



Sun Valley
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Pornography Policy

1. Background

1.1 A distinction is often drawn between art, erotica and pornography but it is not easy to define these terms. On one hand, there are naked women and men in various poses, and on the other, there are pictures of people being humiliated and demeaned.

1.2 Where one draws the line between what is acceptable and what is offensive is essentially a personal moral choice. While we understand that issues like pornography are personal moral issues, we also feel that pornography needs to be understood within the context of human sexual development and psychological well-being. This document is an attempt to frame the school's position on this issue from a moral, psycho-sexual and educational perspective.

2. The school's moral standpoint:

2.1 The school's moral position on pornography is consistent with our policy on Religion and the ethos of the school. As such:

2.1.1 We uphold the sacredness of marriage and the importance of the family unit.

2.1.2 We disapprove of all behaviours that contribute to the breakdown of families and the disintegration of committed relationships. In this context we believe that pornography impedes the formation of intimate relationships and is thus harmful.

2.2 We believe that any sexual activity that is predatory and unwelcome, any pattern of sexual behaviour that seeks to impose upon a weaker person the will of a stronger person, exploiting sex, and any sexual acts that degrade another person are wrong.

2.3 We believe that promiscuous sexual behaviour is dehumanising to both partners and is therefore wrong. We affirm that sex is a gift of God meant to be shared in a relationship of ultimate commitment.

2.4. We believe that pornography de-humanises and de-personalises sex. We also believe that pornography takes sex out of the context of a committed relationship. As such we are opposed to pornography. It is illegal for children under 18 years of age to purchase pornography and to access

pornographic images on the internet. The school actively encourages pupils to follow the law of the land and will take steps to actively enforce these laws on our campus.

3. Healthy Sexual Development:

3.1 Pornography should be dealt with not only as a moral issue but also within the context of a pupils' healthy sexual and psychological development. As such it is important to identify the sexual developmental tasks that a teenage pupil should have achieved by the time they reaches adolescence.

3.2 According to Murray (2003), by the age of thirteen, a pupil should:

- Have an understanding of sexuality as a natural part of life.
- View their sexual feelings as legitimate and normal.
- Understand that sex is pleasurable as well as a way to procreate.
- Realise that sexual acts can be separated from reproductive acts.
- Know how males and female bodies grow and differ.
- Know about contraception and ways of preventing pregnancy and diseases.
- Know about changes they can expect in their bodies before puberty, such as wet dreams and menstruation.
- Know about sexually transmitted diseases and infections.

3.3 It is also important to realize that as a teenager, a pupil will be awakening to his/her own sexual impulses and drives. As such he/she will experience sexual desire, have a natural curiosity in the male and female body, be seeking ways to express his/her sex drive and will be searching for information about sex. Any action that shames a pupil or makes him/her feel bad or guilty about his/her sexual curiosity is harmful to his/her sexual development. In this context it is worth noting that it is not unusual for pupils to look at pornography. Research indicates that in the USA most teenagers have seen a pornographic magazine or video (not to mention a website containing sexually explicit images) before they leave high school (Richardson and Schuster, 2002).

4. Is viewing pornography psychologically damaging?

4.1 Unfortunately, the research available has not resolved this debate. Some research indicates that adolescents who use pornography become casual and even callous about sex, that they develop chauvinistic and objectifying attitudes about people and unrealistic expectations about what men and women look like and what they do. There is no shortage of research that suggests that looking at pornography regularly and over a prolonged period can be harmful (Murray, 2003).

4.2 Other experts say that viewing pornography has no known negative effects on children of any age and quote research to support their view (Richardson and Schuster, 2002). As Biddulph (1997) points out (in the absence of other suitable educational material) can have an educational role, and pupils' curiosity is healthy and natural. Boys want to see what women look like and visa versa. They want to see what goes where, and how. In this sense, some experts maintain that pornography certainly seems to fill a need. It can open a door to satisfying sexual experiences for teens and provide an opportunity for sexual experimentation and expression in a "safe" environment (Richardson and Schuster, 2002). Although it has been known to stir up the desire to search out sex of the non-solo variety, some teenagers report they have also found it to be a tool for maintaining abstinence (Richardson and Schuster, 2002). The excitement of pornography, unlike sexual experiences with others, comes without any risk of STI s or pregnancy, a

lower level of anxiety and no chance of breaking someone's heart (Richardson and Schuster, 2002). It is, however, noteworthy that even though some researchers suggest that pornography is not always harmful, it is very difficult to find respectable research that suggests that pornography has a positive and healthy effect on individuals. For most pupils looking at pornography will not become a problem. Some pupils, however, by virtue of their psychological make-up and family circumstances, may be at risk for developing psychopathology as a result of exposure to pornography. Within this context, pupils who grow up in a family where making good intimate, affectionate relationships has been put in place early on, are generally not at risk even if exposed to pornographic images (Murray, 2003). The evidence, however, suggests that a pre-occupation with pornography occurs where relationships are already difficult. As such obsessions with pornography can be seen as a symptom of an internal emotional difficulty.

