

The horror stories are real.

Don't give your children a smartphone.

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Oct. 4, 2016 (LifeSiteNews) - After spending four days at the Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation Summit in Houston, Texas, my brain is very tired. We heard lectures on neuroscience, human trafficking, sexual abuse, child exploitation, and so much more. And we heard many, many lectures on the poison that is seeping in everywhere, fueling sexual abuse, destroying relationships, breaking down the ability of men to function, and obliterating childhood: pornography.

I'll be writing a lot more about what I've learned (read my reports from the conference here, here, and here) but for now I'd like to make one simple plea to parents, something nearly every speaker and every lecturer advised: don't give your children smartphones.

It's crazy to think that a decade ago, smartphones were uncommon. Many people didn't even own a cell phone. Now, as we heard from Vanity Fair journalist and author of *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* Nancy Jo Sales, nearly every social interaction - and sexual interaction - of teenagers is shaped by the tiny, always-throbbing devices they carry with them wherever they go. This has given rise to cyber-bullying and a spate of suicides, sexting and sexual exploitation of teens by teens, and the nearly non-stop viewing and amateur production of pornography. Teenagers - and children - are pulled into the social webs woven from Facebook to Instagram, from Snapchat to a half-dozen other underground cyber-settings, the interactions and content curated only by the children who populate them, free of parental or adult supervision.

Teenagers know that it's making their lives miserable. The girls Sales talked to told her so. They also said that they had no way of getting out. Much of life is now lived online, and to opt out is to engage in voluntary isolation. The currency is often nude or sexually explicit pictures or "selfies"—and increasingly, that's often non-optional, too.

Parents cannot control the new world of teenagers. In many cases, they cannot even penetrate it. That is why one man was so bewildered when his daughter hung herself after a teenager cruelly posted a video of her in the shower on Snapchat—that was the first time the girl's bereaved father had ever even heard of Snapchat. For parents who wish to rescue their children from the cyber-jungle or spare them the pain that is engulfing millions, there are a number of answers. Open communication and open conversations. Attempted oversight of social media use. Accountability software and filters on all technological devices.

But for today, I just want to push one: Don't give your children smartphones.

This advice has made me very unpopular in some circles—one teenager greeted me at a high school presentation by saying balefully, "So you're the one who told my parents I shouldn't have a cellphone." But it is essential. Children, and most teenagers, do not need a phone with Internet access. They do not need nonstop access to social media sites that put them under the influence of their peers rather than adults. They do not need the social pressure that inevitably - inevitably - comes with entering a cyber-world of teenagers with new standards and new currency. And above all, they should not have access to all the pornography the web can offer, vile material that is setting new sexual standards teenagers across North America and beyond are beginning to conform to, through pressure, through force, or by choice.

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I heard dozens of stories this weekend of parents finding children on smartphones, watching hardcore pornography. Children younger than the former average age of first exposure to porn, which used to be age eleven. It's now age nine. These children, in a few gawking, horrified moments, are robbed of their childhood. Their worlds change in that moment. They cannot unsee what they have seen. And they should never have had access to it in the first place.

Don't give your children smartphones.

I understand that teenagers are more likely to actually need a cell phone. My parents signed for a cell phone for me when I got my driver's license—not so I could interact with my friends or go online, but so they could contact me and I had a way of communicating with people when I was out and about. My first cell phones had no Internet capability, and I didn't miss it. I sometimes wish my current phone didn't have Internet either, because I'm as guilty as the rest of this generation of wasting time on my phone when I could be doing something - or anything, really - more productive. But when teenagers need a phone, they still don't need a phone with Internet access. A phone that allows them to make phone calls and text is good enough. They don't need nonstop social media connection, they don't need SnapChat (a "sexting" app that destroys photos in seconds), and they absolutely should not have access to the twisted pornography that they will almost inevitably find.

Do not give the pornographers the access to your children that they seek. They know that children and teens are most likely to find porn on phones, and that's why they've made a gargantuan effort in recent years to create porn that can be viewed and streamed on mobile devices. They know how to access your children—through a smartphone.

