

136 BILLION PORNOGRAPHIC

videos were viewed on smartphones in 2015.



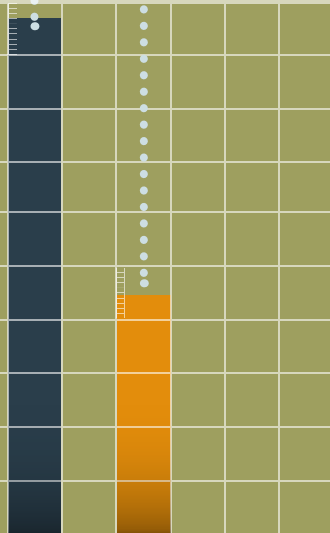
**30%** of  
INTERNET  
DATA is  
**PORNOGRAPHY.**

*Pornography is a*

**\$97** BILLION  
*industry.*

*By comparison, the  
**COMBINED** revenue of  
the top-10 sports leagues  
in North America,  
Europe, and Asia is*

**\$45.8 BILLION.**



# EIGHT STRATEGIES TO Help Children Reject Pornography



By Lisa Ann Thomson

The statistics can overwhelm parents. Extremetech.com estimates that about 30 percent of all data transferred over the internet is pornography.<sup>1</sup> It is found on literally hundreds of millions of web pages, including social media giants Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It is accessible through television, computers, tablets, and smartphones.

“The material a child is coming across just traumatizes a child’s tender and fragile brain,” points out therapist Dr. Jill C. Manning, who is a frequent presenter on the impact of pornography on marriage and family.

But there is hope.

Even with the seeming pervasiveness of pornography, parents have power to protect their children and prepare them to face and reject pornography.

Here are eight strategies from Church leaders and experts to help parents fortify their families.

## 1. Address Access and Family Rules

Start with the outer defenses. “We safeguard our children until the time they can safeguard themselves,”

says Jason S. Carroll, professor of family life at Brigham Young University. The brain stem, which houses the pleasure centers of the brain, develops first, he explains. Only later do the reasoning and decision-making abilities in the frontal cortex fully develop. “So kids have the gas pedal without the full brake,” he says. Therefore, external filters and monitoring are crucial for young people.

Simple steps and rules can protect children (and adults) from unintentional exposure and help them think twice about the content they choose to view:

- Use filters at the computer, router, and internet-service-provider levels.
- Enable parental and content controls through cable providers and online media services.
- Set up content restriction settings on mobile devices.
- Keep computers and tablets in common areas.
- Ask children and teens to turn in their phones and mobile devices at night.
- Establish an open-book policy; parents can view texts and social media accounts at any time.

# TEACH CHILDREN what to do if they encounter **PORNOGRAPHY:**

- Close their eyes.
- Shut down the device.
- Tell an adult.
- Redirect their thoughts.

**SOCIAL MEDIA** platforms have become highly trafficked pornography exchange sites.

**76%** of internet users across 40 countries use social media.



Teach children what to do if they encounter pornography: (1) close their eyes and shut down the device, (2) tell an adult, and (3) redirect their thoughts. Assure them that they did nothing wrong and are not in trouble.

## 2. Preach of Christ

“Filters are useful tools, but the greatest filter in the world, the only one that will ultimately work, is the personal internal filter that comes from a deep and abiding testimony of our Heavenly Father’s love and our Savior’s atoning sacrifice for each one of us,” said Linda S. Reeves, Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency.<sup>2</sup>

To help children develop that internal filter, Sister Reeves points to the counsel of Nephi: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, [and] we prophesy of Christ . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Experts agree. Studies have confirmed that religiosity in the home, coupled with a “warm parenting style,” has a protective effect against pornography.<sup>3</sup>

“The best preventative measure and the best reparative measure for pornography is the true teaching of the gospel in the home,” says Timothy

Rarick, parenting professor at Brigham Young University–Idaho and member of the United Families International advisory board. “The best thing we can do is help our children establish their own connection to heaven.”

