

# *Yellowstone Counseling Center*

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Dear Legislators;

As Mental Health Professionals, we are witnesses to the detrimental effect pornography has on the lives of individuals and their families within our community. We hear it commonly reported in counseling that pornography affects people in multiple aspects of their lives including their mental health, their interpersonal relationships, and their sense of self and their own sexuality.

We have seen children who have been exposed to pornography, which contributes to significant disturbances in their perceptions of "normal" sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Many exhibit symptoms of trauma, similar to sexual abuse. Some go on to exhibit inappropriate sexualized behaviors that cause distress for them, their families, and others in their lives. They have grown up to have distorted beliefs about their bodies and sexuality, leading to depression, anxiety, and unhealthy and often abusive relationships.

We have seen teenagers exposed to pornography who are unable to navigate how to have healthy sexual attitudes and relationships when they see examples of such unhealthy and unrealistic sexual ideas. Teenagers, naturally being curious and seeking novelty, are susceptible not just to viewing pornographic images or videos once, but to continue their exposure to it. That naturally leads to an unhealthy understanding of sexuality and boundaries as they use what they see as a normative model. Prolonged exposure in the teen years can lead to social isolation, anxiety and depression, self-loathing, sexually risky and dangerous behaviors, and problems in critical areas of their lives including sleep deprivation, poor self-care, school productivity, and family engagement.

We also know that children and teenagers are extremely at risk for being contacted, stalked, and preyed upon by predators, both those who are individually looking to sexually exploit children and teens and those who are looking to traffic them. The ability to gain access to children and teens for this purpose is frighteningly easy, and often youth are unaware if it is even occurring, leading to grooming and exploitation.

We have seen adults, who through exposure and then increased exposure, become so preoccupied with the viewing of pornography that it affects their daily lives. Hours are consumed with it, increasing the need to be stimulated. More deviant sexual activity is viewed as there becomes an increased need for additional stimulation. Addiction to pornography happens quite often as the person needs more and more to gain the same physical and emotional effects.

We have seen couples go through significant stress and conflict regarding pornography. Many couples are unable to engage in healthy, fulfilling, or even safe sexual relationships with each other after one partner views and even becomes addicted to pornography. Many marriages are damaged and are failing due to the harm pornography has caused within their relationship. These problems impact not only the couple but their children as well.

Due to the significant negative impact pornography has in our community and our society, we ask that you contribute to helping us minimize the damaging effects of pornography by declaring it a Public Health Crisis. The better we all work together to address this problem, the more we can help our children and families. Please do your part to help!

Sincerely,

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Jamie Stocker, LCPC  
Theresa Blazek, LCPC  
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