

Protecting Your Household

According to the Internet Filter Review, 90% of eight- to sixteen-year-olds have viewed pornography online, usually within the context of doing research for homework. The average age of the first exposure is estimated to be as low as eleven.

In light of these statistics, you can put some safeguards in place:



- * Talk up front about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.
- * Put a secure filter on your home computer.
- * Block unwanted sites with password protection and monitor your children's computer viewing.

- * Become familiar with the "history" function on your Internet browser and check it frequently. It will show you all the sites that have been visited recently. You can set it to record up to a month's worth of viewing history.
- * Place computers in open areas around the house.
- * Set limits on Internet time.
- * Find a holy card, prayer, or family photo to place on the video monitor to serve as a reminder of our priorities and capabilities of self-control.

It's important to make these efforts ongoing as well. For instance, finding graphic pictures of celebrities in various states of undress is literally only a Google search and mouse click away — so vigilance and communication is paramount.

Finally, while women are becoming increasingly interested in pornography, the husband is still more likely to introduce it into a marriage than the wife. Combating the effects of pornography on a marriage is twofold. Husbands need to remember that the use of pornography breaks the vow of marital fidelity, in addition to creating a fundamental self-centeredness that destroys the mutual intimacy necessary to a Christian marriage — not to mention the potential of the children stumbling on previously viewed sites, searches, or pop-ups. Wives, on the other hand, need to remain strong in their insistence that pornography not be a part of their married life.

When You Need Additional Help

If pornography has invaded your marriage, it may require professional intervention.

"I didn't know what my husband was looking at until I caught him one day," says Louise, whose husband admits to an ongoing addiction to porn. "I was shocked and devastated when I found out." Louise, like most people whose spouse is caught in the web of pornography, stresses the importance of finding a counselor (preferably Catholic) who understands the Church's teachings about masturbation, sexual pleasure, and marriage. "We've been in counseling for more than a year," she adds, but also admits that while things are better, she still isn't sure their marriage will survive.

In addition, twelve-step groups, such as Sex Addicts Anonymous or Sexaholics Anonymous, are invaluable.

"I knew the Church's teaching, and so did my husband," says Louise, "but SA put the problem out there in a way that neither of us could deny." Even if your spouse doesn't want to go, you can attend twelve-step group meetings for spouses and family members affected by this addiction, such as S-Anon. As Louise puts it, "You'll learn that you aren't alone."

Masturbation and Pornography

Pornography is often used to create a situation in which an individual masturbates — deliberately stimulating the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. The Church has always taught that masturbation is an "an intrinsically and gravely disordered action" because the "deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose." (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2352.)

Never before has pornography been so readily available to so many people. Like a plague, it sickens and even kills those who come in its path. It corrupts our vision of marriage, turns individuals into commodities, and lines the coffers of the unscrupulous and immoral. As Bishop Loverde says, "We stand at a threshold — either we can continue to allow this plague to spread with fewer and fewer checks, or we can take concrete steps to uproot it in our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, and our culture." **The choice is ours.**

For More Information:

Aquilina, Mike, and Fr. Kris D. Stubna, *Talking to Youth About Sexuality: A Parent's Guide* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2006).

Cavins, Jeff, *The Pornography Plague* (CD) (Ascension Press, 2005).

Groeschel, Fr. Benedict J., C.F.R., *The Virtue Driven Life* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2006).

Loverde, Bishop Paul S., *Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God, A Pastoral Letter* (Catholic Diocese of Arlington, 2006). Available on the internet at <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/offices/communications/boughtprice.html>.

Morrow, T.G., *Christian Courtship in an Oversexed World* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2003).

Popcak, Gregory K., MSW, LCSW, *Beyond the Birds and the Bees* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2001).

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PORNOGRAPHY

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Mark closes down his web browser, then goes to the toolbar and carefully erases the history of the sites he's been viewing. In their bedroom, his wife stares at the ceiling, knowing he has spent the last hour looking at explicit sexual pictures. When he comes to bed, she pretends to be asleep, as she does most nights.