## 3. Teach Children How to Filter Internally

Parents can teach specific strategies for filtering media through gospel standards. For Dr. Manning, the thirteenth article of faith is the quintessential filter for all media choices.

“We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men [and women]. . . . If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things’ [Articles of Faith 1:13]. There is a lot of material in the latter days that does not line up with that criteria. And if what we find does not line up, we need to keep looking,” says Dr. Manning.

But it is that effort that sets Latter-day Saints apart, pointed out President Thomas S. Monson: “As the world moves further and further away from the principles and guidelines given to us by a loving Heavenly Father, we will stand out from the crowd. . . . We will be different as we decide not to fill our minds with media choices that are base and demeaning and that will remove the Spirit from our homes and our lives.”<sup>4</sup>



#### 4. Teach Children Healthy Sexuality

The principle of “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) applies to pornography. It is not enough to label pornography as bad; parents also need to teach their children what is good.

“One of the most powerful buffers and protections for our youth is to teach them sexuality in the home, starting early,” says Dr. Manning. “Our youth are suffering because they are growing up in a vacuum of toxic messages with too few positive messages within the gospel framework.”

Brigham Young University family life professor Mark H. Butler recommends a straightforward explanation: “The sexual-response cycle exists naturally in us as human beings. The desire and drive we have is a God-given endowment which blesses us, drawing us naturally and affectionately toward the opposite sex, toward marriage, and toward family life.”

Age-appropriate discussions about healthy sexuality can begin early. Professor Carroll points out that conversations about

good touch and bad touch and personal privacy, along with correct terminology for body parts, can be taught starting at a young age. By age eight, a child is able to gain a basic understanding of sex in its physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational contexts, he says.

Youth also appreciate correct and direct language. One young man said, “If you beat around the bush, people can really misunderstand. I was taught about the law of chastity a dozen times before I knew they were talking about sex.”

Professor Carroll says parents should also pay attention to the context of these discussions. “Do everything possible not to ritualize these conversations,” he says. “We take our child out to dinner, we put on our church clothes, or we have the conversation in the parking lot of the temple,” he says. But if children get the message that sex can be discussed only under those circumstances, they might not know how to recreate those circumstances when they have questions.

Rather, parents should create an ongoing dialogue and opportunities for children to ask



Watch a video of children explaining how to stay safe from pornography at [lds.org/go/81722](https://lds.org/go/81722).



questions whenever they have them. “If the conversation happens sitting on your bedroom floor or in your pickup truck or out picking strawberries, they know how to get back there,” says Carroll.

“My experience has taught me that the teenagers who are the most sexually active are usually the least informed,” points out BYU associate professor Bradley R. Wilcox. “Young people who get answers from parents at early ages are usually the ones who avoid sexual experimentation.”

### 5. Shatter the Myth of Pornography

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) clearly stated the truth about pornography. “It is vicious,” he said. “It is lewd and filthy. It is enticing and habit-forming. It will take

[you] down to destruction as surely as anything in this world. It is foul sleaze that makes its exploiters wealthy, its victims impoverished.”<sup>5</sup>

