

A P A R E N T ' S  
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G U I D E

# Talking to Girls about Porn

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# #TimesUp on Culture's Message That Female Objectification Is Empowerment

“Society’s stereotype is all wrong when it comes to this issue. It’s time for society to finally come to the realization that porn is no longer just ‘a guy thing.’

With the increased availability of internet porn in the last decade, women are becoming just as active on XXX sites as men. This isn’t just a guy problem. It’s a human problem.” — [Fight the New Drug](#)

Male porn use certainly takes a heavy toll on women, but it’s a serious mistake to think that pornography is a “guy’s problem.” While research shows that more men than women view porn, [female porn use is on the rise](#), particularly among young adults and teenagers. [According to Fight the New Drug](#), “Probably one of the biggest and longest-held myths in our society is that it is normal for guys to watch porn, and included in that false belief is the idea that girls don’t watch porn.”

**It’s crucial that we talk to our daughters about pornography.** Even if they don’t struggle with looking at porn themselves (and we shouldn’t assume they don’t or won’t merely because they are female), they are living in an increasingly pornified culture. They are surrounded by the lies that porn is telling women about their sexuality. It is quite possible they struggle with lust and other sexual temptations aside from porn. And the chances are extremely high that they will date and/or marry a man who has struggled with a porn addiction. It is important that we prepare them for that reality and help them navigate it well.

## — Don’t women mainly like erotica?

When many people think about women using porn, they assume most of them are reading steamy novels. Erotic stories do tend to be a type of porn that appeals to women, as the highly popular [50 Shades of Grey trilogy](#) demonstrates. *50 Shades* is a series of erotic romance novels featuring a sadomasochistic relationship. The books, commonly dubbed “mommy porn,” have been made into three movies.

Despite the growing number of women who are viewing porn online, we think it’s worth acknowledging that women do tend to be drawn to sexual content framed within the context of romance, something we might call “emotional porn.” When we say women are drawn to “emotional porn,” we mean they derive pleasure from romantic and sexual feelings that should only happen between two people within the intimacy of marriage. Emotional porn awakens romantic, sexual desires separate from a real-life situation and portrays sexual love in an [unrealistic and impossibly fulfilling light](#).

While physical objectification tends to be more of a temptation for men, we could argue that emotional objectification is (generally) a greater temptation for women. Women need to guard themselves, not only against sexual fantasies but also against only valuing men for what they can do for them romantically. If a woman forms patterns of thinking about men as a way of fulfilling her romantic desires, she is building habits for how she perceives all men, i.e., as a means to an end. Both physical and emotional objectification are selfish. Both treat people as objects instead of as human beings.

## — What is culture telling women?

One of the major points in our “Parent’s Guide to Understanding the Porn Threat” is that culture is being “pornified.” Behaviors and scenarios once only acceptable within porn are becoming normalized in pop culture. Women are getting the message through countless avenues that objectifying themselves sexually is empowering. One example is Beyonce’s performance at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards. Her performance included stripper-inspired dancing, as well as a feminist quote that said that women are sexual beings. This message is extremely confusing, particularly because of its partial truths.

More recently, Christina Aguilera collaborated with Demi Lovato on female empowerment anthem “[Fall in Line](#),” a beautiful song about not giving in to others’ standards (“You are not beholden / You do not owe them / Your body and your soul”). This was released just after another of her singles, “[Accelerate](#),” which is full of sexual innuendo (and whose music video is highly sexualized).

Additionally, women are bombarded by the same hypersexualized images that men are. But the message women are getting is that they need to be like the women in those images. They need to be physically beautiful (according to a culture’s arbitrary standards). If a man does not desire them sexually, then they are not valuable. If guys don’t ask to see their nude pictures, don’t want to date them, or don’t want to sleep with them, then they are unworthy in some way. (Note: The topic of pornography is closely related to that of sexting, so check out our “[Parent’s Guide to Sexting](#)” for more.)

It’s ironic that the popularity of *50 Shades* has roughly coincided with the #MeToo campaign, which is helping draw awareness to sexual abuse. Anti-porn website Fight the New Drug [recently featured a quiz](#) where users could read passages that were either excerpts from *50 Shades* or were #MeToo posts. The two are disturbingly similar. This juxtaposition highlights the deep hypocrisy of what our culture is communicating to women.

