

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

ASMR

axis

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To be filled with God is a great thing, to be filled with the fullness of God is still greater; to be filled with all the fullness of God is greatest of all.

—[Adam Clarke](#)

When eating sounds make you...relax?

Imagine you're sitting in a salon getting your hair washed. The only sound you can hear is water rushing down your head into the sink below your neck. You get a tingly sensation as the stylist washes soap out of your hair and brushes it with her fingers. If you've ever experienced that sensation, you're not alone. ASMR, or Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, offers an explanation for this strange feeling. You're also not alone if this has never happened, because not everyone experiences it.

The scenario described above is pretty harmless. Many people get these "shivery" feelings as a response to gentle motions or sounds. What's interesting is the fairly recent recognition of ASMR by name across the globe through a strong online presence. So is ASMR really harmless, or should we stay far away?

— What is ASMR?

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) is a physical tingling feeling that happens in response to auditory, visual, or touch triggers. The sensation typically starts at the scalp, then travels down the spine and actually calms the central nervous system. Some of the feelings people who experience the phenomenon report feeling include relaxation, comfort, sleepiness, peacefulness, and happiness.

If you've experienced something similar (e.g. you get goosebumps when someone scratches your head) but aren't familiar with the term, it's because it's possible that it's been around forever but was never [given a name until February 2010](#). For years, Jennifer Allen, founder of [ASMR University](#), had experienced a strange tingling feeling in the back of her scalp in response to watching videos of space. The grand, beautiful visuals gave her a sense of relaxation that she couldn't explain. She searched the Internet far and wide for something, anything that could explain it. But of course, nothing.

Finally, in 2009 a light shone down via [this discussion board](#), giving Allen a few of the answers she was looking for. There she discovered that she wasn't some alien creature experiencing something totally unheard of; there were other people who had experienced the same feelings. Once her theory was confirmed, Allen decided to create a clinical name for the weird feeling to gain credibility. Thus, ASMR was born.

Once it had an official name, people could not only explain what they were feeling, they could also create videos with the explicit purpose of inducing it in themselves and others. Originally, it started with just a few "whispering channels" on YouTube [like this one](#). There wasn't much to these videos, just a blank screen and the sound of someone's voice at a low whisper. But people quickly realized that there were other ways of triggering the response, so they branched out, experimenting with new sounds and techniques. From there, it evolved and metamorphosed into the phenomenon it is today.

Since 2010, it's safe to say that ASMR has taken some weird turns over the years. In a quick "ASMR" search on YouTube, the first videos to pop up include ASMRtists (as they're known in the ASMR community) tapping fingernails on microphones, roleplaying

a dermatologist appointment, massaging or scratching ears, and making mouth sounds—all accompanied by soft whispers. Sounds of people eating or clicking their tongue probably makes a lot of us cringe, but there are thousands of ASMRtists who make those specific sounds for a growing audience.

— Is ASMR scientifically proven?

Not really. Though popularity has grown significantly over the past decade, there is still little science to describe or even predict the sensation. [Studies are currently being conducted](#) among scientists and psychologists who are interested in the subject, but there are no agreed-upon conclusions. University of Sheffield's Dr Poerio said: "Our studies show that ASMR videos do indeed have the relaxing effect anecdotally reported by experiencers—but only in people who experience the feeling." So you've either got it or you don't; ASMR isn't the same for people across the board.

The [ASMR University](#) believes there may be a variety of contributors to the tingly feeling. Endorphins, oxytocin, and serotonin may play a role in the feelings of relaxation, sleepiness, and the decrease of stress. Along with that, dopamine in the brain may affect the desire to keep experiencing ASMR, which might make it addictive for some.

As of now, all we really know is that ASMR tends to relax individuals who watch/listen to it. The calm feelings can be potentially be traced back to childhood and the gentle, soothing touch of a parent (i.e. when parents soothe their young children during thunderstorms by whispering words of encouragement and holding the child close). There's no real science behind it, people just naturally like to feel comforted.

— Should I be worried about ASMR?

