

Online Pornography: Intervention & Treatment

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

There is currently no specific evidence-based treatment identified for online pornography use. However, given the similarities between substance and process addictions, service providers can apply similar treatment approaches used for substance use disorders.

Intervention & Treatment

Treatment plans for pornography use in children and youth should be individualized, considering developmental, psychological, and social factors. Many youth do not ask for support from adults about their pornography use, often because they are ashamed.

Establishing a non-judgmental and supportive therapeutic relationship is essential in reducing this stigma and fostering openness in the treatment process [1]. Intervention and treatment for pornography addiction in youth should align with approaches used for substance use targeting reducing triggers, managing relationships and implementing effective strategies to reduce the compulsive and impulsive behaviours [1]. With the pervasive nature of sexually arousing stimuli that is readily available online, complete avoidance of pornography is unrealistic.

Unlike other sexual disorders, pharmacological treatments have shown limited effectiveness in treating pornography addiction [2]. However, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), commonly used for impulse control disorders, are sometimes prescribed to help reduce compulsive behaviors [3].

Systemic approaches to treatment have demonstrated promise in addressing problematic pornography use, particularly in young adults. [1]. Therapeutic models that involve family and relational dynamics can be effective, including Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy and Couples Therapy for young adults. At the individual level, psychological interventions that focus on managing compulsive behaviors and emotional distress include: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy [1,4,5].

Support for Youth & Families

Parents and youth need to be reassured they are not alone in their struggle with pornography use or sexting. It is critical that youth and their families receive reassurance and timely access to education, support, counselling and treatment that address the ease of access to pornography, including its hardcore nature, along with the development of problematic unrealistic sexual scripts for youth. More research is needed to understand the impacts of pornography, sexting and the negative emotional, social and legal impacts this may have on children and youth.

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Research in this area should be conducted from a cultural and community health perspective. These efforts will ensure that intervention, education and policies are developed that reflect the diverse issues that children, youth and families are facing from a trauma-informed and culturally responsive lens [6].

Prevention Strategies

Digital citizenship education plays a crucial role in helping children, youth, and families navigate online spaces responsibly. Without appropriate guidance, many adolescents turn to pornography as a substitute for sex education, which can result in unrealistic expectations about relationships and sexual intimacy [6,7]. Prevention efforts should focus on:

- Encouraging open discussions between youth and trusted adults
- Promoting media literacy to critically assess online content
- Implementing school-based programs that provide comprehensive, age-appropriate sexual education
- Supporting healthy relationship education to counteract the influence of explicit media

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