Anti-porn advocate [Gail Dines describes a conversation](#) she had with a convicted child rapist [*warning: the linked video contains strong language and disturbing content*]. Sexual predators often “groom” their potential victims, i.e., they prepare them to receive a sexual offense. The child rapist told Dines that he really didn’t have to do much to groom his victims because “the culture did a lot of the grooming for me.” Dines also quotes a pornographer who observes that culture is preparing women for porn, causing girls to “come to the set porn-ready.”

## — What is porn telling women?

If culture tells women that they are sexual objects, porn heightens the intensity of this message. Women in porn are overly sexualized, their body parts exaggerated. If they are not outrageously beautiful (according to porn’s standards), they have no value.

Porn typically portrays men as dominating and women as submissive. So you might think that the message women get from porn is that they need to debase themselves and be extremely submissive. However, the message porn is actually communicating

to women is consistent with the one that culture is giving them: Sex is power. It might look like submission, but according to porn's narrative, the beauty and desirability of women is the key to having power and control.

## —— What's the current state of female exposure to porn?

The [National Center on Sexual Exploitation \(NCSE\) reports](#) that “teenage girls and young women are significantly more likely to actively seek out porn than women 25 years old and above.” Almost half of women who are young adults [see using porn as normal](#). 62% of women have been exposed to porn by the time they are 18 years old. [Another study of women](#) who were college-aged found that over half of them had encountered sexually graphic content by the time they were 14.

In [Pornhub's 2017 Year in Review](#) (*warning: these stats are on the Pornhub domain and are very disturbing*), the website (one of the biggest porn sites in the world) proudly observes that the number of searches for “porn for women” on its site is on the rise. Pornhub found that women make up roughly 26% of visitors to its site, pointing out that the number of female users on the site grew over the past year by 359%. Disturbingly, in Pornhub's analysis of the most popular search terms among men and women, “gangbang” was the seventh most searched term among *women*, but didn't even make it into the top 15 most popular searches among men.

## —— So why do women watch porn?

### 1. Accident and Curiosity

Jason Dean, founder of and counselor at the United Kingdom's main porn counseling service, says that [both male and female porn addiction](#) follow the same basic patterns. Men and women are exposed somehow, become addicted, and then search for increasingly graphic content. One difference, however, is that women tend to feel much guiltier than men do.

Singer and songwriter Audrey Assad (b. 1983) has spoken publicly about her own experience as a porn addict before God set her free. We highly recommend checking out one of her talks [here](#). Assad ran across porn accidentally when she saw it on TV in her parents' basement. Her curiosity piqued, she continued watching it for two years even as she was highly involved in her church.

### 2. It's Addictive

Porn has a powerful impact on the brain. It releases a dopamine rush and has an effect similar to that of [other addictive substances](#). A key reason, therefore, why women watch porn is because of its addictive properties. The [NCSE reports](#):

*Researchers...extrapolated that, when compared to those addicted to gambling or drugs, problematic pornography users experience more powerful and faster conditioning to anything associated with their use (computer, being alone, pop-ups, etc.).*

The power of porn to cause an addictive habit is such that women might continue

watching it, not because they want to so much as it's just what they do at particular times or in certain places.

### **3. No One Is Discipling Women About Sex**

Silence about sex and porn increases the likelihood that women will fall prey to sexual addiction or sexual abuse. Despite its lies, culture is right about this: Women are sexual beings, and their sexuality is powerful. **Women need mentors to acknowledge, validate, and steward this aspect of their natures.** But many churches don't talk about sex at all, apart from communicating that sex is for marriage and that women are supposed to be pure outside of it.

Culture, on the other hand, is constantly talking to women about what their sexuality is and how to use it. Assad believes that her struggle with porn was severely compounded by the fact that her church never talked about sex. It was also harmful that, when she heard authority figures talk about porn, they always assumed that only men struggled with it. To make matters worse, Assad had virtually no sexual education as she entered puberty, so she didn't have terminology for understanding sex, her own body, or much less pornography.

