



# Catholic Parenting 101

## Tips for Building Strong Catholic Families

By **TIM HOGAN, PsyD, LP, CIRT**

### Protecting Kids from Pornography

Allowing children easy access to pornography may constitute as one of the most frequent forms of child sexual abuse of children in our day. The United States Department of Justice recently reported that children have never before been this vulnerable to obscene sexual material. Over half of today's teens have visited sexually explicit websites and suffer predictable consequences, including increased uncertainties about their own sexuality, and increased feelings of loneliness and depression.

Children and teens must be protected from pornography. Parents are in the perfect position to provide this protection by following a few key steps:

1. Actively supervise your child's Internet activity
2. Use monitoring software to ensure that computers are used appropriately
3. Educate children about how pornography degrades the dignity of people and contradicts the goodness of the human body

#### Step #1: Supervise all Internet activity

Parents should make sure children only use computers, tablets, etc. that are out in the open where other family members can monitor and observe their activity. Children should not be allowed to search the Internet unless a parent is present. Parents should not allow children or teens to have a computer in their bedroom.

#### Step #2: Install monitoring software

Tell children clearly and often that their activity on a computer, table, smartphone, etc. will be monitored. Remember, digital devices can take a child anywhere in the world, so they need good supervision. Parents should clarify that children and teens should not expect to have fully confidential communication while online.

Parents should also establish a rule that the usage history of all computers, tablets, and phones will be reviewed and tracked. A child should never delete a device's history. Similarly, cell phones should be left on the counter at the end of the day so parents can quickly check Internet activity. Parents should only use this to briefly scan for inappropriate material, not as a method of reading messages with friends.

#### Step 3: Educate about the dangers of pornography

Children need the tools to fight this threat when parents are not around to protect them. Therefore, as children approach adolescence, parents must help them to confront the three most common lies that lead to widespread problems with pornography:

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**Lie #1: Looking at pornography is harmless fun; it doesn't hurt anybody.**

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**Truth:** Viewing pornography "burns highly charged" images into the brain. These images become difficult, if not impossible, to remove. This often distorts a young person's view of human sexuality and perception of relationships. Pornography makes the viewer far more likely to engage in damaging and confusing sexual exploration, resulting in depression and anxiety disorders.

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**Lie #2: Looking at pornography is a normal and healthy way to enjoy God's creation.**

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**Truth:** Jesus taught that lusting (i.e. looking at pornography) is spiritually deadly. It is akin to committing adultery with your heart. Young people already know this in their hearts. Parents can ask teens how they would feel about other people viewing pornographic images of their parents, siblings, or best friends. Our hearts know that pornography violates the dignity of the human person. We are meant to enjoy the goodness and beauty of people, but in appropriate ways that honor God's plan for life and love.

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**Lie #3: People can play around with pornography without getting addicted.**

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**Truth:** People can become immediately addicted to Internet porn after one exposure. In this way, it follows the addictive path of crack cocaine, and often requires years of intensive treatment to get back under control.

Pornography poses a serious threat to the sexual and emotional development of children. However, parents stand in the perfect place to protect their children.

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