

*You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial.*

*1 Corinthians 10:23*

Dear Parents,

This summer, we were invited to speak at several camps (and future quest) to both junior high and high school students and it's without exaggeration when I tell you with each year I counsel students, the numbers and the stories shock me more and more.

**There are more students compulsively looking at pornography at younger ages and with greater frequency than ever before.**

This summer, by a long stretch, was the “worst” in terms of what secrets I learned students carried. After my last night speaking at my last camp, I retreated home, and my heart broke as I thought about some of the things I learned from our teens.

*I could not logically reconcile in my mind all the confessions I heard over the summer with the **children** who shared them.* While every story was unique in the details, in most situations, there were three common themes that kept surfacing.

1. **Google is the new Sex-Ed:** Remember the first time you, as a parent, saw pornography? Likely it was a friend's parent who had a dirty magazine or maybe you saw something somebody brought to school. Now, when a student hears a word or phrase they don't understand, they don't ask you what it means (because they fear getting in trouble). They don't ask their friends (because they fear being ashamed for not knowing). *They ask Google.* Google won't judge them for not knowing. Because of our short attention spans and desire for instant gratification, they don't click the first link that shows up – they go straight to Google Images. **In almost all of the stories I heard, this is how someone was first exposed to pornography – Google Image searching.** The average age of first

exposure in my experience was 9 years old.



What is sex?



Shop #backtoschool with Google Shopping

2. **If Your Child was *Ever Molested*, You Likely Don't Know:** Another *extremely* common theme was children being inappropriately touched, often by close family members or friends. The stigma and shame of being a victim coupled with the trauma that happens with this experience is confusing to a child of any age: our systems weren't made to process that event. Many things keep children from confessing abuse: being told they've made it up or are exaggerating, being a disappointment, and in most cases, getting the other person in trouble. **While a child can look at pornography without being abused, children who have been molested by and large look at pornography and act out sexually.**
3. **Your Child is Not the Exception:** After speaking with a youth pastor at a camp, he said most parents live with the belief their child is the exception. *Your child is not.* The camps I went to this summer weren't camps full of children on life's fringes that one would stereotypically believe experience these traumatic events or have access to these inappropriate things. *You must throw your stereotypes aside.* Most of the children at these camps were middle class, mostly churched students. Let me give you a snapshot of a few things I heard from these students:
  - They've sent X-rated photos of themselves to their classmates (or received them).
  - They've exposed themselves to strangers on the Internet or through sexting.
  - They've seen pornography.
  - They've read pornography.

- They've watched pornography.
- The girls compare their bodies to the ones they see in ads at the mall or of actresses and keep those images hidden on their phone (or iPod, or whatever device they have) so they can try to imitate them.
- They question their sexuality.
- They've masturbated.
- They know exactly where and in what movies sex scenes are shown and they watch them for sexual gratification.
- They've had a homosexual experience.

*And they're terrified to tell you.*

**But maybe you're right. Maybe your child is the exception.** I would argue at this juncture in life, *being the exception is as equally dangerous.*

At the end of every session I presented I intentionally and clearly directed students to ask me or another leader if they didn't understand or know what a certain word meant. "Do *not* go to the Internet and look it up."

Sure enough, there is always the child who stays behind until everyone leaves and quietly asks what the word "porn" means or if God is angry because that boy or girl from down the street told them it was okay for them to touch them "down there." There is the child in the back row who leans over to his friend and asks, "what does molest mean?" and the other boy shrugs.

This summer, I am beyond grateful that mature, God-fearing adults were available to answer those questions with grace and tact and maturity; that we were in a setting that was safe for questions and confessions. It was entirely appropriate. *Not every child gets that opportunity.* Most won't. Most will find out from the Internet or from a peer who isn't equipped to provide the correct answer in the correct context.

As the summer camp season ends, *I feel a shift in my heart.* We need to talk about sexuality in a positive and FRANK manner. Our kids cannot be afraid to talk to us about sexual things, because it is easy to get information now. If they are afraid to talk to us about it, they can get it from somewhere else, and it will most likely not be good/healthy information.

**However, I am more aware now more than ever before in my ministry *how little parents know about what's happening.*** And because I'm not a parent, I feel terribly inadequate in telling you this.

But I can't *not* tell you. After seeing the innocence in the eyes of 13 olds who've carried secrets *nobody*, let alone a child, should carry; after hearing some of the most horrific accounts from students I've ever heard this year, *I cannot go one more day without pleading with you to open up and have these difficult conversations with your children.* Would you prefer your son or daughter learn what a "fetish" is from you or from searching Google Images? Talk to them about abuse and sexuality.

**Your children need to know.** If not for them, maybe for a friend. Maybe they can help bring context or see warning signs and find a WAY OUT.

**Ask them what they know. Ask them what they've done. Ask them what's been done to them.** Show grace and love. Stay far away from judgment and condemnation. If you feel ill equipped, ask a pastor or counselor for help. If you hear an answer you didn't expect and your first instinct is to dismiss it, or get angry – don't. Find a counselor. Look for resources. Continue following up. **If you struggle with this (and let's admit it, statistically, a lot of us do), get help too.**

Do the right thing, the hard thing, for the sake of your children. If we don't do this now, **I am terrified of how the enemy will continue stealing hope and joy from our youngest generation and how they'll be paralyzed to advance the Kingdom of God as they mature.**

We cannot let this happen on our watch. Protect your kids: GINA HOFFMAN

- Covenant Eyes
- Lock down the iPhone, only buy a phone you CAN lock down
- Look for warning signs:
  - Cleared search history
  - Check the cloud for downloaded apps
  - Hiding, treating the phone like a diary- it isn't private
  - Check text messages, facebook messages

- Anything that cannot be traced is a problem.
- Be informed about social media: read a few articles
- Ask for help outside your family
- Be open about your own failings and be willing to deal with them (maybe not with your kids, with a pastor, but let your kids see that you are growing).

Youth Group for the next few nights will be different, INVITE YOUR PARENTS! If you're in Refuge High School Group or Jr High group! Bring your parents to church for a PARENT MEETING. 6:30pm-9:00pm Thursday Night (Sr High) and 6:00pm-9:00pm Friday Night (Jr High). Come!