

HOW CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED AND WHY?

Sometimes adults and older children with a sexual interest in children, intentionally expose children to adult and /or child pornography in order to stimulate the child's sexual interest in sexual activity. Sometimes these people appear totally safe and may also develop relationships with a parent in order to obtain access to a child.

Sometimes children are contacted by adults with a sexual interest in children through cell phones, chat rooms and other points of contact through the internet.

Children and their caretakers may believe that the intention of the adult concerned is quite innocent, whereas the exposure or contact may be the beginning of a “grooming” process and the child may be increasingly drawn into a relationship that becomes exploitive and abusive. Remember that people who exploit children sexually usually seem very ordinary and “normal”. Sexual offenders do not have a particular personality type.

EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON CHILDREN

Pornography, depicting adults or children, is harmful for children to watch or be involved in because:

- It stimulates a sexual interest that may not be appropriate for the age and stage and level of development of the child. Since young children fantasize and imitate, seeing something on screen that they cannot 'filter' or understand, can lead them to play out what they have seen without understanding that it is wrong.
- It may influence and shape their sexual orientation and activity especially as they may lack other sexual experience and therefore have no other reference point for healthy and responsible sexual behaviour.
- Psychological trauma can result when a child is exposed to pornography (more so when they are made to participate). The child becomes reserved, aggressive and confused about their place in the world.
- It promotes promiscuity and a skewed view of what is acceptable sexual behaviour.
- It gives the message that instant self-gratification is more important than establishing a relationship. For example, young boys, instead of enjoying the heart and mind of the opposite sex may merely focus on her body, mentally undressing her and picturing sexual encounters. If they are repeatedly viewing pornography, they can become sexually aggressive to women later and feel uncomfortable in normal, healthy relationships. There is also a decrease in respect for women, in the valuation of faithfulness and a major increase in the importance of sex without attachment.

- It increases child-on-child abuse. This effect is confirmed by many welfare organisations that have seen a link between young sexual offenders and their exposure to pornography.
- Repeated exposure to soft or hard-core porn in childhood can lead to full scale porn and sex addiction in later life. Our own hands-on experience with porn addicts (as well as research) has shown that the common denominator in most cases had been their initial exposure to porn in childhood.
- It is a known strong predictor of sexual deviance in adulthood. Adult child abusers frequently relate their behaviour to inappropriate exposure to pornographic material at an early age.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION & POLICY

- The Films & Publications Act
- The Amendment to the Films & Publications Act
- The Children's Act No 38 of 2005
- The Children's Act Amendment Bill
- Sexual Exploitation and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)