At its best, ASMR is simply a relaxation tool that many people use to reduce stress and fall asleep easier; however, at its worst, ASMR can be sexualized, even if it's not meant to be. At the start, ASMR was pretty harmless. But as it has fallen into the lap of mass production and mainstream culture, ASMRtists have become increasingly provocative.

This isn't to say that *all* of ASMR is bad. There are thousands of YouTubers who create videos of themselves brushing hair or folding towels for pure relaxation purposes. Maybe not everyone's cup of tea, but you get the point. [Gentle Whispering ASMR](#) has 1.7 million subscribers who enjoy her [Sleep-Inducing Haircut](#) video, among many others that capture mundane tasks. [SAS-ASMR](#) is just shy of 7 million subscribers. She specializes in food ASMR—basically, she eats things in front of a camera and into a very, very sensitive mic. [Here](#) she takes on a plate of noodles for six minutes, and the comments rave about the satisfaction of watching it all play out.

That being said, some people *are* watching ASMR videos for sexual gratification. They are not the majority, but they're out there. There are many popular child ASMRtists under the age of 13, and it's left YouTube in a sticky spot. One YouTuber with some questionable material is 13-year-old Makenna Kelly, otherwise known as [Life with MaK](#).

With over 1.5 million subscribers, Makenna is very influential in the world of ASMR. None of her content is created as purposefully provocative, but some of it is difficult to deny. One video featured Kelly roleplaying a “sassy cop,” tapping long fingernails on a car window and clanking handcuffs together while whisper-singing “[Don't Cha](#)” by the Pussycat Dolls. YouTube has since taken the video down, along with 12 others, citing “inappropriate” content. As a result, Makenna has decided to [shut down her account](#) in protest against what she and her mother deemed “overly strict content guidelines.” But there are many who share a collective sigh of relief that the video is gone (in fact, there were lots of reaction videos to her “sassy cop” video, many of which brought up great points but are too vulgar to share here).

Unfortunately, there are also ASMRtists who create explicit content that seem to blur the line between ASMR and pornography. Many of these involve some form of role play, massaging, kissing, and slow whispers. Keywords in titles are easy to spot and should be monitored, such as “sensual,” “erotic,” “licking,” and “moaning.” Some may be a little less obvious, like “mouth sounds,” “ear eating,” and “sassy.” In addition, before the name ASMR came to be, many people who experienced it [referred to the feeling](#) as a “brain orgasm” or AIHO (Attention-Induced Head Orgasm) or AIE (Attention-Induced Euphoria), so it's no surprise that the trend has been highly sexualized.

The real stickiness comes in when trying to determine where the boundaries really are with ASMR. Most of the content out there is not made to be erotic whatsoever, but it's difficult to define what's arousing to some people versus others. For example, a big trend in the ASMR world is watching people eat food. This in and of itself is really nothing too crazy—watching a woman crunch down on a pickle might seem weird, sure, not sexual (unless they eat it in a specific way...)—but YouTube has taken down countless videos where the mouth is the focus, because some may perceive it as a sexual display.

So how do we know where that boundary is? Again, it's hard to say. At a certain point, we may wonder as parents if its worth letting our kids play too close to the fire before they get burned.

— What does Scripture have to say about this?

While this 21st-century YouTube trend isn't exactly mentioned in the Bible, God's Word does have a lot to say about holiness and self-indulgence. [1 Corinthians 6:12](#) says, “All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.” When Paul wrote this, he was addressing the importance of fleeing sexual immorality. While ASMR may not seem like the standard form of sexual immorality, it is certainly worth taking a deeper look at.

What Paul is saying is that, as Christians, we have the *freedom* to pursue whatever we desire. God gave us the free will to either choose Him or not, so we hold the ability to act according to our desires. **But liberty under God does not give us the license to sin.** Paul then goes on to say that “not all things are helpful.” He's likely speaking directly to the Corinthians' use of prostitutes—they didn't believe it to be wrong, as it was culturally acceptable in Corinth. He argues that while they can freely choose to pursue

sexual sin, this can and will be detrimental in the long run.