### **4. Coping with Trauma, Wired for Intimacy**

One of the reasons why people develop addictions to drugs or alcohol is because they turn to those substances to deal with trauma, shame, or failures in their lives. People turn to porn for the same reasons. If girls or women are experiencing pain in real life, porn offers them a fantasy where they can escape and where they are accepted. It provides a type of outlet, a way of dealing with pain if they are not dealing with it well for some reason. Porn use can also simply be a response to boredom.

In our "Parent's Guide to Talking to Boys about Porn," we note that culture's portrayal of men as strong and stoic can make them vulnerable to using porn because they have no emotional outlets. Assad believes that something similar set her up for porn use. For various reasons, she learned from a young age not to open up emotionally or personally. This set her up to struggle in isolation with her addiction.

As [Dr. Juli Slattery points out](#), women are oriented for relationships. Women want to be seen, loved, and found beautiful. Pornographic stories like *50 Shades* offer women the ability to indirectly experience being desired and being pursued, even if in a twisted way. For a woman who is lonely and longing to feel loved, it can be easy to justify consuming such books or movies, especially since that content is "not affecting" anyone else.

### **6. Sexual Abuse**

Culture tells us that the more sexually liberated a woman is, the more empowered she will be. But even *Vice* magazine, in its article, "Why Are So Many Women Searching for Ultra-Violent Porn?" suggests it is troubling that so many women are viewing porn that portrays violence against women [Note: we have deliberately not linked to this article because of the inappropriate images within it.].

[This study](#) on the relationship between porn and violence against women found the following:

*Female students exposed to family psychological violence and to sexual violence were significantly more likely to watch pornography, especially violent pornography, than those*

*who had not been exposed. No such association was found among male students.*

There seems to be a connection between sexual abuse and porn use, specifically with women. While this is worth noting, it's just one of the reasons why women watch porn.

## ———— **How does porn impact the women who watch it?**

### **It Affects Them Physically**

As we observed, porn affects people in the same ways as other addictive substances. Porn use impacts the brain's prefrontal lobes, which govern a person's willpower. When dopamine ([which regulates pleasure and reward](#) in the brain) continually floods the brain as the result of compulsive porn use, the dopamine actually "reshapes" the prefrontal lobes and [causes the neural cells there to decrease](#). So when someone feels a helpless "need" to use porn and loses motivation in other areas of life, there are actually neurological reasons why.

Because the human brain doesn't finish developing until the mid-20s, [young women are especially susceptible](#) to becoming addicted to porn. Young people are anywhere from two to four times more sensitive to dopamine than adults are. This means that addictions can take a much more powerful hold over teens than they can over adults. While there has been a lot of evidence showing the connection between porn and erectile dysfunction, porn use has also been tied to [lower sexual performance and satisfaction in women](#).

See Covenant Eyes' resource [The Porn Circuit: Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits in 90 Days](#) for a breakdown of the neurochemistry of porn addiction.

### **It Affects Them Psychologically**

Because porn teaches women that they are sex objects, it follows that women who use porn [experience negative body image](#). Porn also causes women to feel more pressure to mimic pornographic scenarios in real life. Even though porn has been tied to making women more vulnerable to oppression, it also makes them more aggressive, both physically and verbally. Evidence shows that porn use leads to poor self-esteem, loneliness, and depression.

Porn even leads to a greater likelihood that the user will question his or her sexual values and orientation. Audrey Assad says that even though she wasn't attracted to women in real life, she was aroused by watching the women in porn perform sexual acts. So when she was viewing porn, she questioned her sexual orientation.

### **It Increases the Likelihood of Sexual Victimization**

Not only does sexual abuse make women more vulnerable to using porn, but porn also makes women more vulnerable to experiencing sexual abuse. [Fight the New Drug reports](#) that female porn users between the ages of 14 and 19 "were at a significantly greater likelihood of being victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault."

This evidence makes sense because porn teaches its viewers that women enjoy sexual violence. Women are also [more likely to accept rape myths](#) and have sexual fantasies about rape if they view porn.

## **It Destroys Relationships**

[Porn damages romantic relationships](#). It's destructive to marriages and has been linked to a greater likelihood of affairs and higher divorce rates. Porn causes people to try out riskier sexual behavior, be more promiscuous, and to have earlier sexual debuts than they would have otherwise. Porn users are less likely to use condoms and are at a higher risk of STIs. Ironically, women experience less real-life sex with their partners as a result of viewing porn.

