

Child Pornography Exposure on Chat Roulette

As my therapy practice continues to be comprised of more and more child pornography offenders, I continue to seek ways to prevent others from becoming exposed to or involved with child pornography.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of meeting a young man who introduced me to yet another way in which people can be exposed to child pornography. The normal routes for exposure are through peer to peer file sharing programs or TOR sites. The man I met yesterday was exposed to child pornography through the chat app, ChatRoulette.

For those of you who are not familiar with ChatRoulette, it is an app that allows you to interface with another user via your webcam or camera on your phone, tablet, etc. As the Roulette name implies, you have no idea who you are going to be paired up with as there are users of all ages from all over the world on the app. You can interact with the person you are connected to for as long or as short a period of time as you want. We have long known that ChatRoulette is a venue for people to expose themselves online or to interact sexually. Since its inception, there is a pretty good chance that when you go on the app, you will run into someone masturbating on the webcam or engaging in some other sexual act.

In more recent history, ChatRoulette is now being used for other sexual purposes. There are some users who are showing child pornography on their screens. How does this happen? When you connect with a random user, instead of seeing another person, they have their side of the interaction configured so that the entire screen is used to play child pornography videos. As you can't choose a user, this is truly a random experience and one that most people are not prepared for.

I would call unintended exposure to child pornography a trauma. These are horrific images and you can't erase them out from your memory. I have had to view these images for court cases and they linger, unwillingly, in your brain for days. This is my reaction when I know what type of images I am going to see. I can only imagine the reaction of a person who has no desire to see these images and unsuspectingly views them on a screen. An even bigger concern is that a young person who is using this app may be exposed to this imagery as well. Even if the images are traumatic for an adult to watch, we can make more sense of them than a child can. Unexpected exposure to child pornography could be even more damaging to a child.

As ChatRoulette engages in random connections, you cannot seek out those who are displaying child pornography. You also can't avoid them as you don't know what user is going to show up on your screen next. As with any of these types of apps, they can be fun or they can be dangerous. It is all in the hands of the user. Technically, the app is listed as Mature 17+. However, that doesn't stop minors from using the app.

As a parent, be aware of what apps your child is using. I would advise that minors not be allowed to use this app due to the potentially graphic sexual exposure from some users. If you do allow your child to use this app, please be sure that you know what they could be seeing. Be prepared to talk to your child about possible exposure before it happens and after it happens.