to it.
6. Teenagers need to appreciate that, despite the fact that they are drawn toward pornography; it interferes with and corrupts their images of members of the opposite sex. It gets inside their heads in such a way as to be superimposed on their fantasies and feelings.
7. Pornography creates a lot of internal distress for the viewer because it overwhelms the senses of the young person; it results in flash-backs to images; creates a pre-occupation with the pornography, and interferes with the child's self-esteem. Having worked with many adults who have been addicted to sex, they always describe it in these kinds of terms.
8. The teenager's self-esteem is damaged because of the inevitable secrecy that surrounds it. Anyone who lives a secret life finds him or herself split in two and out of emotional alignment.

With this kind of information say to your teenager;

1. You are not abnormal for being drawn to pornography. The raging hormones of teenager hood means that, for many young boys particularly, sex is ever present on their minds.
2. You must understand how addictive it becomes and how some people get sucked into the addiction of pornography in such a way as to take over their consciousness.
3. We don't want to make you feel bad for looking at it, or for wanting to look at it, but we need you to be able to see what it does to you.
4. But you know it is wrong and you know this for a number of reasons. It feels wrong. It makes you live a secret life. It 'messes with your head'. It makes you view girls in a different way and makes you start comparing girls you know to girls in pornography. It distorts your perception. It begins to make you feel bad about yourself.
5. So, your interest in sex is fine and natural, but you must always keep it connected to what you know to be good, and what we have taught you.
6. Pornography is run by the sex industry designed to exploit young women and people who look at it and buy it.
7. The girls you see in pornography are really some poor parent's daughter who has been trapped by drugs, poverty, trafficking, exploitation, or prostitution and by viewing it, and buying into it, you support the nasty people who create this need.
8. We don't want you to be a prude but we want you to be a young man of courage who is able to challenge his mates about porn, able to stand up for the girls that are exploited by it, is able to respect women and girls in a manly way. We want you to be able to kiss a girl with tenderness and affection that makes a girl feel good about herself because of her values and self-respect.
9. Stand against it without pretending that you are not also fascinated by it.
10. Talk to us about it. The struggle with it is normal and you may not always win, but you and we need to know how to deal with its effects.
11. Looking at pictures of some poor young girl trafficked into prostitution does not feel right. Trust these feelings.
12. It is an old fashioned idea but never forget that sex must always have something to with love. You may not understand what, but they are entwined.