Paul's closing remarks in this verse is powerful: "I will not be dominated by anything." Things that are permissible (i.e. not wrong in and of themselves) can dominate or control us if we allow them to hold an improper place in our lives, thereby *becoming* sinful for us. In addition, our bodies are [holy temples](#), and we need to treat them as such. Because we are not our own—we were bought with a price—God is the loving ruler of our bodies. So if we find ourselves in a place where one thing or person begins to dominate us, that's a sure sign we need to flee from it. ASMR is not inherently sinful, but if it dominates us in any way, sexual or not, it will become life-stealing and detract from the abundance God desires to give us.

A big reason why ASMR has gained such popularity is in the comfort it brings to people. They feel seen, heard, and loved. **To be reliant on anything but God for this type of affirmation is a slippery slope, and that's part of what makes ASMR a tricky subject.** We can always find [rest in God](#), [cry in His arms](#) when we're upset, find [peace in the midst of anxiety](#), and trust that [He'll hear us](#). When we're confident in these things, avenues like ASMR become less and less important.

[1 Corinthians 10:31](#) tells us to do everything to the glory of God. If we find ourselves in a bit of a hazy spot of right versus wrong, we should ask ourselves this question: **Does this glorify God?** Everything we do from brushing our teeth to sitting in math class should be seen as glorifying God. So if ASMR seems iffy, we can pose that question and ask God to give us the wisdom and discernment to hear His voice.

As parents, we can approach God and ask Him that question, but it's important to teach our kids how to ask, too. Often times teens aren't aware of what questions they need to be asking or where they should be exercising discernment. Our culture is saturated with increasingly normalized content that's pretty damaging to us—sex, vaping, obsession with social media, and myriad others. Point being, it can be hard for our teens to know what's really going to be hurtful.

So, where do we start the conversation of asking for wisdom? First, our kids need to be willing to ask and be open enough to do so. We can encourage them to do this by talking about having a prayer life, whatever that looks like to them. When they're worried about a test, heartbroken after a breakup, or happy about getting on the baseball team, they can go to God with it. He's there to hear our worries and our praises, but above all, He's there to be our loving Father. Talk with your kids about what it means for God to be our Dad. He's trustworthy and *always* available with a listening ear. **If our kids know that [God is always working for our good](#), they can be encouraged to talk with Him on their own.** When they know they can trust Him, they'll feel comfortable enough to ask for guidance when they need it.

— Should I let my kids watch ASMR?

At face value, ASMR really isn't all that dangerous. But like anything on the Internet, it's easy for it to go down a really weird path, really fast. We should never give our kids

complete, unfettered access to the Internet because, on it, something harmless always has the potential to go down a rabbit hole into something much more serious and/or harmful. We don't need to take away their devices altogether, but we do want to keep an eye on what they're watching and participating in. So if you do decide to let your kids watch ASMR, it should never be without some form of accountability and time limit.

Another thing to think about is maintaining a healthy balance when watching ASMR. As mentioned, those who use it refer to the sensation as a "brain orgasm." Pleasure isn't wrong, but if we spend hours upon hours trying to get more brain orgasms, something's not right. The more we seek, the more our brain will crave. And what happens when the sound of tapping nails on a box just doesn't do it for us anymore? Our brains can become desensitized to that feeling over time, and that causes us to seek out more and more to achieve the feeling again. This will inevitably lead to stranger content, which has the potential to become very inappropriate.

In addition, many ASMR fans like using it to fall asleep, which means your kids will need their devices in their bedrooms, *something we highly discourage*. Not only are there the arguments of how the blue light emitted by the screens [messes with our sleep cycles](#) and circadian rhythms (and using [Night Shift](#) on Apple devices only [sort of helps](#)), there's also the fact that these devices are powerfully distracting. They're [designed to be addictive](#), and it's easy to pass hours on a smartphone or iPad without realizing it. But what's most important is that having a device in a room with a closed door while parents are sleeping can be an invitation to engage in risky behaviors (like seek out pornography) because no one will know. So if this is why your teen likes ASMR, have conversations about all of these aspects, gently helping them see how the risks might outweigh the benefits.

