

## Pornography: Having the Conversation with Your Child

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I don't know about you, but I'd rather do almost anything than sit down and discuss the topic of pornography with our pre-teens. Not because I'm uncomfortable, but because I'm not entirely sure what to say.

Videos, television shows, magazines, novels, and live performances all within mainstream culture today fit *my* definition of pornography. Pornography is found in music, ads, art, video-games and on toll-free hotlines. There is so much—where to start? How much information is too much, and when is it not enough?

Being ever so resourceful, I turned to the Catechism of the Catholic Church for a definition of pornography and guidance. The Catechism (1994) provided this definition:

Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants since each becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense.

Ah-ha! There it is! It's a grave offense—that'll work! Most of the above might not be helpful when discussing pornography with pre-teens but that last line, now that one I can use to make sure they don't begin viewing pornography. I'll talk about how wrong it is to view naked or half-naked bodies, that it degrades men, women, and children, that mom and dad are not for pornography and won't tolerate it in our home, that it is against our faith and just for good measure I'll throw in one more time that it is a "grave offense." That should do it indeed.

Wait, uh-oh, not a good strategy, I've just set up the perfect environment for our children to NEVER tell us if they are exposed to pornography. Mom will be mad, Dad will be mad, it's a sin, it's a grave offense.

Yet, pornography is used frequently by child sexual molesters to physically and emotionally groom children, to desensitize them to sexual acts, evoke curiosity, or make them feel more "adult-like."



Showing youth pornography levels the playing field for the molester, it allows the molester to become a peer rather than the adult who should be protecting them from such material.

Time to re-think my strategy...

We began by outlining God's design for the human body and human relationships and images that are different from God's design for us are wrong. We decided to tell our children that as parents we have the right to protect them from harm, and pornography is one of those things. Naked, half-naked bodies or certain body parts are used in pictures, videos, or television to shock, raise curiosity, or get you to do something you are not sure you should do. It is in these circumstances that you should ALWAYS tell Mom or Dad or another trusted adult that someone showed you this material. You won't be in trouble. Pornography used in this way signals that it isn't a safe environment for you to be around.

If, however, you are with friends and someone brings out pornography or wants to view pornography and it's "giggle-giggle, laugh-laugh" time, please know that pornography isn't for us. It isn't what we are about as a family, and it isn't how we view other human beings.

Tip: One effective way to say the above is to use your last name, "Pornography isn't for us, the Smith's. It might be for some people but not for us, the Smith's." Experts agree that personalizing the message gives a sense of being different and being okay with being different because as a family unit, you are all on the same page.

The other day my son and I were traveling in the car in our city's business district. In front of a prominent salon/spa establishment are two life-size Roman-type naked female figures, just like what you would see at an art museum featuring Roman art. Our son quickly asked, "Mom, why is that salon place showing pornography? We better make sure we never go there."

Darn! Back to the drawing board! Just remember, clear the way for them to TELL you if they are exposed to pornography. Adults showing children pornography is one of the warning signs of a child molester. While one warning sign does not a perpetrator make, such behavior does indicate, that person is not a safe person for your child.

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