



# UNDERSTANDING PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

## UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

Short guides to understanding addiction and mental health

# UNDERSTANDING PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

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Pornography, or porn, is described as printed or visual material that contains an explicit description or display of sexual activity, or sexual organs. Porn may be presented in the format of written stories, photos, drawings, videos or animations. It is often viewed to stimulate sexual excitement, and it is during the teenage years that you may first be exposed to pornography.

When we talk about porn, we are often referring to videos that can be watched online. Some people enjoy watching porn, whereas others will not ever feel the desire to watch it. Of those who do watch porn, a small number may start to feel compelled to watch it, and others may begin to feel addicted. An addiction to pornography can escalate into watching porn more often, watching more extreme porn, or making porn your priority at the expense of your friends, schoolwork or hobbies. There are ways to manage an addiction to pornography, and experts who can offer help if you need it.



## WHAT IS A PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION?

Pornography is not a new thing, but it has become much easier to access. Porn should only be viewed by those who are aged 18 or over, but as it can be viewed online it has become easier for teenagers to access it if they want to. Although there are many forms of porn, including animations or erotic literature, one of the most common formats for porn is a video recorded in a professional capacity, or by amateurs on a camera or smartphone. These films are sometimes known as adult, or X-rated, movies.

Some people will never watch porn, some will watch it once or twice and not feel interested in it or find it offensive, others will watch it occasionally, and some will regularly view porn. A person's preferences for porn are highly individual and there is no reason for you to watch porn if you don't want to.

It is common for people to watch porn to help them feel sexually excited. Some may watch it by themselves during masturbation, and others may watch it with a partner. While most people who watch porn may view it occasionally, some people who start watching porn can become addicted. Porn addiction is not recognised by most healthcare professionals as a true addiction, however it can lead to the compulsive behaviour that is similar to other addictions. Those with a pornography 'addiction' may therefore find themselves feeling compelled to watch porn even though they know it could be having a negative impact on other areas of their life.

## THE SYMPTOMS OF PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

Like other forms of behavioural addiction, wanting to watch porn can feel like a compulsion. Just as gamblers might feel desperate to enter an online casino, and gamers may not be able to relax until they're in front of their console, someone may become reliant on watching pornography to feel content.



The way that you use pornography may be concerning if you:

- Are spending more time watching porn than you used to, or feel that you need to watch it more often to feel satisfied
- Find that watching porn gives you a 'high', or that you need it to feel good about yourself
- Seek out extreme forms of porn to get the same high that you are used to
- Watch porn but then feel guilty, ashamed, or regretful afterwards
- Insist that your partner also watches porn, or acts out something that you have seen in a porn movie, even though you know they don't want to
- Are so keen to watch porn that you ignore other areas of your life such as homework, chores, seeing friends or going to work
- Stay up late to visit as many porn sites as possible
- Watch porn in more risky situations, such as at school, in public or at work
- Spend large amounts of money watching paid for porn
- Continue to watch porn even though you know it is negatively affecting your life
- No longer enjoy sex with a partner
- Use porn to manage how you feel, for example if you are anxious or feel low.



If you have noticed any of the above signs, you may feel embarrassed to bring up your concerns with anyone close to you. If you don't feel able to speak to a friend or an adult you trust, you can seek advice from a counsellor or your doctor. They may be able to advise you of a specialist you can speak to. Additional guidance is also given later in this article.

## WHAT CAUSES PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION?

People who have so called 'problematic pornography use' (PPU) have similar changes in the brain as those who are addicted to substances or other addictive behaviours such as gambling. It is helpful to remember this, as it means that, just like other forms of dependence, porn addiction can be managed and treated.

As with other types of addiction, the brain's reward centres are affected by pornography. When watching porn, the dopamine system may be activated which gives feelings of pleasure and reward. Over months or years, the amount of dopamine that is produced when watching porn is likely to start to reduce, and so you may feel that you need to watch more porn, view it more frequently, or watch more extreme porn, to get the same excited feelings.

Once you regularly watch porn, it can be harder to stop because you miss the feeling it gives you. Even if watching porn feels like a bad habit or something that you are ashamed of, you may find you still go back to it because you can't resist the high it gives you. If you try to stop, you may be surprised to find that you can't.

However, if you currently watch pornography occasionally, it is possible avoid addiction by setting clear boundaries. This might include having an idea of how often you want to watch porn, when you will watch it, and if any types of porn are off-limits for you.