Ultimately, if you do choose to let your kids watch ASMR, keep a watch on it and make sure that healthy balance is in place. Otherwise, you could be allowing a door to swing open that'll be tough to close later on.

— How do I talk to my kids about it?

This may be a completely new realm for many of us (or all of us, for that matter!), so talking about ASMR may seem like uncharted territory. Here are a few important things to keep in mind when talking with a teen about it.

Have an unbiased approach.

We may have our opinions about ASMR, but that's sort of beside the point. If our teens like watching it, there was something that drew them to ASMR in the first place. It's important to respect where they're coming from and hear them out so that they can feel safe and respected. When we jump to condemnation or judgment, it puts a thick wall between parent and child. Our purpose in talking about it should be to open up pathways of conversation, rather than tearing them down.

Figure out what desire is being met by ASMR.

A strong appeal of ASMR is the component of personal attention. Examples include

receiving a virtual haircut, words of affirmation, or even role-played boyfriends and girlfriends. Most of these are very tame, and simply offer the viewer some long-desired attention that they may be missing elsewhere. [YouTubers like this](#) can become a real comfort, especially to teens who struggle to make genuine connections in their own lives. One commentator on [softlygaloshes'](#) video said, "I'm 25 and no one has ever hugged me ... you've kinda kept me here over the years." It's a source of refuge where they feel no judgment and can feel valued and affirmed.

Is this the type of need our children are seeking to find in ASMR? We need to see this from our kids' perspectives, because there is a real desire in their hearts that they're struggling to unpack. When we understand what they're trying to get out of ASMR, we can empathize with and approach our kids from a humble place. An alcoholic doesn't drink just to drink; there is an underlying reason. That's what we hope to discover for our kids so that we can lovingly address root issues.

Help them see what those unmet needs are.

Our teens may be unaware of *why* they've been turning to ASMR. If our kids aren't self-aware enough yet to see it themselves, we're here to offer guidance. Again, it's important to maintain that unbiased approach when talking with our kids about ASMR. The last thing we want to do is judge something they've been reliant on, because it'll only turn them off from listening at all. Enter the conversation by talking about why ASMR may seem satisfying, but that joy is only temporary. Just as drugs or likes on social media can only offer short-term help, the effects of ASMR finish at the end of each YouTube video. Though we seek more videos to offer that sense of relief again, it will always leave us wanting.

[We were made to be filled by God.](#) To seek fulfillment in anything else goes against our God-given wiring as humans. It's exhausting to live every day in the arms of a temporary savior because, in the process, we're running away from our true source of rest.

Redirect them to the Word.

If something is unsettling, the best thing we can do is pray and turn to the Word. If our kids are watching ASMR on a regular basis and it starts to get to us, we can talk with them about focusing their energy on God's Word, and finding that peace and comfort in Him. If they struggle with this, calmly ask them why. It's easy to say you should find peace in God; it's a whole other thing to actually know how to do this. It becomes a great discipleship opportunity for you, one in which you can share how you've learned to find comfort in God and His Word and any struggles you may have had along the way.

Teach them to guard their hearts.

Okay, so we've all heard [Proverbs 4:23](#) before, but ASMR introduces the opportunity to look at it in a different way. The first half of the verse asks us to guard our hearts. What are we guarding our hearts with, exactly, and from what? To guard our hearts we've got to fill it with God's word. God isn't asking us to completely cut ourselves off from culture; instead, He asks us to be so filled with His Word that outside forces can't break the bond we have with Him. The second half of this verse says that everything we do will flow from our hearts. When we're filled with God's word, life flows from it freely. **We**

want to teach our kids to live out of overflow. When our kids know the importance of filling their hearts with the Word, the appeal of ASMR will fall to the wayside. We cannot be filled by people or experiences, let alone a person sitting behind a screen. God alone can serve that purpose.

— **What can I do to help my child?**

Why are our kids turning to fictitious people who pretend to be a close friend? While these videos are certainly well-intentioned, should we be relying on ASMR for that kind of human contact? Unfortunately, it's not uncommon to turn to YouTube for affirmation in many other ways, and ASMR has taken it in a new relaxing direction for many.

