

The Utah State Board of Education

A Teacher's Guide

To Teaching the Harmful Effects of Pornography

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Background

In 2018, HB 286 Reproductive Education Amendments, modified instruction in health to include instruction in the harmful effects of pornography. This requirement was added to the [Health Education Core Standards](#) in 2019 as a safety standard, as it does not require parental consent as outlined in Utah Code [53G-10-403](#).

The Utah Health Education Core Standards teach the harmful effects of pornography” in two instances: Health I (middle school) and Health II (high school). The standards for each grade level are outlined below.

Standard HI.SDP.5: Explain the harmful effects of pornography and recognize that recovery is possible.

Standard HII.SDP.4: Assess the harmful effects of pornography and recognize that recovery is possible.

In this guide you will find information about law and policy, best practices for teaching adolescents this sensitive topic, FAQs, and resources as they relate to the instruction of the harmful effects of pornography.

Law and Policy

The Oxford Dictionary defines pornography as explicit depiction, in pictures, writing, or other material, of sexual subjects or activity in a manner intended to arouse.

[Utah Code 76-5b-103](#) states child sexual abuse material means any visual depiction, including any live performance, photograph, film, video, or picture, whether made or produced by electronic, mechanical, or other means, of sexually explicit conduct, where:

- a. the production of the visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in, observing, or being used for sexually explicit conduct;
- b. the visual depiction is of a minor engaging in, observing, or being used for sexually explicit conduct; or

c. the visual depiction has been created, adapted, or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in, observing, or being used for sexually explicit conduct.

It is illegal for minors to send or retain nude or explicit images or videos of themselves or other minors. The distribution of child pornography in Utah is charged as a second-degree felony that carries harsh penalties of up to \$10,000 in fines and/or 1-15 years imprisonment.

Minor means a person younger than 18 years old.

Students who are sent images should take the following steps:

1. Do NOT send the picture to anyone. No matter their intentions, as soon as teenagers forward an inappropriate picture of a peer, they can legally be charged with possession and dissemination of child pornography. (See [Utah Code 76-5c-205](#)).
 - a. In order to report to proper authorities, the image/video would need to be saved to give to law enforcement.
 - b. Images cannot be saved on personal devices if they are not going to be reported.
2. Tell a trusted adult immediately. (School personnel exempt when investigating a violation of [Utah Code 76-5c-208](#)).
3. Contact law enforcement for situations involving adults sending nude photos to a minor.

It is important to note that a student who receives an image will not be charged for reporting that image, so long as they do not distribute it in any way and alert the appropriate adult.

Best Practices for Teaching

When teaching about the harmful effects of pornography, it is important to approach the subject with sensitivity, empathy, and a focus on promoting critical thinking and responsible decision-making. Mixing shame with sexual curiosity will likely lead to unwanted results. If a student feels ashamed, then they are unlikely to

reach out when there is real trouble. Here are some suggestions for how to discuss this sensitive subject without having a shame-based approach:

1. Establish a safe and non-judgmental environment: Create a space where individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns without fear of being shamed. Encourage open and respectful dialogue.
2. Use neutral and objective language such as risky, dangerous, harmful, and factual consequences (for example, legal and safety).
3. Avoid using shameful or judgmental language (for example, sin, disgusting, immoral, wrong, gross, stupid) that may make students feel defensive or attacked. Stick to factual information and focus on the potential negative consequences of pornography without using derogatory terms.
4. Promote critical thinking and media literacy: Encourage individuals to think critically about the messages and impact of pornography. Help them develop the skills to analyze media and understand its potential influence on their attitudes, relationships, and self-image. This may include the impact on mental, social, and/or physical health (see [Health Triangle](#)).
5. Provide accurate information: Share evidence-based research and statistics about the potential negative effects of pornography, such as its impact on relationships, body image, and unrealistic expectations. Present this information in a non-sensationalized manner.
6. Encourage empathy and understanding: Recognize that individuals may have diverse experiences and attitudes towards pornography. Encourage empathy and understanding towards different perspectives while still highlighting potential harms.
7. Offer support and resources: Provide individuals with information about support networks, counseling services, or educational resources that can help them navigate their concerns or challenges related to pornography.
8. Avoid moralizing or imposing personal beliefs: It is crucial to respect individual autonomy and choices while still providing information about potential consequences. Acknowledge that people have the right to make their own decisions but also highlight the importance of informed choices.

