

## **SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Organisation:** Life, Marriage and Family Centre  
**Name:** Mr Christopher Gordon  
**Position:** Director  
**Date Received:** 10/02/2016

## **Submission from The Life, Marriage and Family Centre Sydney**

### **A: Introductory Comments**

1. In my position as the Director of the Life, Marriage and Family Centre, and drawing on my experience as a family and parent advocate and educator, I wish to forward this submission on behalf of the Life, Marriage and Family Centre of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.
2. The Life, Marriage and Family Centre is an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney and has been established to extend the research, policy, educational and pastoral activities the Church undertakes with respect to bioethical, marriage and family issues. The Catholic Church recognises that parents are the primary educators of their children, a role that should be supported, not supplanted, by government and society. The Church has a long and ongoing tradition of guiding and supporting parents in their vital mission of educating their children in the family, the parish, the school community and the wider culture.
3. The subject of this inquiry, the sexualisation of children and young people, is deeply troubling and reflects a confluence of factors. The often unfettered access of many children to personal mobile phones and the internet, as well as their exposure to sexualised media in the wider culture, is frequently recognised as a crucial factor.
4. This problem highlights the deeper issue of providing parents with the support and tools they need to develop in their children the values and conscience which will enable them to resist premature sexualisation and to use technology in a way which respects their dignity and the dignity of others. As Pope Francis said recently in his message for World Communications Day, *"It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic, but rather the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal."*<sup>1</sup>
5. This submission is made with the knowledge and support of the Catholic Education Commission NSW.

### **B: Inquiry into the sexualisation of children and young people**

#### ***Term of reference 1 The sexualisation of children and young people in electronic, print and social media and marketing.***

1. There is growing concern in the community about the increase of sexualised images of children and young persons present in Australian media. The Australian

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *"Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter"*, Message for the 50<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, 24 January 2016.

Psychological Society has undertaken research in this area and has made the following findings:

*Mental health professionals are increasingly concerned about the prevalence of sexualised images of children and early adolescents in the media. These images appear to be widely used in advertising, and represent children, including pre-pubertal children, in ways more congruent with adult sexuality. The values implicit in the images are that physical appearance and beauty are intrinsic to self-esteem and social worth, and that sexual attractiveness is a part of childhood experience. Research has shown that the exploitation of children, particularly girls, as sexual objects has a detrimental effect on adolescent development, increasing the risk of depression, eating disorders and low self-esteem. The unrealistic depiction of children in a sexualized manner is not only harmful to girls and women, but has wider consequences in the community.*<sup>2</sup>

2. Recently there have been several examples of advertisements that have sexualised young girls. Despite the understanding among psychologists and other medical professionals about the harmful effects of these images, we continue to see them allowed for publication in Australia. Many commentators refer to this kind of advertising as “corporate paedophilia”.

Several risks associated with the sexualisation of children through advertising have appeared. There is commonly held concern that Children are apparently becoming sexually active at an earlier age. This has serious effects on physical and mental health. Children can gain a premature, confused view or perception of what beauty is about and therefore what sexuality means. We are witnessing more children suffering anxiety over their body image and therefore impacting their self-esteem. Kids can suffer from peer pressure to accept and be what is sexual or risk social isolation by peers.

This form of advertising can also contribute to creating a climate conducive to child abuse. It can suggest children are mentally and physically ready for sex and therefore ‘suitable’ for exploitation, leading to paedophilia. Adolescents can be hesitant to stand up for their values in the face of peer pressure and simply acquiesce. Many teenagers are unable to understand the consequences of their actions.

See Appendix 1 for some samples of sexualised images of children that have been published in recent years.

***C: Term of reference 2 The exposure of children and young people in NSW to sexualised images and content in public places, electronic, print and social media and marketing***

There is a proliferation of sexualised images in public places frequented by children and young people. Often, these images are part of advertisements on billboards. These can be found on the rear end and sides of buses and taxis, on train platforms on fixed and on rotating

---

<sup>2</sup> Australian Psychological Society “Sexualisation of Girls”<https://www.psychology.org.au/community/public-interest/sexualisation/> Accessed 5th of February 2016

signage boards. Children are bombarded with these images when travelling to and from school.