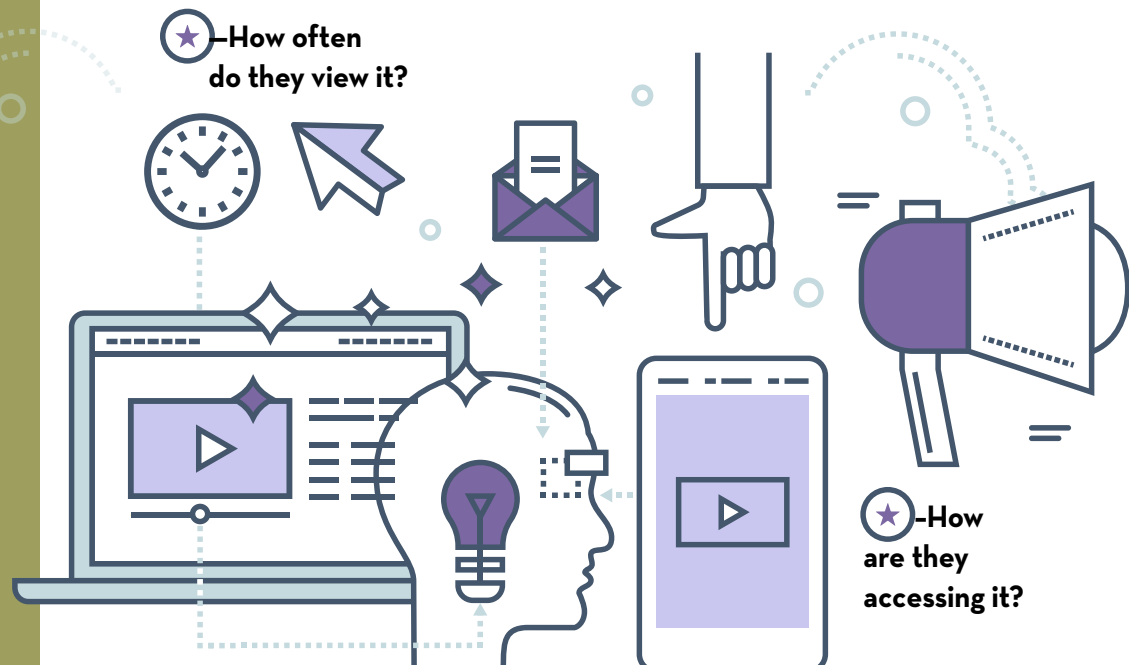
“Pornography use by adolescents and young adults often leads to a distorted view of sexuality and its role in fostering healthy personal relationships,” points out the American College of Pediatricians. “These distortions include the overestimation of the prevalence of sexual activity in the community, the belief that sexual promiscuity is normal, and the belief that sexual abstinence is unhealthy.”<sup>6</sup>

In discussions about pornography, parents should point out that pornography is mythical on all levels. The behaviors portrayed in pornography are neither normal nor a reflection of what should be anticipated or

When addressing issues, take a TRIAGE APPROACH:



★—How long has it been going on?





expected in a healthy relationship. “Pornography is attractive only as long as the myth of pornography is embraced,” Professor Carroll says.

## 6. Change the Conversation about the Problem

Experts and Church leaders warn against jumping too quickly to the conclusion that any involvement with pornography necessarily indicates an addiction.

“Not everyone who uses pornography willfully is addicted to it,” points out Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “In fact, most young men and young women who struggle with pornography are not addicted. That is a very important distinction to make—not just for the parents, spouses, and leaders who desire to help but also for those who struggle with this problem.”<sup>7</sup>

“Young men and young women get involved with pornography out of curiosity, out of accessibility, and out of what, at its core, amounts to immaturity,” says Professor Carroll. “Every one of us experiences the power of the sexual-response cycle triggered during

puberty, long before we have the emotional or spiritual maturity to fully make sense of it.”

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, BYU professor of Church history and faculty adviser to the student club Unraveling Pornography, observes that “the problem is real and has terrible consequences, but making blanket statements about the problem often pushes it deeper into the souls of those struggling.”

Elder Oaks points out that pornography problems can range from “occasional or repeated intentional use, to intensive use, to compulsive (addictive) use. . . . If behavior is incorrectly classified as an addiction, the user may think he or she has lost agency and the capacity to overcome the problem. . . . On the other hand, having a clearer understanding of the depth of the problem—that it may not be as ingrained or extreme as feared—can give hope and an increased capacity to . . . repent.”<sup>8</sup>

When addressing issues, Professor Butler suggests parents take a triage approach: How long has it been going on? How often do they view it? How are they accessing it? Then parents can work with the youth to determine an appropriate level of action.

Create an ONGOING DIALOGUE for children to ask questions.

## GUILT

is a natural response to mistakes that can motivate change.



## SHAME

is a destructive feeling that can lead to a sense of hopelessness.

“Understand the person and who they are,” says Professor Holzapfel. “How deep is their problem? What is really going on? What is their reason for viewing pornography, and how can we address the deeper problems?”

