

Life Talk™ News 12

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(Suggestion: print for a complete record) ©Izabella Little

– Action today changes tomorrow –

Join the Life Talk Tug-of-War



Together we can pull to win!

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why is it so
dangerous now?

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can all pull
together

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FORUM BACKGROUND

The Life Talk Forum aims to: create awareness, highlight areas that can make a positive difference to the lives of adolescents and parents, help to facilitate communication, and create happy and fulfilled youth guided by sound values.

NEWSLETTERS 1 – 11 COVERED: clubs; a drug dealer's alert to parents; cell phones; teen drinking; pocket money; hubbly bubbly; porn; chewing tobacco; fake IDs; communication; discipline & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; sexual activity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; self-esteem; bullying; sexual abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; MXit; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', head injuries; cults; 'rape me' games and helpful reading. (You can download them from www.lifetalk.co.za)

LET'S ALL JOIN THE "TUG-OF-WAR"!

In reality, the challenges faced by our adolescents and parents have created a tug-of-war (see above pic) where aspects such as alcohol, drugs, bullying and peer pressure are pitted against values, responsibility, wise choices and other positives. If we don't all join in and pull, there's a strong chance that our children might be drawn into some of the very tough (and avoidable) challenges being encountered by so many youngsters.

In response, **Life Talk** has launched the "Tug-of-War" – a countrywide awareness-building initiative that tackles the challenges and explores proactive solutions.

The aim is to galvanize all families, schools, corporates, the media and society into action. It's about gearing ourselves to be informed and proactive, and to ensure that as a nation we win the "tug-of-war" that we are engaged in.

See end of the newsletter for details of joining or go to www.lifetalk.co.za .

PORNOGRAPHY: A GROWING DANGER – WHY?

Recently we've had a dramatic increase in reports of children as young as 8 being exposed to pornography – and a growing number of teens admit to watching 1-2 hours of porn per day. *Life Talk for Parents* contains a very sobering chapter about the realities, and we have also asked Sean Semple, a psychologist who deals extensively with porn cases, to provide an update of what's happening:

What is the problem?

- Average age of child first seeing porn is 11
- Addiction to viewing porn
- Chemical rewiring of the brain, and eventual sexual and other dysfunction.

How did this happen?

Sean says: "Porn usage used to be limited, but the Internet changed everything. Overnight porn was easy to obtain, a lot of it is free, there is an almost limitless variety to satisfy even the most twisted imagination, and it comes into your room allowing anonymous access. And cell phones now allow porn to be even more accessible."

How dangerous is porn?

"Porn can become as dangerous as drugs. Consider its power:

1. Porn provides **instant sexual arousal**. It enters the body and accesses the nervous system instantly. The brain cannot distinguish between porn and the real thing – it tells your body that you are there, in the action, which stimulates the production of testosterone, automatically increasing desire and causing arousal. This will happen even if one has moral issues with porn.
2. When porn is viewed it is stored in the memory and is available for future stimulation – you **cannot get away from it** because it is in your head.
3. Porn is **chemically addictive**. This is the most important concept for us to grasp. Users are not addicted to the images themselves but to the chemicals the porn stimulates. Porn actually changes the chemistry of the brain¹. In the median forebrain there are receptors for the neurotransmitter dopamine. Dopamine is released by the body when we engage in pleasurable pursuits: kissing, eating, intercourse, smoking, taking other drugs. Porn causes a large amount of dopamine to be released causing a high similar to that of crack cocaine. Other body chemicals are also stimulated: adrenaline, endorphins, and serotonin. So porn gives users an almost instant "high".

Overloading the brain with these chemicals through porn causes the body to reduce the natural production of them under normal life circumstances. Porn thus becomes more and more necessary for feeling normal/good.

Porn is very often combined with masturbation. At climax, opiate-like hormones and neurotransmitters are released in the body numbing pain and anxiety, and bringing pleasure and relaxation. So porn provides a very pleasant chemical journey that starts by lifting the mood and ends up with relaxation. It allows people to feel good and deal with feeling bad. Porn thus can become something a person craves and is preoccupied with – it can and does become highly addictive.

Furthermore, at point of climax powerful bonding hormones such as oxytocin and vasopressin are released. They contribute to establishing a lasting emotional attachment to whomever or whatever you were with, or thinking about, at climax. The more climaxes one has to porn the more emotionally attached one will become. It cements the relationship with porn.

4. **Withdrawal from porn** can bring with it all the symptoms of detoxing from alcohol, cocaine and other hard drugs: agitation, depression & sleeplessness.
5. Porn is **psychologically addictive**. The user is under the illusion that he/she is immensely powerful and desirable and in total control of what is happening. There is a psychological shift away from sex being about the other person, to a self-centred sexual experience."