Remember, the goal is to foster a healthy and respectful conversation that promotes education, understanding, and well-being rather than inducing shame or guilt.

What are the harmful effects of pornography?

When teaching Standard HI.SDP.5 and HII.SDP.4 the following factors may contribute to the harmful effects of pornography:

- Legal consequences
- Impact on the brain
- Unrealistic relationship expectations
- Confusing fact vs. fiction - understanding it is an unrealistic depiction of relationships and expectations.
- Dehumanizing relationship roles
- Sexual violence (physical, emotional, technological)
- Impact on relationships/effects on dating culture
- Effects on body image
- Where and how to get help

Quick Facts

- A 2014 study found that increased pornography use is linked to decreased brain matter, which results in decreased motivation and decision-making skills, impaired impulse control, and desensitization to sexual reward.
- Research shows that a child or teen's exposure to violent pornography or excessive exposure to pornography can impair a changing child's brain, social interactions, and emotional skills well into their mid-20's.
- The brain scans of pornography addicts show more pronounced stimulation centers when watching X-rated material compared to those not addicted – this mirrors similar studies on drug addicts' and alcoholics' brain scans.
- Addictive substances and behaviors, like pornography, activate the part of the brain called the reward center, triggering the release of chemicals, including dopamine, that give the user a temporary buzz. High levels of

dopamine cause a temporary feeling of extreme pleasure or euphoria. For teens, the risk of addiction is especially high because a teen's reward center in the brain responds two to four times more powerfully than an adult's brain and releases higher levels of dopamine.

- Consumers report lower body image, higher levels of body dissatisfaction, anxiety in romantic relationships, and higher rates of depression as a result of viewing pornography.
- The Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children both recognize that pornography is an element that adds to the serious problem of sex trafficking. Many traffickers are found with filming equipment and cameras to create and sell pornography.
- According to cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, pornography was the 3rd-most common form of sex trafficking, after escort services and illicit massage businesses.

A Guide to Answer Questions for Teachers

The Utah State Board of Education has created a Guide to Answer Questions for Teachers for the sex education section of the core standards. Educators may find the guidance in that document useful for the harmful effects of pornography standards as well. You can view that guide on the Utah State Board of Education's [Health Education webpage](#).

A few sections of the guide that may be valuable for these standards include:

Utah Law: Teachers may respond to spontaneous student questions for the purposes of providing medically accurate data or correcting inaccurate or misleading information or comments made by students in class. [53G-10-402](#)

Utah law prohibits teachers from answering questions concerning sexual techniques, including intricacies of sexual stimulation or erotic behavior. Utah Code: [53G-10-402](#)

Utah Administrative Code: [R277-474](#)

Validating Activities/Behaviors

Students may seek validation/approval for certain behaviors or activities affecting their sexuality. They may ask whether a teacher considers a behavior/activity okay, or whether the teacher experienced the same thing when he/she was younger. They may also ask whether something is normal and common for most adolescents.

In response, avoid using the term *“normal,”* as this will vary from one value system to another. Present medically accurate information addressing legal issues, risk factors, and consequences of behaviors students may be suggesting. Reinforce the value of asking questions as a means to learn about making healthy decisions and keep responses as brief and concise as possible. Teachers should never include personal biases or past experiences.

General Guidelines for Answering Questions

1. Establish and reinforce ground rules with class. These may include:
 - Teachers are not at liberty to answer all questions. Some questions may not be answered because they are either inappropriate or do not meet the state, or LEA guidelines.
 - Questions must be asked and answered using accurate and unbiased information – no street slang.
 - Technique or “how to” questions will not be answered.
 - Students may not ask questions about the teacher’s personal experiences.
 - Do not allow for the ridiculing or making fun of students who ask questions.
 - Allow students to participate in ground rules or class agreements.
2. Precede responses with phrases that help students feel at ease and encourage class discussion. Examples are:
 - “Many students probably wonder about this...”
 - “Thank you for asking this very relevant question...”