### 7. Teach Emotional Management

Addressing deeper problems may be key to preventing pornography problems as well, says Nathan Acree, a Utah-based therapist. Beyond natural curiosity, pornography is often used as a way to cope with emotion, particularly overwhelming emotion.”

Professor Butler adds, “At some point, a young man or woman has a difficult or distressing psychological, relational, or spiritual experience.” He says negative experiences can lead the adolescent brain to revert to “feel-good experiences” such as viewing pornography and engaging in related behaviors such as masturbation. The emotions created in such behaviors then replace or mask distressing emotions. And therein lies the danger: “The person moves away from a feel-good experience into the initiation of a psychological dependency orientation. Now he or she is using the behavior as a way of managing life.”

Brother Acree says parents should teach children that both pleasant and

unpleasant emotions are normal, and it is OK to experience negative feelings such as sadness, anger, frustration, or hurt. Parents often feel the need to control their children’s emotions, but allowing them to experience and cope with negative feelings builds a critical skill set.

If a pornography problem exists, parents should take care not to add to the child’s emotional burden through shaming. BYU family life professor James M. Harper noted that while *guilt* is a natural response to mistakes that can motivate change, *shame* is a destructive feeling that can lead to a sense of hopelessness.

In other words, creating or exacerbating a feeling of shame in a child damages the child’s ability both to develop positive emotional responses and to recognize the influence of the Spirit, which is ultimately the most powerful ally in the prevention of and recovery from pornography use.

One young man who struggled with pornography remembers clearly how his parents responded when his challenge came to light: “My mother reacted strongly, yelling and screaming, and it made me feel worse about it rather than hopeful of overcoming it,” he says. “The most helpful was my dad telling me repeatedly how much he loved me.”



“Please do not condemn them,” pleads Elder Oaks. “They are not evil or without hope. They are sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.”<sup>9</sup>

## 8. Teach That the Savior’s Atonement Works

In talks, lessons, and reading materials, youth receive the clear message that pornography is a dangerous evil, but we need to give additional emphasis to the doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

For youth, Professor Butler believes that the adolescent brain may be one of the primary reasons to teach them about the Atonement. “The adolescent brain is not fully formed, and that leads to certain issues like impulse control and lack of forward thinking,” he explains. “A spiritually sincere, striving teen can become crippled by overwhelming guilt when he encounters weaknesses that he is uniquely vulnerable to having with that still-adolescent brain. It is so critical that, alongside teaching the commandments, you teach adolescents the Atonement—that it’s there for the purpose of developmental patience and persistence in life.”

“All of us need the Atonement of Jesus Christ. . . . Through proper and complete repentance, [all] may become clean, pure, and worthy of every covenant and temple blessing promised by God,” says Elder Oaks.<sup>10</sup> This includes those who have used pornography.

And that is a hopeful message: there is much parents can do to prepare their children to reject pornography,

and when they falter, the Savior’s infinite Atonement makes change and repentance possible.

“That means, come what may, Heavenly Father will never stop loving you, and we, your parents, will never stop loving you,” says Professor Rarick. For a child, there can be no more hope than that. ■

*Adapted from “Arm Your Kids for the Battle,” BYU Magazine, Spring 2015.*

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### NOTES

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2. Linda S. Reeves, “Protection from Pornography—a Christ-Focused Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 16.
3. See Sam A. Hardy and others, “Adolescent Religiousness as a Protective Factor against Pornography Use,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, vol. 34 (May–June 2013), 131–39, sciencedirect.com. The author also interviewed the lead researcher.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 88.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 51; *Liahona*, Jan. 2001, 62.
6. “The Impact of Pornography on Children,” *American College of Pediatrics*, June 2016, acpeds.org.
7. Dallin H. Oaks, “Recovering from the Trap of Pornography,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 34; *Liahona*, Oct. 2015, 52.
8. Dallin H. Oaks, “Recovering,” *Ensign*, 34–35; *Liahona*, 52–53.
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10. Dallin H. Oaks, “Recovering,” *Ensign*, 37; *Liahona*, 55.