Sexualised images can be found on the covers of magazines in supermarket aisles and at the checkouts. Often these magazines are placed in close proximity to confectionary in supermarkets. Children are naturally drawn to the areas of the supermarket where lollies and chocolate are located, as they see these items as desirable. The practice of placing magazines with sexualised images on their covers in the same place as items which are marketed towards children is highly questionable.

This photo (See appendix 2) was taken on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016 at the Woolworth's Supermarket on George St. Sydney. It shows the magazine rack, which is adjacent to drinks and confectionary for sale and is at children's height level:

As you can see from the photo, there are 5 sexualised images present on the covers of magazines for sale. An adult must bend down to reach these. They are on display at children's eye level.

This next photo (See Appendix 3) was taken at Woolworths Baulkham Hills on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016 and shows sexualised images on the covers of magazines located directly above publications marketed towards young children and teens and in close proximity to confectionary.

Similar examples can be found in other major supermarket chains. No effort is made to place these items in places out of view of children.

### *Term of reference 3 The impact on children and young people of growing up in a sexualised culture*

Children and young people are growing up in a culture that increasingly exposes them to sexualised content, images, values and ideas. The impact that this sexualisation is having on our young people is manifold and the consequences, most particularly, detrimental.

Firstly, children and young people are being sold the idea that it is important to look 'sexy'.<sup>3</sup> As a result, children are starting to exhibit traits of monitoring their personal appearance, an act known as 'body surveillance', which leads young people to develop dissatisfaction with their bodies,<sup>4</sup> increased poor self-esteem, anxiety,<sup>5</sup> depression and eating disorders.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Linda Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People Review* (Crown Copyright, 2010), <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10738/1/sexualisation-young-people.pdf> Accessed 21 Jan 2016, 6; Cf., Louise Newman, "The Psychological and Developmental Impact of Sexualisation on Children" in *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*, M. Tankard Reist (ed.), (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press Pty Ltd., 2009), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., McKinley, N. M. (1999). "Women and objectified body consciousness: Mothers' and daughters' body experiences in cultural, developmental, and familial context" in *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 760–769.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., Louise Newman, "The Psychological and Developmental Impact of Sexualisation on Children" in *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*, M. Tankard Reist (ed.), (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press Pty Ltd., 2009), 81.

<sup>6</sup> Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People*, 6.

Alongside this constant exposure to sexualised content is the normalisation of that which is sexually explicit.<sup>7</sup> Young people value their worth and identity on how they rate sexually and then project these expectations on others, while influencing how they interact with others based on these sexual 'norms'. Pornography is becoming increasingly normalised, with evidence indicating a correlative increase in sexual aggression toward women.<sup>8</sup> Men's magazines contain "highly sexualised images of women that blur the lines between pornography and mainstream media",<sup>9</sup> and as a result push a message of the need for boys to be sexually dominant.<sup>10</sup> Further to this is the rise of eating disorders and anorexia brought on by socio-cultural influences<sup>11</sup>; the mainstreaming of the sex industry through the normalisation of pole/lap-dancing clubs;<sup>12</sup> and confusion among young people regarding what is acceptable behaviour in sexual relationships.

The exposure of children to sexual imagery in advertising, images and social media "presents children with information and relational themes they may not understand and which may arouse premature questioning."<sup>13</sup> Adults are able to selectively filter these images and the messages they present, whereas children are less aware of the impact of these images and are thus less able to 'screen' what they see.<sup>14</sup> While what children may be exposed to is, more often than not, targeted at adults, our young people's perceptions and social learning regarding sexuality and relationships will inevitably be influenced by the messages perpetuated through sexualised imagery.<sup>15</sup>

A notable outcome of the sexualised culture in which our children and young people are growing up is the cultural phenomenon known as 'sexting'. Sexting is the sending of sexually explicit images involving young people that they send via text message to each other. Sexting has increased as a result of the rise in mobile phone ownership among young people aged 15 to 17 years which stands at 90%.<sup>16</sup> Of particular concern is that images of young people, especially young girls, are being distributed without their consent, often with serious consequences.<sup>17</sup> The spread of these images and the consequential shame associated with them "have reportedly led to social, psychological and legal consequences",<sup>18</sup> including "young people being excluded from friendship groups and moving