4.3 In some pupils pornography can begin to act in the same addictive manner as a drug might. In explaining the psycho-dynamics of a pornography addiction some writers maintain that the appeal of pornography is that it is fantasy which provides an escape into oblivion. As such, pupils who are withdrawn, lonely or who find the world painful and difficult, may find comfort and escape in the fantasy world of pornography.

4.4 For pupils who are withdrawn and lonely – as indeed is generally the case with older people who become obsessed with sexually explicit images – pornography provides an escape into oblivion. When dealing with such a pupil it is important not to add to what can be a vicious circle. The pupil feels bad about him/herself, so he/she uses pornography to make him/herself feel better. An angry parent or teacher who is disgusted at what they find will only make him/her feel worse. Talking in a non-judgmental and shame-free environment while helping him/her understand what lies behind his/her use of pornography may be psychologically more helpful (Murray, 2003).

5. Advice to parents:

5.1 On the issue of pornography, the school gives parents the following advice:

5.1.1 Provide information about sex. Richardson and Schuster (2002) suggest that if parents really want to make an impression and minimize the role of pornography in their child's sexual education, they should get him/her in touch with a competing perspective on sexual pleasure. A good book on sex will give your child some of the excitement and titillation he/she is looking for and the how-to-information he/she needs along with reminders about responsibility and contraception in the context of a healthy perspective on sexuality and relationships.

5.1.2 Chatrooms on the internet. Richardson and Schuster, (2002) suggest you that you do not discourage your child from entering chatrooms. They can be a great source of fun, support, and information. But it is important to set the following boundaries:

- Make sure your child understands that a person who tells them he/she is fifteen may actually be a fifty-year-old who says what teenagers like to hear in order to entice them.
- Warn your child that at some point they may get an IM from a stranger asking them to meet for sex or even just to talk. Tell them they will be safe as long as they do not respond and do not give out any identifying information, like their address or phone number. Tell them to block the IMs from that sender, and then always to tell you what happened.

5.1.3 The internet and the viewing of sexually explicit sites. More than one billion people around the world will be connected to the Internet in this decade. According to a major US Internet Provider, 70% of the time, people using the Internet are searching for sexually related material. The most commonly searched - for word on the Internet is "sex." Some porn sites receive over 100,000 online visitors each day (Locker, 2003). If your child has access to the internet and a shred of curiosity about sex, sooner or later he/she will find his/her way to a porn site. Within this context it is important to realize that the internet can be used to:

- Learn about everything from sexual health to sexual oddities.
- Read steamy stories about people's wild sexual adventures.
- Look at pornographic pictures and real - time pornographic video clips.
- Have sexual conversations with strangers in chat rooms.
- Send sexy or romantic e-mails to your lover.

5.1.4 As you probably know, if you want to prevent your child from accessing sexually explicit material on the internet, you can get a filter. Filters come built in to the most popular Internet service providers and need only to be switched on to start screening out sex-related material. They can also be purchased separately and installed. Most filters work by denying access to websites that contain certain key words, like sex. The problem with filters is that they are notoriously over-inclusive. A filter will largely block your child's ability to access pornography on the internet, but it will also prevent him/her from getting into some valuable sites as well. Even the cleverest filters will make it impossible for your teenager to get genuinely helpful information about sex on the web (let alone about testicular cancer).

5.1.5 Richardson and Schuster (2002) make the point that the children most likely to search for and view a pornographic site on the internet are boys between the ages of fifteen and seventeen (about one in four of whom are reported to do this in the USA). Significantly it is also this group that are most likely to use the web to learn about sex and other sensitive topics that they feel uncomfortable discussing with parents (about one in four of them do this, too). So if you block pornography, you will block their online learning about abstinence, safer sex, and many other health issues.