Don't give them one.

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Your Modern Media committee would like to supplement the above article by asking your attention for a few additional remarks focused on the alarming rate at which world conformity is taking hold of us within our churches. The case of how we and our youths have so eagerly adopted the smartphone is a prime example. Friends, why, why do we all have these devices? It is to be more like the world? We in the MMC are not any different than you, most of us have them, we too notice the lure it has.

If we show our children it is OK by giving them the smartphone, will they one day ask the same questions as you and I? Will they be able to control their uses without the maturity and moral compass of a well raised adult? We all purchased smart phones as adults. Our children are the first generation growing up with smartphones. Will future generations ask what were we thinking? If we believe as our doctrine teaches that all this will come to an end, and then there is only one thing needful, then why are we so involved in these things? And why do we teach our kids to be so involved in it? 1 John 5:21 reads: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols, Amen".

The most horrible danger of internet access is pornography, and this danger is even more prevalent with the smartphone. The job of filters is to block this content. We all know filters are not perfect and ways can be found to circumvent them, especially by those who have a desire (habit) to see content outside what they are allowed. So we must be vigilant, especially with our young children.

Youths are so much more susceptible to the lure of pornography. Smartphones make it so much easier for anyone to privately find and abuse pornography (it often even starts by accident). And, it changes their world. For the WORST. Filters are a poor defense in such an important struggle to keep our youth's minds clean. It is likely we don't completely stand outside the startling statistics on pornography use. Not even our children and ourselves. Statistics repeatedly show 60-75% of men and woman view pornography monthly. That is a shocking statistic! How much of that applies to our church? Only 30%, or maybe more? We hope very much less, but how many of us have adopted the smartphone and similar technologies?

Have you already allowed your child(ren) to have a smartphone? Realize the risk and the damage the device can cause, even with a good filter in place. Consider taking it back for a few years. Yes your child may think you are the worst for doing it, but they will get over it. The real worst thing would be mistakenly letting your child view pornography on the smartphone you gave them. Your child will forget and forgive you, they cannot however unsee some of the images Satan makes available to them on the internet.

Have you already allowed your child(ren) to have a smartphone? Not keen on taking it back? Consider a third option: let your child use the phone only in your presence, for 1 or 2 hours a day (or just share your phone with them for those hours)

Unfortunately, due to the prevalence of our teenagers having smartphones and tablets, we believe the above article will be viewed as alarmist by many and not taken seriously. The article only has a short mention of filtering and monitoring because the author's expert opinion is **don't give your children smartphones**. Although the use of tablets is not mentioned, they are capable of many of the same functions as a smartphone. Please realize this, and don't give tablets to your children, that they can use by themselves.

Yet, friends, please do know this: If you or someone you know, has trouble with pornography, you are not alone. Many people have viewed and/or have become enamored with it online, statistics show this is likely even true in our church. It is a private sin that many will never know of each other. Consider this, not only are the viewers victims, the "actors" on the screen are victims also. The viewers victimize them too, not only those that produce and profit from it. For a great many of these "actors" it is a habitual cycle in their life as well, a dysfunctional cycle that is often not started by they themselves. A viewer can often trace a similar path in their past life as well. If you struggle with pornography please do fight with it. Start with prayer. Take some encouragement from what Solomon teaches us, there is nothing new under the sun. You are not enamored with something many have not fallen into themselves. While it is not new; it may now be harder to break the habit, being that it is at our finger tips. On the MMC website, <http://tinyurl.com/mmcnj> there is a section labeled accountability. Accountability is a method where, with others help, you can break the habits of poor online behavior. It is a very private matter, we know and do feel that, but you should feel entitled to reach out to any member of the MMC, or your consistory for help. It is wrong, but it is a widespread problem in the world, and your MMC knows: "there but for the grace of God go I". Only by the grace of God do I not also stray there. Yet, know that all these helps are not the answer without prayer, prayer for God's help. Our minister says often, "God loves a beggar". 1 John 2:1 reads: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"

--Your Modern Media Committee