---

<sup>7</sup> Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Mary Anne Layden, PhD, "Pornography and Violence: A New Look at Research" from *The Social Costs of Pornography*, [http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden\\_Pornography\\_and\\_Violence.pdf](http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden_Pornography_and_Violence.pdf) Accessed 21 Jan 2016;

<sup>9</sup> Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Papadopoulos, *Sexualisation of Young People*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> "Eating disorder risk factors" in *National Eating Disorders Collaboration*, <http://www.nedc.com.au/risk-factors> Accessed 21 Jan 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., Coy, M. & Garner, M. (in press) "Glamour Modelling and the Marketing of SelfSexualisation: Critical Reflections" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2010 13:657 DOI: 10.1177/1367877910376576

<sup>13</sup> Newman, "Psychological and Development Impact", 80.

<sup>14</sup> Newman, "Psychological and Development Impact", 80.

<sup>15</sup> Newman, "Psychological and Development Impact", 82.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Trends in media use by children and young people: Insights from the Kaiser Family Foundation's Generation M2 2009 (USA), and results from the ACMA's Media and communications in Australian families 2007* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010) [http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib310665/trends\\_in\\_media\\_use\\_by\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib310665/trends_in_media_use_by_children_and_young_people.pdf) Accessed 22 Jan 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Cf., Shelly Walker, Lena Sancı & Meredith Temple-Smith, "Sexting and young people: Expert's views" in *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 30 No. 4 2011, 8-16, at 9, <http://journals.sfu.ca/ysa/index.php/YSA/article/viewFile/129/145> Accessed 22 Jan 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Walker, Sancı and Temple-Smith, "Sexting and young people", 9.

schools, with reports of their having experienced emotional distress and school suspension.”<sup>19</sup> In the more extreme cases, young people have tragically committed suicide.<sup>20</sup> There is a dire need for education among young people, as well as their parents and teachers, regarding the potential risks involved with sexting. According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority, 13% of 16-17 year olds say they have sent a sext to someone else, with 18% of 16-17 year olds saying they or a friend received sexts of another person.<sup>21</sup> Once the sexting image is in the hands of another, statistics show that 88% of self-generated images had been collected and put on other sites.<sup>22</sup> Such staggering statistics are troubling especially in light of the associated consequences that many young people have faced as a result of this phenomenon.

*Material from a large metropolitan diocese schools authority:*

*Sexual Development*

Sexual orientation, exploration and play are a natural part of childhood sexual development, and help children not only learn about their bodies, but also about the social and cultural rules that govern sexual behaviour (NCTSN, 2015). A continuum of sexual behaviour for children and adolescents has been attempted to assist in the identification of typical or commonly encountered behaviours verses behaviours that may indicate serious matters that require immediate action if not legal protocols following illegal behaviours defined by law. Ryan’s (2000) research exploring childhood sexuality and development has guided CEC NSW training documents which support school personnel and leadership with the identification, assessment, support planning and response protocols for students displaying problematic sexualised behaviour. This has been adapted and modified from Ryan (2000) and the

---

<sup>19</sup> O’Keefe, G.S. & Clarke-Pearson, K. 2011, “Clinical report – the impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families”, *Paediatrics*, v.127, n.4 as cited in Walker, Sanci and Temple-Smith, “Sexting and young people”, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Tomazin, F. & Smith, B. 2007, ‘The bully you can’t see’, *The Age*, retrieved from, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/in-depth/the-bully-you-cant-see/2007/03/09/1173166983566.html?page=fullpage> Accessed 22 Jan 2016; Chalfen, R. 2009, ‘“It’s only a picture”: Sexting, “smutty” snapshots and felony charges’, *Visual Studies*, v.24, n.3, pp.258-68.

<sup>21</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Aussie teens and sexting*, <http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/aussie-teens-and-sexting#> Accessed 22 Jan 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Aussie teens and sexting*, <http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/aussie-teens-and-sexting#> Accessed 22 Jan 2016.

response protocols have also been adapted to suit the needs and context of a major metropolitan Catholic diocese.

### *Sexualisation of children and young people*

Children and young people are flooded with sexual messages from the media (television, movies, music videos, and lyrics of songs, social media and the internet), yet, sex remains a topic that can be uncomfortable and difficult for some parents to discuss with their child.