## **— What can I do to help my daughter(s) not fall prey to porn?**

### **Invest in Your Marriage and Your Family**

Your daughters will get their first lesson on the relationships between men and women based on your marriage/relationship. It's crucial that you are actively investing in having a loving and godly marriage (if possible).

In an interview, Christian speaker and author [John Eldredge observes](#) that research shows that fathers are the ones who most strongly shape gender identity in their children. And the key question all women are asking is, "Will I be chosen?" At their core, our daughters want to be seen and cherished for who they are. Fathers, are you emotionally distant from your daughters or do you spend time getting to know them, telling them you love them, and telling them they are worthy of unconditional love? Girls are getting the message over and over again that their beauty is physical and depends on certain standards. Do you tell your daughters they are beautiful even when they are not dressed up? Do you make it clear that what you mean is they are beautiful for who they are, not just for how they look? When you see your daughters successfully living out their femininity, say by trusting in the Lord during difficult circumstances, encouraging others, or by showing strength of character, do you affirm those qualities and praise their inner beauty?

Moms, your daughters need your love and affection as well, and they need for you to vulnerably live out what it means to be a godly woman. We know one woman whose mother habitually sought God through Bible study, prayer, and fasting all throughout the daughter's childhood. When the daughter was an appropriate age, her mother told her about her past, including her sexual brokenness. The mother shared the lessons God taught her as she healed from those experiences (which took a long time). Even in the daughter's adulthood, her mother is still persevering in her faith and still wrestling honestly before God. She's simply working through her personal challenges and doesn't see herself as doing anything particularly special. But her example is a significant testimony to her daughter of how to authentically seek the Lord.

Does your family have a culture of love or is it performance-based? Do your daughters know that, no matter how much they fail, your love for them will never go away? Or do they think your love is based on their behavior? Even if you know that your love is unconditional, your daughters need to repeatedly hear and see that from you. Are you pursuing relationships with your daughters? If you don't have relationships based on love and trust, they will not feel safe sharing their personal struggles with you.

A note about sexual abuse. Sexual abuse does not mean your daughters are going to

turn to porn, nor does using porn automatically mean your daughters will be sexually abused. However, given the evidence pointing to a connection between the two among females, it would be wise to be extra vigilant about porn addiction if your daughter has ever been abused. If she has, we strongly recommend getting professional counseling if you are not already seeking it.

### **Recognize That Women Are in Prison Alone**

People widely recognize that men struggle with lust, but tend not to think it's an important subject to address with women. This ignorance puts women at a significant disadvantage because they lack the accountability and support that men often have. Audrey Assad uses the analogy of a prison and says, "Men are in jail together." Men might be in the jail cell of sexual bondage, but they are supporting each through their situation. Women are in the same prison, but they are in solitary confinement. [One trained counselor](#) "calls women's addiction to pornography 'widespread and silent.'"

Bear in mind that, while this guide is on porn, it is completely possible to struggle with sexual fantasies and masturbation without ever looking at porn. No matter what, your daughters need you to disciple them about their sexuality.

### **Don't Just Have "the Talk," but Many Talks**

We cannot afford to have just one "sex talk" with our daughters. We need to have ongoing conversations as they grow up on sexuality, lust, what it means to be a woman, and so on. See our the first guide in this bundle for how to talk about sex in age appropriate ways. Following are some ideas for questions you might discuss with your older daughters, always remembering that **these conversations must take place in the context of much prayer and [a trusting relationship](#)**.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What do you think it means to be a woman?
- What are some of culture's messages about what it means to be a woman?
- What do your male and female friends think it means to be a woman?
- What guidance does the Bible provide about being a woman?
- What does porn say it means to be a woman? What is porn's vision for a woman's purpose and identity?
- What is porn teaching you about men?
- Do you know the data that shows how porn affects women?
- All persuasive lies have some truth in them. What are the truths about men and women that porn is twisting?
- How does porn's vision compare with God's vision for His children, and for women specifically?
- Do you believe that God is calling you to a better story than porn's/culture's story?
- How do you think people should handle their sexual urges if they can't act on them by having sex or by viewing pornography? Does the Bible give us any guidance on what to do? What is the value of abstinence and how might it help your children develop other forms of discipline as they grow older?