5.1.6 One way or another, many pupils seem to happen upon the occasional pornographic site – if not at your home, then at the neighbours. Rather than trying to protect your child from material and ideas he/she is bound to come across, consider pouring your energy into helping make him/her a critical consumer of such material. This means:

- Keeping an eye on his/her surfing (and TV watching, movie going, and music listening) and inviting him/her to discuss with you what it all means.
- Asking him/her how realistic he/she finds the depiction of women on a particular site.
- Telling him/her what you think and why. If you are opposed to these sites, explain why, and make an argument for his/her avoiding them if you feel he/she should. If you feel it is fine for him/her to go to them, you might want to make sure that he/she understands the difference between fantasy and reality.
- Explain to your child that because computers offer 24 – hour access to pornography right in your own home, pornography can seriously interfere with your life if you begin to use it every time you go onto the computer.

5.1.7 Warn your child to be careful and to set limits for him/herself, or sex online can easily become compulsive. If you want to know whether he/she is following your advice, you can enter the history of your child's browser and find the names of the recent sites he/she has viewed (unless he/she has deleted them). Checking the browser history has a lot in common with reading your child's diary; both are seductive shortcuts around building a functional connection with your child, and both can render the privacy of the medium (one of its main assets for encouraging discovery) moot. If you decide to check the browser history it is suggested that you tell him/her when you first get the computer so that he/she has been duly warned. An alternative way to fulfill your curiosity about your child's online habits is to use the hard but direct way – ask him/her what he/she is doing.

6. Prohibition and banning pornographic material

6.1 Biddulph (1997) maintains that responding to the issue of pornography with prohibition doesn't work. Boys and girls will see these images in magazines being passed around among friends or on the Internet. What is needed is close enough monitoring by parents so that you are able to prevent really objectionable material circulating amongst boys, while at the same time not shaming the boys or girls for being interested or curious. It is too heavy-handed to ban everything but really offensive hardcore pornography (Murray, 2003) but it is not unreasonable to discuss your personal moral decisions and opinions with your child.

7. Discussing pornography with your teenage child

7.1 We suggest that at some stage you should have a conversation about pornography with you child. Keep the following points in mind when you do so:

- Tell him/her you know that he/she has probably seen pornography and that a fascination with the naked human body is normal and that it is normal to seek information about sex.
- Encourage him/her to think about the difference between pornography, erotica and artistic pictures of naked men and women. In the process make him/her aware that he needs to consciously set his/her own boundaries on these issues and learn to censor what he/she reads and looks at.
- Ask him/her how realistic he thinks those depictions of men, women, and sexuality are.
- Tell him/her what you think is left out or distorted (for example, that most women do not have breasts that size or that most men's penises are not that large).
- Discuss the problems that pornography can cause in a relationship. Locker (2003) reports that pornography can damage relationships in the following ways:
 - It can create jealousy and unrealistic expectations.
 - It may decrease desire for your partner.
 - It costs money that belongs to both of you.
 - It takes away from time that you would have spent with your partner.
 - It creates an atmosphere of secrecy and lies.
- Encourage your child to think about the messages the pictures send, why they are sold, what is portrayed and whether or not they are respectful of men and women. Fathers or mothers may well help their children find better erotica to look at and read.

8. School rules pertaining to pornography:

8.1 While we understand that it is normal for teenagers to seek information about sex and to have a curiosity about the naked human body, we also feel the need to set limits with regard to what is acceptable in the context of a school. As such the following limits have been set:

- The use of the school's computer network for sourcing, copying, distributing, emailing and/or storing sexually explicit material and/or naked images is prohibited.
- The possession, selling and/or distribution of sexually explicit material and naked images at school are prohibited.
- The public display of naked and/or sexually explicit images on the covers of books and files, on screensavers or as computer wall-paper is not permitted.
- Storing sexual explicit and/or images and video clips on a laptop computer which is brought to school is prohibited.

9. Consequences of contravening the school's rules:

9.1 In the first instance, a pupil found to be contravening the school's rules on pornography should be referred to the counsellor, who should discuss the matter with him/her. The principles outlined above in the section on "talking to your teenager about pornography" should serve as a guideline for this discussion.

9.2 If a pupil has an abnormal preoccupation with pornography, he/she should inform the pupil's parents and refer the pupil to the Counsellor.

9.3 If the pupil is referred to the Counsellor, a thorough assessment should be made of the pupil, his/her level of social functioning and emotional state. If necessary the pupil should be referred for further assessment and treatment to a suitably qualified Psychologist. This should be done in consultation with the pupil and his/her parents.

9.4 Pupils who are found to be distributing or selling sexually explicit material may be referred to the Disciplinary Committee.

10. The school's educational responsibility:

10.1 While we believe that sex education and discussions about pornography are primarily the responsibility of parents, we do acknowledge our need to address these issues in our curriculum.

10.2 As such the issue of pornography will be dealt with in Life Orientation lessons as well as in Sex Education classes. This education should be consistent with the contents of this document.