Whilst I do not have data around the amount of or frequency in which children are exploited in print and or social media, we do know that this occurs and that sexual messages and undertones exist in all mediums and are frequent. The average American adolescent will view nearly 14,000 sexual references per year (NCSBY, 2016). Due to this exposure, media has the potential to be a child's main source of information. Likewise, research indicates that the most common sources for young people to obtain information about sex are online searches.

According to Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS (2012), the most common sources of sexual health information were the internet (85%), friends (76%), magazines (72%), school (69%), TV/Movies (67%), parent/guardian (65%), sexual health clinics/community health services (65%) and porn (65%). It is clear that young people access sexual health information from a large number of sources, from both formal and informal channels, and in a planned and unplanned way. We know that the unplanned viewing or unreliable sources accessed by young people profoundly impacts on sexual development and may in fact be a contributing factor into the rise of problematic sexualised behaviour referrals across the Diocese. The average age of first exposure to porn is 11, and most children have viewed it by 15 years of age, yet the majority of teenagers aren't engaging in sexual intercourse until after 16 years (Valenta, 2015). Those who have perpetrated some form of sexually abusive behaviours reported significantly greater exposure

to and use of violent sexually explicit media (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2013). Whilst exposure to porn does not cause sexual aggression or sexual abuse it may be a contributing factor to those children already vulnerable (or predisposed) to sexual aggression.

### *Understanding and Coping with Problematic Sexualised Behaviour in Children:*

Some childhood sexual behaviours indicate more than harmless curiosity. In some cases, sexual behaviours pose a risk to the safety and wellbeing of the child and other children in his or her world. Problematic sexualised behaviour usually are characterised by one or more of the following:

- Are clearly beyond the child's developmental stage
- Involve threats, force, aggression
- Involve inappropriate or harmful use of sexual body parts (e.g., inserting objects into the rectum or vagina)
- Involve children of widely different ages, or abilities or power differentials
- Are associated with strong emotional reactions in a child – such as anger or anxiety
- Interfere with typical childhood interests and activities

Although the number of cases being referred to child protection and juvenile justice systems has risen over the last two decades, it is not clear if these referrals represent a true increase in the number of children with sexual behaviour problems, increased public recognition of the problem, or an increase in the sexualisation of children and young people. However, it is likely that it is a combination of all these factors and more.

### *Causes of Sexual Behaviour Problems*



There are many possible reasons why children may show sexual behaviours that are inappropriate and unexpected for their age. Children's sexual behaviour problems are rarely about sexual pleasure. These behaviours are far more likely to be related to anxiety, traumatic experiences, curiosity, exposure to online/media sexual content, poor impulse control and a range of other factors. These all need to be explored at the time of the identified/reported incidences by trained clinicians and/or school counsellors to guide appropriate response protocols (see attached problematic sexualised behaviour – response protocols).

#### *Large Metropolitan Diocese – Problematic Sexualised Behaviour*

2015 referral data regarding a classification of problematic sexualised behaviours (classified as yellow or red flag) across the diocese for students under 12 years of age involved 11 separate referrals. Examples of the nature of such incidents included:

- Sexually explicit conversations between persons of significant age difference
- Compulsive masturbation and or task interruption to masturbate in class and in front of peers and teaching staff despite being told to stop (year 2)
- Touching of genitals of other class peer and forced to secrecy (two kindergarten students; and incident among two year 3 students and two year 2 students – all separate schools).
- Student bringing in banned device and showing peers sexually explicit material (year 3)
- Exposing of genitals in front of peers at school (year 4)

2014: included 17 separate referrals (under 12 years only). The nature of which are similar to and outlined as above as well as including:

- Simulating foreplay with dolls or peers (clothed) (year 2)
- Degradation or humiliation of self or others with sexual themes
- Forced exposure of the genitals of others
- Repetition of chronic peeping, exposing, obscenities

Data from our Secondary Schools is a little more difficult to collate due to the increase in problematic sexualised behaviour being reported. Sexting behaviour in particular would need to be collated by student survey feedback. The incidents that do get reported to staff however are responded to and taken seriously. Often Police Liaison Officers are contact to speak to individual students and or whole grade. The number of children and teens charged with child pornography offences has tripled in 5 years (Valenta, 2014), and students are often surprised to hear that sexting and the images they produce and send, do have the potential to “go viral” in which they also run the risk of legal charges.