# — What do I do if my daughter has looked at porn?

Protect Young Minds has an excellent resource called the “SMART Plan Guide for Parents,” which gives advice on how to react if you discover your kids are looking at porn. You can download it [here](#).

## 1. Be Calm and Tell Her You Love Her

Don't succumb to anger or despair. React in love, not condemnation. You will obviously be grieved, but it is crucial that your daughter immediately knows you still love her very much. If she has voluntarily come to you and confessed, that is huge. HUGE! Express how thankful you are that she was willing to trust you. If she confesses and then gets the message that you really aren't a safe place to go, she won't come to you any more with her struggles. Your love for her in that moment is a powerful example of the [love that Christ has for all of us](#).

## 2. Seek Accountability in Community

[The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection](#). Your daughter needs accountability within a community. This community must be **trustworthy** and it must be founded on **honesty**. It needs to be a safe place where people will not be shamed for their failures, but are willing to lovingly call each other out. If your church doesn't have a resource that could help her, consider looking into a 12-step program in your area. It also is not a bad idea to seek out professional counseling. Some online resources we recommend, both for accountability and for gaining information, are:

- [Pure Desire Ministries](#)—focuses on overcoming sexual addiction, offers support groups, has extensive resources on the site.
- [Celebrate Recovery](#)—Christ-centered 12-step program for people struggling with addiction.
- [RTribe](#)—an app for those who struggle with pain or addiction; provides accountability in community, as well as other resources.
- [Fortify](#)—web-based platform; provides online community for overcoming porn addiction.
- [Covenant Eyes](#)—online porn filter; accountability focus, extensive online articles.

## 3. Get Serious

You and your daughters need to approach recovery recognizing that you'll have to seriously deal with the issue over an extended period of time. This means setting boundaries that might seem extreme. When Jesus talked about lust in Matthew 5, He said if our right hand offends us, then we ought to cut it off. This was not a statement meant to be taken literally, but rather to express the seriousness with which we need to take our sin. This could mean totally cutting out certain friendships. We know some women who are recovering drug addicts. They have recognized that if they are truly not going to use anymore, they need to cut certain friendships out of their lives. There is no hesitation or question in their minds that if they do not, they will go back to using and dealing drugs.

## 4. Identify Triggers, Set up Boundaries

Sit down with your daughter and identify the patterns and circumstances surrounding her porn viewing. What are her triggers? Is it boredom? A certain place or time of day? Does she need to give you her smartphone at night? Maybe if she continues a relationship with a certain friend, they only meet in public places. Set consequences,

not just for viewing porn again, but for breaking the boundaries. For example, say one of the boundaries is no phone in her room at night and the consequence is she loses her phone for a week. If she brings her phone into her room at night, even if she doesn't look at porn, she still gets the consequence of losing the phone for a week. The idea is that she experiences the consequences before even getting to the point of viewing porn again.

Some people might question the strategy behind setting such consequences, seeing them as ignoring the grace God offers us. But the purpose of these measures is to retrain addicts and rewire their brains to associate porn with a negative feeling. In the heat of the moment, your daughter is not likely to consider the long-term consequences of using porn. She is, however, more likely to want to avoid an immediate consequence like losing her phone. Over time, this repercussion helps build up her brain's willpower so she can better resist temptation. We all need accountability and self-discipline for our various struggles, and training ourselves to be obedient to Christ does not negate the abundant grace He gives us when we fail.

### **5. Get Educated, Educate, and Serve**

Help your daughter to get education about porn, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking. Encourage her to educate others in some way about porn's consequences. Find ways to serve victims of sexual exploitation. It's harder for us to stay addicted to a sexual sin if we're constantly talking to other people about how harmful it is.

### **6. Don't Assume You're Out of the Woods**

Sometimes God miraculously heals people, but addiction is a cycle, and you should expect that it will take time to break it. If your daughter is or becomes a recovered porn addict, **it's crucial you do not assume that the struggle is gone for good.** It takes 90 days for the brain to rewire and ongoing accountability not to slide back into old habits. What's more, living in recovery from addiction is a lifelong process. You should **never** assume your daughter's struggle is gone for good. We know of two addicts who were each sober for about 20 years before they relapsed. It's essential that your daughter practices wise habits, no matter long she has been living a porn-free life.