Modern porn is devastatingly powerful and dangerous.

Sean continues: "Porn conditions the user's mind to understand sex in an unreal, distorted and dysfunctional manner. It competes with real life partners and often wins because it avoids the need for commitment, affection, communication, fore- and afterplay, and any consideration of safety and consequences.

"To experiment with it is like experimenting with cocaine or heroin. It may seem at first as if the user is in control of the porn but what one sees quickly developing is denial and minimisation of the problem. This "permits" the user to use with greater frequency and search for more stimulating images. In adults, the need for the kick that porn provides begins to intrude on marriage, family and career. Soon, male-female porn fails to give a sufficient dopamine rush and so the user searches for something more exciting. Lesbian sex, bestiality, abuse, rape and child-porn follow. A common

¹ 2008:19

expression I hear from people I am counselling is, “*I have no idea how I came to be looking at bestiality or child-porn.*” People believe they are in control but this is an illusion – porn like alcohol or drugs “*has an inherent destructive potential that is beyond our ability to completely manage or control.*”²

What are some of the negative consequences of using porn?

“Irritability and depression; Social isolation; Neglect of important responsibilities; Sexually objectification of people (pornifying); Sexual dysfunction; Addiction; Relationship problems; Self esteem issues; Engaging in dangerous/illegal behaviour

How are children exposed to porn?

“The average age at which a young person has first contact with porn is 11 years of age. Some of the ways include:

- a. **The parent’s stash.** The most common exposure is through finding a parent’s stash of porn. The fact that it is hidden, immediately gives it value to the child – it must be precious or special. When they are exposed to the porn it creates new and powerful emotions and responses which they instinctively know they cannot share with their parents because either they will be punished or the stash will be no longer accessible to them. Finding the stash teaches the child about secretiveness and hiding things from others which becomes a pattern for life.
- b. Being exposed to porn by an **older relative or friend**. This carries the exhilaration of bonding with people the child looks up to and of emulating their behaviour.
- c. Through the **internet and cell phones**. “90% of children between the ages of 8 & 16 years old report that they have viewed porn online.”³
- d. **School friends**. Many children are shown porn on cellphones in the playground.

If parents find out about the porn they can often make the issue worse by reacting with anger or shaming the child. This creates an impression that matters of sex are wrong and shameful and can never be discussed rationally. Young people may internalise these notions and develop an unhealthy, ever more secretive relationship with porn.”

Why do kids continue using porn?

- **To learn more about sex.** There is a natural curiosity about sex – what do people having sex look like? However this “learning” is deeply flawed. It creates wrong beliefs: porn sex is the ideal sex to strive for; casual/anonymous sex is great sex, no-one ever feels exploited after sex and any type of sexual activity will be welcomed and enjoyed by your sexual partner.
- **To belong.** Sharing something taboo strengthens social ties. It is a way to create “street cred” or be cool or manly. Interestingly, even adult men seem to have an unspoken rule that forbids them from expressing anything negative about porn to each other even if they felt that way.
- **To feel normal.** Where can adolescents explore and come to terms with their emerging sexuality? Puberty can be confusing especially when parents do not guide us to understand that the sexual urges, feelings and fantasies are normal. Since porn has no boundaries it allows a realm of private exploration and experience. It validates sex and sexuality in a way many parents fail to.
- **To cope with life.** Where children feel powerless, unloved, neglected, abandoned, humiliated, attacked or betrayed, they lose themselves in porn’s powerful drug-like properties. It becomes a toxic form of stress management.”

Sean says that “Many children’s first sexual relationship is not with another person but with porn – which shapes their psyche and sexuality in destructive ways. It moulds an expectation that a sexual partner should be able to meet every sexual desire “whenever, wherever and however I want without asking for anything in return”. This expectation will cause a vicious addictive circle because it will sabotage real relationships, and drive them towards porn as a sexual outlet and viable relationship.”

² 2008:121

³ 2008:29

Some 2008 statistics::

- In the US, 40 Million people visit porn sites at least once a month
- 25% of all daily internet searches are for porn
- 35% of all downloads on the internet are for porn
- There are 400 million pages of porn on the internet
- Porn is a \$97 billion dollar industry annually worldwide
- In the US porn revenue is greater than all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises.
- Young people under the age of 18 have become one of the largest consumer groups of porn.
- 75% of users are men

Sean's input confirms what we're experiencing at the Forum. We're inundated with emails from concerned parents whose children speak of regular exposure to porn.

THE TUG-OF-WAR – A VITAL INITIATIVE!

We really are engaged in a tug-of-war with many of the crucial issues, threats and challenges – and we have to pull together if we're to have any influence on the world our children enter.

EVEN OUR “STRONGEST” TEENS ARE OFTEN AT RISK. As we've been reporting: teen binge-drinking is spreading, drug use is escalating, sexual activity starts at ever younger ages, school bullying and violence is increasing, depression and teen suicides are at worrying levels, divorce breaks families apart at an unprecedented rate, peer pressure is intense, crime is stressful, 10-year olds are viewing porn in school playgrounds, values often get sidelined, and the list goes on... Those of us pulling against these challenges, and for: values, wise choices, responsibility (and other key aspects) find ourselves in a daunting position.

If you worry about what your children are exposed to, do you ever ask:

- How do we prepare our children (and ourselves) for all these challenges?
- How can we help to create a world that's safer and more focused on: values, respect, self-discipline, communication, and sound choices and decisions?

The Tug-of-War initiative aims to do just that.

If we all pull together, we can make a huge difference to our children's world.

HOW DO YOU JOIN THE TUG-OF-WAR?

- a. **If you're not already a Life Talk subscriber, sign-up now** (free) on www.lifetalk.co.za .
- b. **Forward this email** to every parent, grandparent, educator and any potentially interested person you know – and encourage them to join. For the initiative to succeed we need as many people “pulling” as possible!
- c. **Invite any high-profile people you may know** (media, business, government, religious leaders, or others) to lend their support to the initiative.
- d. **See our website for other ways of being involved.**

HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM JOINING?

- Joining the initiative will help you to be proactive in preparing your children for the challenges of adolescence (and adulthood);
- You'll receive current information and advice at no cost;
- You'll unleash your power (replacing worry and helplessness with action and results); and
- You'll become part of building a society where values, positive attitudes and successful choices are part of our youth's future.

TELL EVERYONE ABOUT IT – GET THEM TO JOIN!
ACTION TODAY CHANGES TOMORROW!

TO SUBSCRIBE (FOR FREE):

Click on **TUG-OF-WAR** on www.lifetalk.co.za and enter your details. If you'd like past newsletters, you can download them off the FORUM page.

PANEL MEMBERS & CONTRIBUTORS

Our panel of contributors includes:

Thomas Burkhalter. A leading psychologist and co-author of *Life Talk for Parents*, Thomas has two practices, focuses on: children, adolescents, parents, adult psychotherapy and couples therapy, and is case conference consultant at the Parent and Child Counselling Centre(NGO).

Sean Semple. Therapist and counsellor specialising in marriage, family, depression and trauma issues.

Sally Thorp. Full-time on Life Talk issues, Sally gives talks and runs workshops and also focuses on the area of building healthy self-esteem and equipping children and teens with tools to face life with optimism & self-reliance.

Izabella Little Gates. Internationally published author of the best-selling *Life Talk* books. She runs the Forum, is a regular guest on radio and TV programmes about teens and parenting, gives talks, and continues to write.

Liz Dooley. Director and Counsellor at FAMSA (Family Life Centre) - 28 years experience as a social worker/counsellor specializing in family and marital relationships and parenting skills, youth and individual counselling.

To utilise any of the panel member's services, email forum@lifetalk.co.za

PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO EVERYONE

The FORUM email address is: forum@lifetalk.co.za

The Life Talk™ Forum is endorsed by:
**FAMSA, the CIE, the ARA, KHULISA (crime prevention initiative)
Retrouvaille, Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre and
many schools and other organisations**

For more about the Tug-of-War, the *Life Talk*™ books, or the Forum visit:

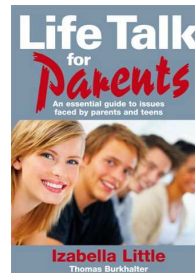
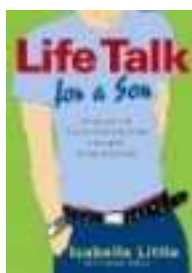
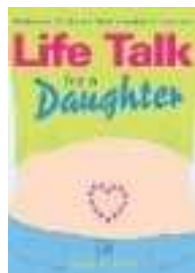
www.lifetalk.co.za

Life Talk for a Daughter and *Life Talk for a Son* are a toolkit of tips and guidelines for teens and young adults.

Life Talk for Parents is a guide to all the issues faced by parents and teens, and it explores solutions and key areas to focus on.

The books make a great gift and are available at most bookstores, on www.kalahari.net, and internationally in: UK, Portugal, Spain and China (and soon in Arabic)

****Proceeds fund the Forum****



* * * Bulk orders can be emailed to: forum@lifetalk.co.za * * *