#### *Response Protocols:*

Whilst some problematic sexualised behaviour referral types that have been submitted to the Psychologist may be of referrals of similar in nature, the potential causes of the behaviour are varied. For example, in only a small number of cases was there a known history of sexual abuse. However, it was common to observe that children displaying problematic sexualised behaviour often showed other behavioural and or social difficulties.

#### *Parental Support and Needs:*

Parents are expressing a need to have further information and support to assist them in talking to their children and young people about sex and the exposure they have through media. Parents often ask for resources and tools to positively guide these conversations.

83% of teens report not talking to parents about sexual issues because they are worried about their parents reaction (NCSBY). Young people want the information, even though they may avoid the conversation – they do actually want to hear from their parents, so it is important to establish the lines of communication and keep them open and non-judgemental.

### *Useful Resources*

#### *Websites*

Australian and New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse  
(ANZATSA) [www.anzatsa.org](http://www.anzatsa.org)

CYBERSMART [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)

Dove Body Program (secondary schools)

LAWSTUFF [www.lawstuff.org.au](http://www.lawstuff.org.au)

NEARI PRESS [www.nearipress.com](http://www.nearipress.com)

SAIFF: [www.saiff.com.au](http://www.saiff.com.au)

Safer Internet Program (Review of parental control tools) [www.sipbench.au](http://www.sipbench.au)  
(gives a list of controls for computers, gaming consoles, mobile devices).

#### *Articles*

Australian Government NETALERT (2007) A parents guide to internet safety – How to keep young internet users safe, Published by the Australian Communications and Media Authority ([www.pcw.vic.edu.au](http://www.pcw.vic.edu.au))

Government of Western Australia, Department of Health, Talk Soon, Talk Often – “A Guide for Parents Talking to their Kids about sex” (available at [www.public.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au))

YEAH & AYAC (June 2012) Let’s talk about sex: Young people’s views on Sex and Sexual Health Information in Australia ([www.ayac.org.au](http://www.ayac.org.au))

Parental Controls Explained:

[www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents/About%20the%20technology/Parental%20controls.aspx](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents/About%20the%20technology/Parental%20controls.aspx)

Rich, P (2011) Understand, Assessing and Rehabilitating Juvenile Sex Offenders (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), John Wiley & Sons: New Jersey p55

Murphy, N.A & Elias, N.A (2006) Sexuality of Children and Adolescents with Development Disabilities Paediatrics 2006 (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/118/1/398.full.html>)

*Term of Reference 4: Adequacy of current measures at state and federal level to regulate sexualised imagery in electronic, print and social media and marketing, and effectiveness of self-regulation measures*

The regulation of video music clips and the impact of the messages they often explicitly portray are of great concern regarding the sexualisation of children and young people.

Content analysis of music videos indicate that 44-81% contain sexual imagery,<sup>23</sup> while “a substantial minority display provocative clothing and sexually suggestive body movements.”<sup>24</sup>

Music videos are frequently available for viewing by children and young people, especially at early hours of the morning, or late at night.<sup>25</sup> Greater care needs to be taken by broadcasting companies and

---

<sup>23</sup> American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2010). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*, 5, <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf> Accessed 28 Jan 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Enid Gruber and Joel W Grube, “Adolescent sexuality and the media: a review of current knowledge and implications”, *Western Journal of Medicine* 172.3 (2000): 210-214. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1070813/> Accessed 28 Jan 2016.

networks in regulating, and encouraging self-regulating of, the content of music videos. Of particular concern is the exposure of children and young people to sexually explicit music videos in the early hours of the morning, when children are watching kid's programmes on various channels. For example, "shows such as *Rage*, a late night music video program for mature viewers, precede the 6am start of children's weekend morning programming; other music video shows often continue throughout weekend mornings, when children are likely to be at the television."<sup>26</sup> Often children switch on the television before their parents rise and are exposed to explicit content without any supervision.

