

Children Searching for Sex and Porn - Yikes!

by Kathy Slattengren

Norton Family Online recently released the most searched for terms by children in 2009. Across all three age groups (7 and under, 8 - 12, 13 - 18) [sex or porn was in the #4 spot for most search for terms.](#) Yikes!

This data was gathered from the 14.5 million searches done by people using their service to monitor and block certain web content. It highlights a significant issue and there is plenty of other collaborating evidence showing children are finding porn online.

Children Viewing Porn

Stories are being told from parents across the country about their elementary-age kids being given web site urls by their friends which turn out to be porn sites. Parents are shocked and upset when they discover what their children have seen. The children are also often distressed by the images they've seen.

I recently heard about a 12-year-old boy who is in therapy after his parents caught him getting up in the middle of the night to look at porn. Apparently he had been viewing porn since he was 8-years-old and was spending increasing amounts of time on it.

Stories like these help alert us to potentially serious problems. Being aware of these possible issues, we are in a better position to proactively plan and act rather than react to a crisis situation.



Children "Sexting"

When people take sexually revealing picture of themselves and send them as text message attachments, it's called "sexting". According to research reported at Common Sense Media, 22% of teen girls and 20% of teen boys have sent nude or semi-nude photos of themselves. They may do this to show off or prove their interest in someone.

What they often don't realize is that sending sexual images to minors is against the law. Some states have been prosecuting children for child pornography or felony obscenity.

Children also don't think through the fact that once a picture is sent, it is around forever. That picture may end up being passed around to many others with devastating results. This happened recently in the Seattle area as [reported by the Seattle PI](#), "Police say three teens were arrested after they sent a naked photo of a 14-year-old girl in a text message that went viral across Thurston County."

When kids make poor decisions in our digital age, the consequences can be enormous. Parents have their work cut out for them in teaching their children about sexuality and helping them learn to think before they click.

Talking About the Birds and the Bees

Clearly children are interested in knowing about sex. The ability for children to learn about sex on the internet makes it even more critical for parents to discuss sexuality with their children starting at an early age. By having these conversations, parents can discuss their values and increase the likelihood the kids will turn to them for questions instead of the internet.

Planned Parenthood outlines what children should know at different ages in their article [Human Sexuality - What Children Need to Know and When](#). There are also a number of [great books on sexuality](#) for different ages.

Guiding Children to Making Good Choices

We want our children making good decisions - especially when we're not around. One way we can help develop their ability to think through choices and possible consequences is to have lots of small conversations with them.

News stories are a wonderful source of real life examples which can launch these conversations. A quick way to start a discussion is to share something you've recently read. *"I just learned that 20% of teens have sent nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves to friends - wow! That really worries me since I also read a story about teens being arrested for this because it's considered distributing child pornography."*

By listening to your children's thoughts and feelings on a story like this, you'll develop a deeper understanding of your children. You'll also be in a better position to influence their thinking about these important issues.

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