### **7. Be Consistent in Your Family Habits**

Evaluate the media you consume as a family, and commit not to watch anything that sexualizes or objectifies people. Be consistent in all areas of your life.

### **8. Utilize Older Siblings!**

Older siblings are a formidable but easy-to-overlook resource. If you have more than one daughter, make sure the oldest knows the influence she has over her younger sisters. The oldest sister has this influence whether she abandons it or uses it for good. If she is willing, she can be a mentor to her younger sister(s) and help protect them from porn addiction.

### **9. Don't Forget That It's a Heart Issue**

Overcoming addiction or even curiosity requires immediate behavior modification. But remember that the root issue is one of the heart. If your daughter does not have a change of heart in what she loves and how she sees herself, no amount of effort to help her change her behavior will be effective in the long run.

## **10. You Can't Help Your Daughter If You Need Help Yourself**

Finally, we want to recognize that many parents and/or their spouses are struggling with porn addictions. If you or your spouse is using porn, you will not be able to give your daughter the help she needs. Follow the advice we've provided here insofar as it applies to you, especially the recommendations to get counselling and join a local recovery program.

## **———— Caveats for the Marriage-Minded**

Before we conclude, we want to mention a couple of encouragements for young women who hope to marry one day. Several young men we know have encountered Christian women who are not willing to even consider dating a guy who has been addicted to porn in the past. These men find this mentality extremely discouraging. They have repented of their porn addictions, are following Christ, have sought accountability in supportive communities, and now hope to find godly wives. But some women would reject them outright solely because of their past sins. It would definitely be foolish to pursue a relationship with someone who currently is addicted to porn. But porn is so rampant that—while it is possible—it is frankly unrealistic to expect to find a guy who has **never** struggled with it.

On the other hand, because porn use is so prevalent and normalized in our culture, your girls might believe that all guys look at it and that's just how it is. They might believe that it's impossible to find a man who is actively resisting the temptation to view porn. This is an insidious lie. Your daughters do not need to settle for a man who thinks looking at porn is ok. While God never guarantees us anything, including a lifelong, godly marriage, they need to know that there are men who are pursuing Christ and rejecting porn. Make sure your daughters have a vision for finding such a man and not for settling for less.

## **———— Conclusion**

According to Audrey Assad, Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft has said that the reason why porn is so harmful is that it attempts to do the same thing death does: separate the body from the spirit.

The good news is that Christ has unequivocally defeated death and its hold over us. The women who have struggled with a porn addiction are many, but the women who have overcome porn addiction through the power of Christ are also a great cloud of witnesses! You are not without resources, and you are not alone. Pursue your daughters, and don't let them battle sexual temptation on their own.

## **———— Additional Resources**

- [Pornography Conversation Kit](#), Axis (watch with teens to get them thinking and talking about porn in a new way)

- [“Fifty Shades of Grey: It doesn’t take a genius to realize that Christian Grey is a domestic abuser,”](#) *Independent*
- [“Sex: Women ‘just as easily hooked on online porn as men,’”](#) *The Telegraph*
- [“True Story: I’m A 17-Year-Old Girl Who Struggles With Porn,”](#) FTND
- [“Women’s Rape Fantasies: An Empirical Evaluation of the Major Explanations,”](#) *Archives of Sexual Behavior*
- [Love People, Use Things](#) [podcast]
- [The Porn Effect](#) [website]
- [“How to Deal with Porn Struggles When Dating,”](#) Authentic Intimacy
- [“Starting Women’s Groups,”](#) [podcast episode] Pure Desire Ministries
- [“Study Shows Connection Between Reading ‘Fifty Shades’ And Health Risks In Young Adult Females,”](#) Pure Desire Ministries
- [“Church Hurdles,”](#) [podcast episode] Pure Desire Ministries
- [“A Christian Mom, Her Sexual Addiction, and Forgiveness,”](#) Authentic Intimacy (paywall)
- [“They’re Right. Abstinence-Only Education Doesn’t Work,”](#) Authentic Intimacy