## HOW DO I RECOGNISE PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION?

It can be hard to admit to anyone that you have a form of addiction, as many of the common addictions have an outdated stigma attached to them and you may feel worried about how someone else will respond. It can feel particularly embarrassing to even admit to viewing porn, and you may not have admitted to yourself that you have an addiction.



If you have persuaded yourself that your porn habits are healthy, it is a good idea to check this by asking yourself the following questions:



1. Do you watch porn because you feel that you have to, rather than because you enjoy it or you want to?
2. Are you spending large amounts of money on purchasing porn?
3. Are you watching porn in risky locations such as in public?
4. Do you avoid seeing your friends or going to any clubs or hobbies so that you can watch more porn?
5. Do you often feel guilty or regretful watching porn afterwards?
6. Are you watching violent or extreme pornography?
7. Do you ask partners to perform sex acts that you have seen online, despite them not wanting to?

If you have answered yes to any of the above, or if you think you have some signs of pornography addiction, you need to take steps to stop watching porn which may require help from an adult you trust, or professional support.

## HOW CAN I PREVENT AN ADDICTION TO PORNOGRAPHY?

Porn should not be watched by under 18s, but if you watch porn and do not have an addiction to it, there are some ways that you can avoid becoming addicted:

- Keep track of when you watch porn, and monitor if the frequency or length of time you spend watching it increases
- Pay attention to what you watch and whether you are turning to more extreme forms of pornography to get the same rush
- Only ever watch porn when you know you are in a private, safe space
- Notice if you use porn because you want to, or because you feel you have to
- Make a note of how much you spend purchasing porn
- Keep up with your friends and hobbies
- Be respectful of your partner's wishes.



If you struggle with any of the above, you may be at risk of starting to watch porn compulsively. At this stage, you need to take steps to treat the addiction, as porn is likely to be harming your mental health and other areas of your life, too.

## HOW CAN I TREAT AN ADDICTION TO PORNOGRAPHY?

It is possible to get back in control of your porn use without the input of a professional. As with all addictions, it will take willpower and determination to give up something that has previously given you a rush.

### Abstain from porn

To manage the compulsion to watch porn, you will need to completely stop watching it. This also includes abstaining from viewing sexual animations, erotic stories, illustrations or photos. There are several ways that you can increase your chance of success in avoiding online porn:

- Pick a date when you are going to stop watching pornography, and stick to it
- Delete any bookmarks or history on your phone, tablet or computer so that you are less tempted to search for porn
- Get rid of any hard copies including photos, DVDs or magazines
- Install software that prevents you from accessing porn, or request that parental controls are used to restrict access to adult sites
- When you think about porn, remind yourself of the regret or shame it made you feel
- If you feel able to, talk to a friend or responsible adult about your porn use, and ask for their support in leaving porn in your past
- Think about any triggers for watching porn, and try to avoid them
- Find a new or old habit that you can do instead of watching porn.



### Think about healthy relationships

Relationships with yourself, friends, or partners are meant to be healthy. If porn has affected how you feel about yourself, how much you see your friends, what you expect from partners or how you treat them, then you will need to reflect on your thoughts and behaviours. Use a journal to write down how you feel about your relationships, and any changes you would like to see in the future.





## Seek professional help

If you think you have an addiction to pornography, you may require help from a doctor, addiction specialist, or counsellor. This can be especially helpful if a compulsion to watch porn has left you feeling anxious, ashamed, or has damaged your mental health.

Seeing a specialist should help you to understand why the addiction has formed, and what you should consider in future to find ways of effectively coping so that you no longer feel that you need to view porn. You may be able to access a specialist via your doctor, through an addiction charity or support group, or by searching online for a private counsellor.

## I HAVE A FRIEND WHO MIGHT HAVE A PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION. WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THEM?

You might have many conflicting feelings if you have a friend who may have become addicted to pornography, especially if you cannot see the appeal of porn yourself. You are not responsible for your friend's recovery from an addiction, but it is possible to support them while they try to manage their dependency.

Sex, intimacy, self-pleasure and porn are often seen as private subjects, so it can be difficult to know how to raise the possibility of addiction with your friend. The following ideas may be helpful to start a conversation.