Programs such as *Rage*, claim to have program classifications "shown at the beginning of the program",<sup>27</sup> however warnings for individual music videos should be in place.

Of more concern is the 24-hour availability of sexually explicit music videos online. One version of the music video "Blurred Lines", featuring naked women throughout, has been watched 75+ million times on Youtube. On YouTube, content available in other countries such as the UK,<sup>28</sup> provide pre-warnings of explicit content through their regulatory organisations.<sup>29</sup> In Australia, pre-warnings on explicit content in music videos are negligible.

#### *Term of Reference 5: Measures to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility to protect and educate children*

6. Schools should provide advice and support for parents in educating their children about media use and human dignity. They should be encouraged to use "best practice" – i.e. strategies which have been found to be most effective. This could be done in PDHPE classes.
7. Studies of children and teens who have a stronger sense of identity and who are more able to resist sexualisation have found that their parents adopt strong parenting practices in three areas: communication, media literacy and media monitoring.<sup>30</sup>
8. Parental rules about media use bring about significant positive effects in their children in terms of resistance to sexualisation, together with ongoing, frequent conversation and dialogue between parents and children.<sup>31</sup>
9. The power of personal example: the most effective parents model critical discernment of media messages and products in their own lives. Parents' own level of

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf., "Video music clips" 4.49-4.55, *Chapter 4 – Regulation of the electronic and print media* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008),

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Completed\\_inquiries/2008-10/sexualisationofchildren/report/c04](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Completed_inquiries/2008-10/sexualisationofchildren/report/c04) Accessed 28 Jan 2016.

<sup>26</sup> "Video music clips" 4.50.

<sup>27</sup> *ABC TV Classifications*, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/classification/> accessed 28 Jan 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Sweeney, "Parental warnings to be introduced for online music", *The Guardian* – 2 June 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jun/02/parental-warnings-online-music> Accessed 29 Jan 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Cf., Australian Communications and Media Authority, *International approaches to audiovisual content regulation—A comparative analysis of the regulatory frameworks* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Media Awareness Network, 2005, *Young Canadians in a Wired World: Phase II trends and recommendations*. MediaSmarts, Ottawa, Canada.

<sup>31</sup> Media Awareness Network, 2005, *Young Canadians in a Wired World: Phase II trends and recommendations*. MediaSmarts, Ottawa, Canada.

media usage strongly predicts the level of media exposure in their children.<sup>32</sup> A parent who uncritically consumes a high volume of media is more likely to have children with high media consumption and lower resistance to sexualisation.

10. Parents who are most successful at monitoring children's media usage do not permit their children to have televisions, computers or internet access in their bedrooms.<sup>33</sup>
11. In addition to positive parenting practices in the areas of media monitoring, media literacy and communication, strong predictors of children and teens resisting early sexualisation and delaying sexual activity include having a close relationship between parents and children<sup>34</sup>, eating dinner together as a family 5-7 times per week<sup>35</sup>, and attending worship services regularly as a family.<sup>36</sup>

*Term of Reference 6: Measures to educate children and young people and assist them in navigating the contemporary cultural environment.*

12. Children have great access to technology, but because of their still-developing maturity, do not always have the maturity or judgment to use it in healthy ways. "Sexting", in particular, is a form of self-made pornography and is gravely harmful. Schools and parents must recognise their responsibility to educate children about how and why it is wrong and a violation of their dignity and worth: *"It is important to build young people's self-esteem, so that they are less likely to engage in risky behaviour to validate their sense of self-worth"*.<sup>37</sup>
13. Education for children and young people in media literacy should aim to develop their ability to think critically, to evaluate media messages and to identify dehumanising and harmful ideas about sex, sexuality and the human person.
14. The Catholic sector is keen to work cooperatively with the eSafety commissioner and the NSW Children's Advocate.

*Term of Reference 7: Possible measures that the Children's Advocate can take to assist children and young people to navigate the cultural environment successfully.*

15. The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People should promote and influence the adoption of stronger media and advertising standards by the statutory authorities, in order to mitigate the negative effects of sexualised media upon children and young people. In particular, it should recommend to state and federal authorities the integration of music videos into the national rating and warning system.
16. The Children's Advocate should support the development of resources for parents and a possible public education campaign to educate parents about the impact of

---

<sup>32</sup> Strasburger, V.C., Jordan, A.B. & Donnerstein, E., 2010, 'Health effects of media on children and adolescents'. *Pediatrics*, vol. 125, no. 1, pp.756-767.

