

My Child Was Doing WHAT?!

What to do when you learn your child is viewing pornography.

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There are few more dramatic, clutch-the-pearls parenting moments than discovering that your child was viewing pornography. It doesn't matter what your child's gender is or how shy or outgoing your child is. It doesn't matter whether you've put parental restrictions on your Internet access. Porn is easily accessible today in a variety of formats, and it is very likely that this will happen in your family at some point.

Why might your child have checked out porn? The most common reasons are:

Curiosity – Cultural references to porn are all around us. They are made by teens and adults, on the radio, by recording artists, in sitcoms and in movies. So sometimes kids check out porn because they want to know what it is and what the big deal is about.

Hormones – It's hard for us to admit, but our children are sexual beings. Once they enter puberty, they are RAGING sexual beings. It's exactly what's supposed to be happening, biologically and developmentally. So sometimes, kids go online to check out porn because it turns them on. Sorry. Truth.

Confusion – Adolescents are concrete thinkers who need specific examples. If you describe what a condom is, your adolescent will understand something. If you show your adolescent a condom, allow her or him to actually touch it, your concrete adolescent will understand far more. For some young people, hearing "oral sex is when someone puts their mouth on another person's genitals for pleasure" isn't enough. How does that actually happen? Why do people do it? Adolescents go online, see someone performing oral sex and say, "Oh, I get it."

Parents often ask, what impact does viewing porn have on children? There are different viewpoints and a range of research relating to this. Generally speaking, a one-time viewing of porn does not harm a young person. It can, however, misinform and confuse them. Porn is made for adults, not adolescents. It is designed to be a fantasy—and adolescents don't always get that because, again, they're concrete thinkers. What they see is what they get.

So, what do you do if your child has been checking out porn?

Decide who's going to bring it up.

If you are partnered or married, strategize together first for consistency. Then one of you should speak with your child so she or he does not feel ganged up on. Believe me, your child is going to feel embarrassed and defensive, so you need to approach this gently.

Be ready to explain how you know she or he was accessing porn.

When it comes to technology, parents are all over the place about whether it's OK to check their children's e-mails, texts, etc. If you are a parent who does spot checks, I suggest you let your child know that in advance. Otherwise, while you're trying to talk with your child about why it's not OK for her or him to look at porn, she or he will be focused on how and why you violated her or his privacy.



Be ready to have several short conversations.

Again, your child is likely to be mortified that you discovered she or he was watching porn. That means you have a limited window in which to talk about it. This also means that you may need to come back to it several times to reinforce what you said the first time, since all they will be able to hear is their own voice in their head saying, "Please let this be over...."

Set boundaries.

Remember you are the parent, and as the parent, you are responsible for setting and maintaining rules in your home. After you've spoken about why adolescents shouldn't be viewing porn, you need to clearly explain your expectations moving forward and that, like with any other rules, there will be consequences for breaking them. Effective consequences should happen right after the offense and be related to the offense (e.g., no non-homework computer access for a period of time).

Watch for these warning signs that indicate a problem needing professional help:**Subject matter.**

If you were to discover that the only images your child was viewing were particularly violent or degrading, you'd need to talk about what she or he saw and to explain clearly that that is not the way people should behave in a sexual relationship. How that conversation goes will determine whether you might want to bring your child to see a therapist to explore the source of their curiosity.

Frequency of viewing.

A parent asked me, "If my son says he can't stop watching porn, is that a problem?" Absolutely. If viewing porn feels like a compulsion, professional intervention is necessary to direct your child away from a behavior that is not healthy to one that is.

Changes in language or behavior.

Any dramatic changes in your child's language or behavior should be noted. (For example, if your previously outgoing child becomes quieter, more secretive, or you hear them using more sexualized language with friends or with you). These changes may not necessarily indicate that your child has been viewing porn, but they can. When in doubt, check it out.

Above all, stay calm. Talk with other parents about how they've handled this situation with their children. Speak with professionals who have expertise working with children. You are not alone in figuring out how to address this!

<http://www.momeomagazine.com/my-child-was-doing-what-what-to-do-when-you-learn-your-child-is-viewing-pornography/>

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