- Mention that you are worried about their use of porn. Depending on the situation, this might include spending more time watching it, spending a lot of money on it, or watching porn rather than doing other activities including socialising
- Ask if porn is affecting how much time they have left for school-work, or if it is impacting their ability to stay in paid employment
- Find out if they would like to stop watching porn, or cut down on it
- Ask your friend how watching porn makes them feel afterwards, as they may later feel guilty or disgusted by their behaviour
- Check if they feel like they need some help from a professional to cut down, or if they want to speak to another adult such as a counsellor or doctor.



It your friend reacts badly to your attempts to help them, try not to take it personally. You can only be supportive if they allow you to be. If you have serious concerns, such as watching extreme or violent porn, or if porn is having a significant impact on their overall health or quality of life, then you must seek advice from an adult such as your parents or a teacher.

Watching porn that involves children is a criminal offence and as such you must report it to Gardai or to another adult who will support you in reporting it officially to Garda Síochána.

## I THINK MY CHILD MIGHT HAVE A PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION, WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

If you think your child might be watching porn, or may have an addiction to pornography, you may have noticed:



- Increased secrecy around their phone, tablet or laptop
- A lot of internet use at night
- Taking a phone or other device into the bathroom where there may be a locked door and therefore guaranteed privacy
- Speaking in a sexual manner or presenting with increasing sexualised behaviour
- Making sexually explicit drawings or writing on sexual themes
- Changes in their mood including anxiety, depression, irritability, contempt towards others or extreme fluctuations in mood
- Withdrawing from friends or family
- No longer interested in clubs or hobbies they used to enjoy
- Increased visits to sexually explicit websites on your internet or browser history.



# WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD HAS A PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION?

If you think your child has an addiction to pornography, they are likely to be fearful or embarrassed when you raise your concerns with them. Talking to parents about sex is hard enough, but both pornography and addiction may feel even more difficult for teenagers to speak openly about. Your child may already have tried to stop viewing porn but have been unsuccessful due to its addictive nature. This may lead them to believe that they will never be able to stop watching porn, or that they are a failure. You will therefore need to show them love and support to be able to help them think about stopping.



When you raise your concerns with your child, make sure that they know you love them unconditionally and that you are not cross or disappointed with them, nor embarrassed by them. You can tell them that you are going to put controls in place to make it harder for them to access porn, helping them to break the cycle of addiction. This might include requesting that your internet provider puts parental controls in place to block adult sites. You may also be able to instal software to prevent access.

Your child may have used porn to meet an emotional need not met elsewhere, and so an open discussion about their overall feelings may also be beneficial. If porn gave them something they felt they needed, there will be other ways to get this feeling. This may involve supporting them to see their friends more, exploring new clubs, or going back to an activity they gave up. If necessary, you may also need to help them find a counsellor or addiction specialist who can help them work through their relationship with porn, and with themselves in general.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Many children will be exposed to porn, some will watch it occasionally, and a few may watch it compulsively. Although porn addiction is not recognised by healthcare professionals as a true addiction, it shares many similarities with other forms of addiction and can negatively influence an individual's quality of life. With determination, it is possible to manage the dependence so that you can look forward to feeling more like your usual self again.

The following services may be helpful:

YSPI Crisis Information:

[ineedhelp.ie](https://www.ineedhelp.ie)

HSE Addiction Services:

[www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/addiction](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/addiction)



[www.rutlandcentre.ie/addictions-we-treat/sex-addiction-porn-addiction](https://www.rutlandcentre.ie/addictions-we-treat/sex-addiction-porn-addiction)

## HELP AND ASSISTANCE

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

 **FREETEXT HELP TO 50015**

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 **WWW.INNEEDHELP.IE**

**Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.**

**Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112**

# ABOUT YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION IRELAND

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



Our main programme is **“Let’s Talk About Mental Health”** ([www.letstalk.ie](http://www.letstalk.ie)). This is a programme for students, teachers, parents and those who work with young people in schools, colleges, GAA clubs and youth organisations around Ireland.

Let’s Talk About Mental Health is a comprehensive mental health awareness and suicide prevention programme for ages 16+. As part of the programme we also provide a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at [www.letstalk.ie/video.php](http://www.letstalk.ie/video.php).

We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a 24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service at [www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie](http://www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie).

Full details are available at [www.yspi.ie](http://www.yspi.ie)



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2. Understanding Drug Addiction
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4. Understanding Gambling Addiction
5. Understanding Pornography Addiction
6. Understanding Sex Addiction
7. Understanding Consent

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