As parents, we need to be the ones filling that role in our kids' lives. We get it, not all families are the "touchy feely" kind. But there's so much more to affirmation than a hug. We can love our children well by telling them we're proud of them and that they're valued. We can affirm our kids by paying attention to the little things, being truly present in their lives, offering advice when they ask, and caring about the things they care about. When we model this affirmation for our kids, they won't need to find refuge online.

In addition to being the source of comfort our children may hope to find in ASMR, we can instill strength, confidence, and safety. The source of that confidence is, of course, Jesus Christ. He's the one who gave us the ability to relate with one another, be creative, be different, pursue passions, and lift each other up in those things. We need to affirm the passions and desires that our kids have. Students at school may shy away from the kid who's different, but we don't have to. To instill confidence means that we fully support what makes them different.

If we want to be their source of comfort and strength, our kids need to trust us. This goes back to doing our best to remain unbiased. They need to see that we care about their interests enough to ask about them, especially when we don't understand them. When we're a safe place, our kids will always be able to trust us. The hope is that the confidence they feel as a result of our encouragement would allow them the freedom to be who they are without any strings attached. While many teens may turn to ASMR for such confidence, why don't we step up as parents to help our kids see their own potential and value?

— **Recap**

- ASMR is a quickly growing YouTube trend with thousands of ASMRtists and millions of subscribers. Its purpose is to help people relax by watching repetitive tasks or listening to soothing whispers and sounds.
- Most of it is pretty harmless (people eating pickles, scratching boxes, folding towels, etc.), but some of the creators have exploited ASMR to make suggestive or outright sexual content.

- When we look to the Bible, we can see that God wants to see us in a place where we can trust Him and refrain from self-indulgence. *He* is the one who heals our anxieties, not a person on a screen.
- To help our kids, we need to come from a place of understanding, not judgment. They need to know that we love them deeply and only want the best for them, just like their loving Father in heaven.
- Teens often turn to ASMR to fill voids of acceptance and comfort. We need to show them that God is that source, and we, by extension, are there to comfort and guide, too.
- We are made to be filled by God, and finding fulfillment anywhere else will always leave us wanting.

Final thoughts

Every year our teens find a new craze to join in on. Culture changes in an instant, and most of the time we have no idea what the big trend is or where to start the conversation. When ASMR found its way to popular culture, it ushered in a totally new phase of YouTube — a phase that's going strong and still growing.

ASMR also gives us a new platform to talk about the Gospel. This is ultimately our end goal as parents: to lead our kids to Christ, one conversation at a time. The teen who watches ASMR on a regular, or even sporadic, basis is not weird. More often than not, they simply need to be valued and seen. After all, that is what these ASMRtists offer: personal attention and constant affirmation. But both of these things can become crutches, so we have the opportunity to teach our teens how to keep their relationship to ASMR healthy and life-giving. But remember, **helping our kids change their perspective, outlook, and hearts won't happen overnight**. We have to play the long game as we guide our kids into becoming the men and women God lovingly designed to be.

Discussion Questions

- Have you ever watched ASMR?
- What YouTube channels do you watch?
- What is it about ASMR that interests you?
- Why do you feel like ASMR is a good thing for you?
- What do you think would be a good balance in how much you watch it?
- Do you feel like you can talk to God? What does that look like for you?
- What do you think it means to be filled by God?
- How can we find real rest with God?
- What does it mean for God to be our Dad?
- Have you ever felt like something had control over you or your actions? What can we do when we start to feel that way?

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a free weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to YouTube](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to YouTube Stars](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Making Your Home a Safe Place](#)

If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low monthly or yearly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass!](#)

Additional Resources

- [ASMR University](#)
- "[How A.S.M.R. Became a Sensation](#)," *The New York Times Magazine*
- "[Is it wrong for a Christian to view or listen to Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response \(ASMR\) triggers?](#)" Gotquestions.org
- "[What Is Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response?](#)" WebMD
- "[Should My Child Watch ASMR? A Christian Perspective](#)," Like-Minded Musings
- "[ASMR](#)," Psychology Today

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