<sup>33</sup> Jordan, A., Bleakley, A., Manganello, J., Hennessy, M., Stevens, R. & Fishbein, M., 2010, 'The role of television access in viewing time of US adolescents', *Journal of Child Media*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 355-370.

<sup>34</sup> M. Weinstein, 2005, *The Surprising Power of Family Meals*. Steerforth, Hanover; CASAColumbia, 2012, *The Importance of Family Dinners VIII*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Fagan, P., 2011, *The Benefits of Family Worship*. Family Research Council, Washington DC.

<sup>37</sup> National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011, *Premature sexualisation: understanding the risks*. NSPCC, London, UK.

- premature sexualisation on their children and the importance of supervising and guiding their children in the consumption of media and the wise use of technology.
17. The NSW Children's Advocate could work more closely with the eSafety Commissioner. We support this initiative of the government and encourage this intervention. What can we do to support them?
18. There is not a good evidence base from Australia in comparison to what is seen overseas. Perhaps the government could establish a good evidence base so that in the future, submissions won't have to draw upon the general concern of persons as evidence to support claims.

*Additional material:*

Some quotes from “**Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education**” – Message of Pope Benedict XVI for the 41<sup>st</sup> World Communications Day, 20 May 2007.<sup>38</sup>

19. *“The relationship of children, media, and education can be considered from two perspectives: the formation of children by the media; and the formation of children to respond appropriately to the media. A kind of reciprocity emerges which points to the responsibilities of the media as an industry and to the need for active and critical participation of readers, viewers and listeners. **Within this framework, training in the proper use of the media is essential for the cultural, moral and spiritual development of children.**”*
20. *“How is this common good to be protected and promoted? **Educating children to be discriminating in their use of the media is a responsibility of parents, Church, and school. The role of parents is of primary importance.** They have a right and duty to ensure the prudent use of the media by training the conscience of their children to express sound and objective judgments which will then guide them in choosing or rejecting programmes available (cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 76). In doing so, parents should have the encouragement and assistance of schools and parishes in ensuring that this difficult, though satisfying, aspect of parenting is supported by the wider community.”*
21. *“Media education should be positive. **Children exposed to what is aesthetically and morally excellent are helped to develop appreciation, prudence and the skills of discernment.** Here it is important to recognize the fundamental value of parents’ example and the benefits of introducing young people to children's classics in literature, to the fine arts and to uplifting music. While popular literature will always have its place in culture, the temptation to sensationalize should not be passively accepted in places of learning. Beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and*

---

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, “*Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education*”, Message for the 41<sup>st</sup> World Communications Day, 20 May 2007.

*vivifies young hearts and minds, while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behaviour.”*

22. *“Like education in general, media education requires formation in the exercise of freedom. This is a demanding task. So often freedom is presented as a relentless search for pleasure or new experiences. Yet this is a condemnation not a liberation! True freedom could never condemn the individual – especially a child – to an insatiable quest for novelty. **In the light of truth, authentic freedom is experienced as a definitive response to God’s ‘yes’ to humanity, calling us to choose, not indiscriminately but deliberately, all that is good, true and beautiful.** Parents, then, as the guardians of that freedom, while gradually giving their children greater freedom, introduce them to the profound joy of life.”*

### *References*

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

National Center on Sexual Behaviour of Youth (NCSBY) <https://www.ncsby.org>

Ryan, G. (2000) Childhood Sexuality: A decade study. Child Abuse and Neglect, 24(1), 33 – 48.

Valenta, L (2014) Support Assessment and Intervention For Families (SAIFF) [www.saiff.com.au](http://www.saiff.com.au)

Appendix 1:





Roger David advertisement from 2012



Marc Jacobs' Oh Lola perfume ad 2012



Total Girl Magazine (For 8-11 year olds)



Barbie Magazine (For 5-12 year olds)



Barbie Magazine



Appendix 2





Appendix 3



Christopher Gordon  
Director  
Life, Marriage and Family Centre  
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney

