

By end of high school, nearly all kids have seen pornography

By Mary Richards

February 19th, 2015

SALT LAKE CITY — Experts say it's an issue that may frighten parents, but it's not going away. Children are viewing and getting addicted to pornography on smartphones and other devices, sometimes as young as 7 years old.

By the time those kids graduate high school, experts say nearly 100 percent have seen pornography. At elementary school, counselors say the problem is ease-of-access.

“It’s just too simple to access it,” said Dr. Douglas Goldsmith, executive director of the Children’s Center.

According to a 2013 Common Sense Media study, 83 percent of 5- to 8-year-olds know how to use a smartphone or tablet. Add to that the \$3 billion mobile porn industry, and experts say exposure is inevitable.

“If they have a phone, it’s likely that they’ll get exposed to pornography,” said Todd Olsen, co-founder of Lifestar Network.

Or they will be shown it.

“Their friends have been exposed, and then they are going to tell their buddies, and so there’s some curiosity to that,” said Olsen.

Olsen said a few years ago, the average age of first exposure was 11. Now it’s 9.

“The curiosity starts pumping in, and there’s a little bit of rush with the brand new, the taboo, the exciting,” said Olsen.

"If they have a (smart)phone, it's likely that they'll get exposed to pornography."

—Todd Olsen

Goldsmith has treated children in first, second and third grades who have been exposed to pornography. He said the problem is that studies show as many as 20 percent of children have suffered sexual abuse, or sexual assault. That then awakens feelings that cannot be turned off easily.

“That child will start to work through those feelings by going to peers and getting them excited about sexual contact,” said Goldsmith.

Peers share pornography on smartphones with other kids, or kids see it at home. Goldsmith said many adults in Utah are looking at pornography, and there’s a high chance a child will walk past an adult who is viewing pornography on a computer.

Some kids may be able to ignore it and move on. But others can't.

“Once they’ve seen that, kids want more. There is an addictive quality that we know about seeing pornography,” said Goldsmith.

Olsen explains further. “They’ll misuse it, and then they’ll abuse it. Then they become dependent on that. Then they become addicted,” he said.

But these therapists stress there is help, through recovery programs and counseling.

“We have a child that needs help, that needs to get their life back in balance,” said Goldsmith.

Friday morning on KSL Newsradio in part two of this series, hear from a family dealing with this very problem, and learn from experts about what you can do to keep your children safe.