- “I appreciate your question. Can you tell me a little more so I can provide a complete answer?”
 - That’s a good question, but I am not permitted to answer.
3. When answering factual questions, make sure you are:
- Providing accurate and unbiased information.
 - Within the Core Standards, Utah State law, and LEA guidelines.
 - Considering the age/maturity level of your students.
 - Objective, brief, and concise in your response.
4. For answers to questions that might cause embarrassment, consider the following introductions:
- “Many times, adults as well as students are embarrassed by questions like this, but it is important to discuss...”
 - “I feel a bit uncomfortable with this question and do not feel I can answer it for you.”
 - “Thank you for being brave, this question has come up before...”
5. For answers to value questions (right or wrong), consider the following responses:
- “This is a question concerning values that vary from person to person or group to group depending on personal background.”
 - “Consult your parents, guardians, or other trusted adults for an answer to this question.”

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is porn illegal?

A: The specific laws regarding pornography typically focus on factors such as the age of participants, the presence of consent, the depiction of explicit sexual acts, obscenity standards, and the potential for harm or exploitation. Child pornography, for example, is universally illegal and widely condemned as it involves the sexual exploitation of minors. This includes sending nude images or video between minors.

Q: Is porn addictive?

A: Research suggests that some individuals may experience negative consequences and difficulty controlling their consumption of pornography, similar to other behavioral addictions. They may exhibit symptoms such as an increasing need for more explicit material, failed attempts to quit or reduce usage, preoccupation with pornography, interference with daily life functioning, and distress or impairment as a result of their consumption habits. However, it is important to note that not everyone who views pornography will develop addictive behaviors or experience negative consequences. Factors such as individual vulnerability, personal circumstances, mental health, and preexisting conditions may contribute to the development of problematic pornography use.

Q: What is considered porn addiction?

A: Pornography addiction is a process addiction or behavioral addiction. These addictions are compulsive behavior patterns in which a person repeatedly engages in an activity despite the negative impacts. The repetitive behaviors associated with process addictions typically escalate over time in a way that resembles a substance use disorder.

Q: Why would someone look at porn?

A: People may have various reasons for looking at pornography. Some common reasons why someone might choose to view pornography include: sexual arousal and pleasure, curiosity and exploration, entertainment or fantasy, education or information, loneliness or companionship to name a few.

Q: Is sexting considered porn?

A: While sexting can involve explicit content similar to pornography, there are some distinctions between the two: Sexting often occurs between individuals who know each other, such as romantic partners, and usually involves consensual exchange of sexual material. Pornography, on the other hand, refers to explicit material created for a broader audience and is typically consumed by individuals who are not directly involved. Sexting becomes pornography when an individual shares the explicit material with others.

Q: Why is pornography bad if it is the same as looking at a body?

A: Here are a few reasons why some people view pornography as problematic:



1. Objectification: Pornography often portrays individuals solely as sexual objects, emphasizing their physical appearance and sexual acts. This can reinforce the objectification of people, reducing them to mere objects of desire and disregarding their inherent dignity, personality, and humanity.
2. Unrealistic expectations: Pornography can create unrealistic expectations about sex, relationships, and body image. It may present idealized and exaggerated depictions of sexual encounters, leading individuals to develop unrealistic notions about what is considered typical or desirable in sexual relationships.
3. Exploitation and coercion: The production of pornography can involve coercion, exploitation, and the involvement of individuals who may be forced or coerced into participating against their will. The industry's darker side includes instances of human trafficking, abuse, and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
4. Addiction and negative effects: Some individuals may develop an unhealthy reliance on pornography, leading to addictive behaviors. Excessive consumption of pornography can interfere with daily life, relationships, and sexual functioning, causing emotional and psychological distress.
5. Impact on relationships: Frequent consumption of pornography has been linked to potential negative effects on intimate relationships. It can create unrealistic expectations, lead to decreased sexual satisfaction, and contribute to feelings of betrayal or infidelity in some cases.

Q: What do I do if someone sends me a pic/video?