What's the Big Deal?

People sometimes think of pornography as “harmless visual stimuli” and wonder what the big deal is with something you do in the privacy of your own home. The reality, however, is that pornography is profoundly harmful, both to the viewer and to society.

A new meta-analysis (a statistical integration of all existing scientific data) from Canada has shown irrefutably that involvement with pornography leads to behavioral, psychological, and social problems. Some of this includes disturbed views of intimacy, such as sexual domination or submissiveness; objectification of people; fetishes; aggression; and even violence. In some extreme cases, people have become so addicted — especially to Internet porn — that they can no longer be around computers even for work.

Just Because You Can Doesn't Mean You Should



The Internet and satellite TV have made accessing pornography extremely easy. But it's easy to max out your credit limits or eat too many calories, too — just two examples of things we have slowly recognized as sources of downward spirals as

well. Our society gives us literally millions of choices, but each comes with consequences. In the case of pornography, we can get sucked in with rationalizations like *just this once*, or *I'm not hurting anyone*, or *it's just entertainment*.

All of these are lies.

While pornography is often considered a solitary act, it's more like an underwater earthquake that causes a tsunami which in turn destroys countless lives hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away. Its victims are many:

- Those who expose the most intimate parts of their bodies to create sexual illusions and incite lust in others — who, as one person put it, subject themselves to repeated rape in the minds of strangers in order to make a living.

- Children whose innocence has been shattered for profit.

- Husbands and wives whose marriages have been destroyed.

- Those who have been subjected to unwanted sexual violence because someone else's addiction to pornography has driven them to seek sexual pleasure at any cost.
- Those who are so trapped in fantasy they can never have a genuine relationship with another person.

By destroying lives, pornography becomes more than a private vice; it becomes an unspeakable sin of violence against humanity.

Are You Addicted?

Sexual addiction can take many forms, from viewing pornography, to masturbation, to promiscuity and adultery. One definition of a sexaholic is someone for whom “lust has become an addiction.” Like other addicts, sexaholics learn to practice sexual sobriety, which is defined as no masturbation and no sex with a partner other than one's spouse.



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The Real Impact

The greatest danger of pornography lies in its moral damage. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* condemns pornography because it *perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other* (CCC 2354). In addition to undermining the basis of marriage and relationships, it creates the delusion that every sexual desire, no matter how degrading or disgusting, can — and should — be fulfilled. Instead of being an expression of self-giving love, the sex act then becomes a trivial source of private entertainment. This attitude is in direct contrast to the Catholic teaching that each and every individual is created in the image and likeness of God, and that the conjugal act within the Sacrament of Marriage is blessed and ordained by God.

In addition, pornography can lead to sins against justice; it *does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others* (CCC 2354).



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What Can You Do?

As citizens, we have the right and the obligation to demand that our governmental authorities create laws which, as Bishop Paul S. Loverde says in his pastoral let-

ter on pornography, place “reasonable restrictions on the depiction of the human body and human intimacy.” Contact your representatives on local, state, and national levels and make your concerns known.

On a personal level, however, awareness is the single most effective means you have of

controlling the spread of pornography. The first priority is to keep your own guard up. After all, no one wakes up one day and decides to become addicted to pornography. It is a process of incremental steps; it may start innocently enough, watching videos on YouTube or random Google searches for entertainment, but then, it continues to escalate in an effort to find something new.

Single people have to be especially watchful in that pornography can draw them into the illusion of a relationship through seemingly innocent dating sites. And, while porn is still predominantly a male vice, women are becoming increasingly lured by easy Internet access. In fact, one out of three visitors to all adult web sites is female.

Although pornography is a grave sin, its grasp can be broken through frequent use of the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Perform concrete acts of penance, such as the corporal works of mercy and fasting. In addition, make sure that your life is filled with wholesome activities such as exercise, new hobbies, or volunteerism, as well as with good friends who will help you focus your mind on more positive activities. Boredom, stress, isolation, and loneliness are big reasons many people fall into the pornography trap.



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