



HOME INVADERS!

You and your children are the first line of defense

By Kirk Noonan

Believe it or not, your home can be a dangerous place for your children.

On the Internet at least 20 fictional children's characters are linked to pornographic Web sites. Every year nearly a quarter of youths receive a sexual solicitation while surfing the Net. By the time an average American is 18 years old, he or she has seen 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 40,000 murders. Plus, there are myriad sexually themed and violent video games, songs, magazines and advertisements vying for your children's attention each day.

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A parent must s clean life becau

Monitoring what your children watch, listen to, play and read is crucial to protecting them from harmful influences. Utilizing family-friendly Internet filters for the computer and V-chip technology on televisions is a good start. But Christian experts say nothing beats common sense and good, sound parenting.

"We must produce young people who can make the right decision, because there is no foolproof filter and there never will be," says Rick Schatz, president of the National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families.

Primetime

It's estimated that 99 percent of homes in the United States have at least one television set. If you own a television you're well aware that keeping obscene and tasteless content out of your home is difficult to impossible. To limit the invasion of such offending material you can get rid of your television or educate yourself and your family on how to use it wisely.

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board provides ratings for many television programs. The rating appears in the upper left corner of the screen as each rated program begins. It can also be found in magazines that list the time and channel for a program.

Each rating has an audience indicator and a content label. For instance, if the rating reads TV-Y7-FV, that means the program is intended for children over the age of seven. The FV indicates that the program contains fantasy violence. To learn more about these ratings visit www.tvguidelines.org.

But be warned, even if you follow the ratings you may still be subjected to content you find unsuitable for you and your family. That is why it is imperative, say experts, that you do research of your own such as reading reviews and visiting Christian Web sites that analyze television programs

you intend to watch.

If you want to be sure your children don't have access to a particular program, you can block it with a V-chip, which is in every television set 13 inches or larger manufactured after January 2000. See your set's owner manual for instructions on how to use the V-chip.

Mel Bass, children's pastor at Pueblo Christian Center (Assemblies of God) in Colorado, says parents must set limits for their children and communicate those limits through words and actions.

"It's a parent's responsibility to filter what is being fed to their kids," he says, noting that some parents have problems with their teenage children because they set a weak precedent and low standards for their children. "It's garbage in and garbage out. A parent must say, 'I am going to help my kid live a clean life because we are called to a higher standard.'"

Net savvy

With the advent and rise in popularity of the Internet, living that higher standard is not always easy, especially for teens who, in many cases, are the primary users of a family's Internet connection.

"Anyone who surfs the Net on a regular basis is going to find pornography sooner or later," says Schatz, noting that many porn operators actively seek new users.

The problem is compounded because Internet porn is inexpensive, easily accessible and anonymous. Plus, it is only a click away. Exposure to pornography — even if by accident — says Schatz, tells impressionable young people lies that can distort their view of sex and morals.

The proof of this, he says, can be seen in the following facts: Each year 40 percent of children born in the United States are born out of wedlock, traditional marriage is under attack like never before, U.S. teens are the most sexually active teens in

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the industrialized world, and 3 to 4 million U.S. teens get a sexually transmitted disease each year.

"Pornography and the sexualized messages of this culture give a totally distorted view of what sex is all about," says Schatz. "The sexualized messages of the culture tell teens that sex with anyone under any circumstances is not harmful and that everyone is sexually active — these are the lies of the sexualized culture.

"When teens are exposed to these lies they begin to believe a totally distorted and unhealthy view of relationships, marriage and sex," he says. "That produces great brokenness in many of them."

To help your children steer clear of pornography, Schatz advises families to place all computers connected to

the Internet in public spaces in the house. He also advises parents to get a family-friendly Internet provider. Monitoring systems can also be purchased, which give parents a report of what sites their children have visited.

But there is even more a parent can do.

"Training our kids to make the right choices about these materials, relationships and intimacy is absolutely critical," says Schatz. "Kids want discipline and boundaries set."

Filtering

Instilling the tools your children need to deflect the messages of the world is as simple as looking for teachable moments, dialoging with

them on a regular basis, and watching programs they are watching or playing video games they are playing.

Schatz also advises parents not to lecture their children about the consequences of sex before marriage. Instead, he recommends that parents talk calmly and constructively with their children about such issues and also about the beauty and benefits of sex in a marriage relationship.

But even more than that, says Schatz, parents need to be sure that children are, "disciplined to understand that their life goal must be to live for Jesus Christ." ■

Kirk Noonan is associate editor of Today's Pentecostal Evangel.

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