



Scarred by online porn: Number of children ringing ChildLine after seeing hardcore images on internet soars to 50 a month

- **Safety fears raised as number of calls increases 34 per cent over a year**
- **Some teenagers are said to be worried about becoming addicted to porn**
- **ChildLine founder Esther Rantzen says children were becoming 'warped'**
- **Girls say they are being coerced or even forced into mimicking adult videos**
- **Campaigners call on Government to bring in automatic block on online porn**

By [Daniel Martin](#)

The number of youngsters ringing ChildLine after encountering videos of hardcore pornography on the internet has soared.

Counsellors are dealing with more than 50 calls a month from teenagers upset after seeing adult images.

Some are said to be worried about becoming addicted to porn. The number of calls is up 34 per cent over a year, leading to renewed fears about the safety of children online.

Last night, ChildLine founder Esther Rantzen said hardcore adult videos were 'warping' children's understanding of what normal sex is, persuading them to copy behaviour which is 'disturbing, even dangerous'.

Girls have called the helpline to report that they are being pressured, coerced or even forced into mimicking adult videos.

In an article for the Mail, the former That's Life presenter warned that the easy availability of internet porn meant that risky sexual behaviour was becoming 'normalised'.

ChildLine said it was being flooded with calls from young girls suffering in sexually abusive relationships.

Pornographic videos are freely available on the internet without proof of age.

Both ChildLine and the NSPCC are campaigning for more action to educate children and parents on the dangers of internet porn.

They have also joined the Mail in calling on the Government to introduce an automatic block on online porn to protect children.

Miss Rantzen said she would like to see a comprehensive 'opt-in' system, where over-18s would have to specifically say they wanted to be able to access adult images following a rigorous age verification procedure.

The Department for Education is consulting on whether to strengthen controls. Parents and charities have two more weeks to air their views.

In her article, Miss Rantzen said: 'At ChildLine we are worried that we are hearing more and more often from children and teenagers who are suffering serious abuse from other young people.

'We believe from what our callers tell us that this may be because hardcore adult videos are now just a few clicks away for many teenagers, and this may be warping their understanding of what is normal – so they are mimicking behaviour which is quite unacceptable and frankly disturbing, even dangerous.'

ChildLine was set up by Miss Rantzen in 1986 to tackle the issue of child abuse. It is now part of the NSPCC.

The helpline said that during the year 2011/12 it carried out 641 counselling sessions following calls from children who had been 'exposed to sexually indecent images such as pornographic material and videos'.

This works out at more than 50 a month – up 34 per cent on the 478 total the year before. The number of boys contacting ChildLine about the issue has increased most notably – up 70 per cent to 268 in 2011/12.

The NSPCC is campaigning for more education in schools to help children protect themselves on the internet, and more help for parents so they can keep their children safe.

It wants the online industry to make a firm commitment to tackle the scourge of online porn, and says the Government should legislate if the industry drags its heels.

Jon Brown, the NSPCC's lead spokesman on sexual abuse prevention, said: 'With over 4million pornographic websites on the internet, an increasing number of children are learning about sex and personal relationships through the warped lens of adult porn.

'Pornography sends out unrealistic messages and expectations and is a poor and damaging sex educator for young people.

'Though there are filters to block this material, they rely on users having the understanding and ability to activate them. Putting the onus on adults to make a decision to view pornography online, rather having it freely available to everyone, would go a long way to shield children.'

He said it was also vital that parents and teachers get the information and support they need to teach children about caring and respectful relationships.

ChildLine collects anonymised information on some of the calls. They reveal how boys are increasingly becoming addicted to online porn, while girls are increasingly worried about the consequences.

One teenage boy said: 'My friend in school has porn on his phone and he showed it to me. Since then I have become addicted to it.'

Another boy said: 'My brother puts sex videos on my computer and shows me them. I have asked him to stop but he keeps doing it. My family would be really annoyed if they found out.'

A teenage girl said: 'My friend has upset me. She called me sick because she came round to my house and I showed her some sex videos on the internet.

'I did not like watching them at first but my dad likes them so I started watching them when he had them on.'

In her article, Miss Rantzen said tougher action was needed from the web industry and from Government to ensure children were protected.

She said: 'The Government are currently on the cusp of having to take a brave decision on how

to protect young people from these videos.

'And whilst filters and blocks aren't the only solution, they are a big step in the right direction and an opt-in system can only be a positive thing.'

GIRLS SEEK HELP AFTER BEING MADE TO 'SEXT' PHOTOS TO BOYS AT SCHOOL

• ChildLine held 274 counselling sessions about sexting in 2011/12

Childline has received hundreds of calls from teenage girls under pressure to send boys sexual images of themselves in a phenomenon known as 'sexting'.

Many say they have already sent pictures and videos but regret it – in many cases because the images have been shared between the boys' friends or even put up on the internet.

The pictures are usually taken on mobile phones and then texted or emailed to boys.

ChildLine said it carried out 274 counselling sessions about sexting in the year 2011/12.

Many girls who take part in the practice have told ChildLine that they have ended up with depression or mental health problems, because they are humiliated by the sharing of the images. Others regret taking part because they do not think they are ready.

The NSPCC warns that girls are being pressurised into copying what happens in videos they see online, and then 'sext' the images to boys.

They say the influence of internet porn means that boys are increasingly seeing girls merely as sex objects – putting them under pressure to perform for them.

Esther Rantzen, founder of ChildLine, said: 'Young people need to know that "sexting" and being abused are not a normal part of growing up and that they have the right to say no.'

A study by parent advice charity Family Lives earlier this year found that girls as young as 11 are taking part in intimate webcam sessions on social networking sites.

And Peter Davies of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre warned that the phenomenon of sexting was now so widespread that children as young as five need to be taught about the dangers in school.

'The moment a child becomes the subject of the education system, that's when you should start,' he told MPs on the education select committee.

'We used to extend our education packages down to ten, they are now down to about eight.

'We are realising we may need to pitch them at ages below that because this is not something that kids do when they are at home under the natural surveillance of their family – the phone is in their pocket and with them all the time.'