A: If someone sends an unwanted explicit picture or video, commonly known as "sexting," it is important to prioritize your well-being and take the necessary steps to address the situation. Here is what you can do:

1. Immediately stop engaging: Do not respond to the message or engage with the sender. It is important not to encourage or validate their behavior.
2. Assess your feelings: Take a moment to evaluate your own emotions and reaction to the image or video. It is normal to feel upset, violated, or uncomfortable. Trust your instincts and prioritize your well-being.



3. Delete and block: Remove the explicit content from your device and block the sender. Blocking the person will prevent further contact and minimize the chances of receiving additional unwanted material.
4. Preserve evidence (if applicable): If you believe the explicit content or the sender's behavior may be part of a larger issue, such as harassment or illegal activities, consider preserving any relevant evidence (screenshots, messages, etc.) as documentation. This evidence can be useful if you decide to involve authorities.
5. Report the incident: Depending on the severity of the situation, you may want to report the incident to the platform or app where you received the explicit content. Many platforms have mechanisms in place to handle such reports and take appropriate action.
6. Seek support: Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or counselor to discuss your feelings and seek support. It can be helpful to talk through your emotions and receive guidance from someone you trust.
7. Consider involving authorities: If you feel threatened, harassed, or believe that a crime has been committed, you may choose to involve law enforcement. Contact your local authorities and provide them with any evidence you have gathered.

Q: How should I respond when someone is asking for a pic/video?

A: When someone asks you for a picture or video, it is essential to consider your own comfort, boundaries, and safety.

1. Assess your comfort level: Take a moment to reflect on your feelings and boundaries. Consider whether you are comfortable sharing pictures or videos with this person. Remember, you have the right to control what you share and with whom.
2. Trust your instincts: If you feel uneasy or pressured by the request, it is important to trust your instincts. Your well-being and personal boundaries should always take precedence.
3. Clearly communicate your boundaries: If you decide not to share a picture or video, it is important to express your boundaries firmly and clearly. You can



say something like, "I'm not comfortable sharing pictures/videos," or "I prefer not to send those types of images."

4. Stand firm and be assertive: If the person persists or tries to pressure you further, it is crucial to stand firm in your decision and continue asserting your boundaries. Remember, you have the right to say no without feeling guilty or obligated.
5. Redirect the conversation: Shift the conversation to a different topic or discuss something unrelated to the request for pictures or videos. This can help steer the interaction away from the uncomfortable topic.
6. Consider the nature of the relationship: If the person is someone you trust and have a close relationship with, you may have more open discussions about boundaries and personal comfort levels. However, it is still important to be assertive and maintain your autonomy.
7. Seek support if needed: If you find it challenging to navigate the situation or feel overwhelmed, reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or counselor for guidance and support. They can provide you with perspective and help you make informed decisions.

Remember, you have the right to control what you share and with whom. It is crucial to prioritize your comfort, boundaries, and safety in any interaction.

Q: What do I do if someone is sextorting me?

A: Sextortion is the threat of exposing or distributing sexually explicit or intimate material (such as photos, videos, or messages) of a person without their consent. If you are being sextorted, it is a serious matter that can cause significant distress. Do not comply with the demands, save any evidence of the sextortion, cut off all communication with the sextorter, report the incident by contacting local law enforcement authorities, and inform trusted individuals to have support and guidance during this challenging time. Increase online security, and one may even seek professional support because dealing with sextortion can be emotionally distressing. Remember, sextortion is a crime, and it is important to involve the appropriate authorities. They can provide guidance, investigate the incident, and take necessary actions to ensure your safety.

Q: Does pornography cause body image struggles?

A: Pornography can create unrealistic expectations about sex, relationships, and body image. It may present idealized and exaggerated depictions of sexual encounters, leading individuals to develop unrealistic notions about what is considered healthy or desirable in sexual relationships.

Q: Does pornography affect your relationships with other people – especially sexual relationships?

A: Frequent consumption of pornography has been linked to potential negative effects on intimate relationships. It can create unrealistic expectations, lead to decreased sexual satisfaction, and contribute to feelings of betrayal or infidelity in some cases.

Q: Where should I go for help if I think I have a pornography problem?

A: Talking to a trusted adult can be a great first step to take for support. Other avenues one can take are therapy/counseling, local support groups, hotlines/helplines, online resources such as fightthenewdrug.com or yourbrainonporn.com, religious/spiritual guidance, or addiction treatment centers in some cases. Remember, seeking help is an important step towards addressing and overcoming any challenges you may be facing. It is okay to ask for support, and professionals and support networks are available to assist you on your journey to recovery.

Q: Why can't the government protect us from pornographic materials?

A: There are several reasons why it can be challenging for the government to fully protect individuals from pornography: freedom of expression, legal complexities, technological advancements, privacy concerns, international boundaries, and focus on other priorities. Governments have limited resources and must allocate their efforts to address a wide range of issues, including public health, education, crime prevention, and economic development. Prioritizing resources for combating pornography may vary across different jurisdictions.

Q: Watching pornography is often characterized as a male activity – do women also view porn?

A: While it is true that the consumption of pornography has historically been associated with men, studies have shown that women also engage with and consume pornography.

Q: What would you say to help someone who is experiencing addiction to pornography?

A: Porn addiction recovery is possible. The first step is recognizing it has become a problem and is a complex issue and does not need to be a source of shame. Sometimes, porn addiction is related to other mental health conditions and addictions. Fortunately, there are professionals that can help people with recovery.

Vocabulary

When teaching about the harmful effects of pornography, it is important to understand various terms and their definitions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Here are some key terms and their definitions:

1. **Addiction:** A psychological or behavioral dependence on a substance, activity, or behavior that becomes compulsive and interferes with daily life functioning.
2. **Body image concerns:** Negative body image stemming from comparing oneself to the often idealized and unrealistic bodies portrayed in pornography.
3. **Consent issues:** Misconceptions or misinterpretations of consent, as pornography may depict non-consensual or coercive sexual acts, leading to confusion or normalization of harmful behavior.
4. **Cyberbullying:** Online harassment, intimidation, or abuse related to the sharing, distribution, or production of sexual content without consent, often leading to psychological distress and trauma.
5. **Desensitization:** The process of becoming less sensitive or responsive to certain stimuli over time, often resulting in the need for more extreme or explicit material to achieve the same level of arousal.



6. Emotional disconnect: The weakening of emotional intimacy and connection between sexual partners, as pornography can create an artificial or distorted representation of intimacy and relationships.
7. Exploitation: The unethical or unjust use of others for personal gain or pleasure, often involving power imbalances or coercion.
8. Objectification: Treating individuals as objects or commodities solely for sexual gratification, disregarding their autonomy, feelings, and dignity.
9. Pornography: explicit depiction, in pictures, writing, or other material, of sexual subjects or activity in a manner intended to arouse.
10. Relationship issues: Difficulties in establishing or maintaining healthy relationships due to unrealistic expectations, objectification, or comparisons to pornographic depictions.
11. Revenge Porn: the act of distributing, sharing, or posting sexually explicit images or videos of an individual without their consent, typically with the intention of causing harm, embarrassment, or revenge. It involves the betrayal of trust, as the content is often shared by someone who was previously in a relationship or had access to the intimate material.
12. Self-concealment: the tendency of individuals to actively withhold or hide important personal information, emotions, or experiences from others, including close friends, family members, or romantic partners. It involves intentionally keeping aspects of oneself hidden, often due to fear of judgment, rejection, or negative consequences.)
13. Sex Trafficking: the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, obtaining, or forcing individuals, through coercion, fraud, or deception, to engage in commercial sex acts against their will. It involves the exploitation of individuals, often women and children, for the purpose of sexual exploitation, which may include prostitution, pornography production, or forced sexual acts.
14. Sextorting: involves the threat of exposing or distributing sexually explicit or intimate material (such as photos, videos, or messages) of a person without their consent.

15. Social impact: The broader effects of pornography on society, such as influencing attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and relationships, as well as potential links to sexual violence or exploitation.
16. Unrealistic expectations: The adoption of unrealistic beliefs and attitudes about sex, relationships, and body image due to exposure to idealized or exaggerated portrayals in pornography.

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Thank you to the many education and legal professionals that contributed to this guide. Your expertise is valued.