



How to talk to your kids about porn

Today's 'birds-and-bees' sex talk requires so much more from parents than it used to. Online pornography is now available on a variety of devices, sites, apps and games, and embedded in everyday platforms. As a result, one in four kids has been exposed to porn by the time they are 12 years old.

Understand the impact of online porn on kids

Our children are part of the first generation to grow up with internet access, which presents a whole new challenge for parents as well as kids.

When you were growing up, you might have seen porn in magazines or on video tapes. But the video streaming of high-speed-internet porn is much worse for children today. It reduces their ability to think through decisions by changing the structure of their developing brains and reducing their self-control – no matter how 'smart' they may be.

There is an enormous difference between adult and youth porn use. The way our kids are getting their ideas about sex has changed and we need to pay attention to what those ideas are. Sex is being normalised as aggressive, abusive and non-consensual, especially against women, who are generally seen as having a submissive, pleasurable response.

Start the conversation early

If we want to help them navigate their teen and adult years successfully, we have to understand the potential effects of online porn on our kids. And we must get past the awkwardness to have healthy conversations with them about what they may be seeing.

To get ahead of the game, start chatting to your kids about porn when they are about 10 years old – or even earlier, if you find that your child has been exposed to it. It's hard, we know, we've had to do it!

If you are undecided about the need for and seriousness of the task ahead, watch this short clip by sex therapist [Jo Robinson](#). Here, she debunks some of the common responses that seek to normalise the use of porn. Her plea to parents is: "You MUST talk to the teens in your life about porn. This is non-negotiable."

How to have 'The Talk'

Here are some guidelines to follow when approaching the conversation:

- Understand how much information your child can take in before they shut down due to discomfort and embarrassment!
- Aim for short but regular chats of no more than a few minutes.
- Choose times when other siblings who don't need to hear the conversation are away, and your child is in a fairly chilled mood.
- Incorporate books that you can read together, to make the topic easy and normal to discuss.



Explain the 'basics' of what makes pornography appealing – and addictive:

- Human beings are always looking for new experiences. We have a natural drive to connect with potential sexual partners.
- Porn offers a hyper-stimulating way to feed this natural desire for connection, with what seems like little risk. But it has untold negative effects:
 - It creates a false understanding of how people are attracted to each other and what intimacy is really like. Sex in movies, and porn more specifically, is pretend stuff. It's not what sex is, or should be like, in real life.
 - Online porn is mostly unhealthy, unethical, abusive, non-consensual and, in some cases, illegal.
 - It gives the brain big dopamine hits, which means it also becomes addictive. Fast.

Make the conversation open and ongoing

Keep the conversation open so your child can ask questions. Discuss the topic regularly as your child develops into an adolescent and then a young adult. This is a great opportunity to strengthen your relationship with them so they will come to you first when they need support. Remind them that you are always available if they need it.

What to do when your child has watched porn

It might feel like a nightmare to discover that your child has viewed online pornography, whether accidentally or intentionally – because, let's face it, it's all XXX-rated out there.

So go ahead, clutch your heart and hyperventilate. Then breathe and tackle the subject – calmly. Respond to their heart by asking how they felt when they saw it. Were they shocked, scared, worried? Be a soft pillow not a concrete slab, as Jo says.

Unpack the problematic messages they may have taken in about consent, degradation, control, harm and violence.

Take a hold of their hands – and their devices

Talk to them about managing their settings, controls and filters. And put those parental controls in place if you haven't done so yet. Parental controls are vital in our fight against the ever-pervasive creep of porn. There is no other way to say this: just block it! Don't let their first exposure to porn turn into a compulsion and an addiction with life-long consequences.

Keep checking in

Let them know you are a safe person to talk to and want only the best for them for their future relationships. Repeat the message that they need the opportunity to develop their preferences and feelings in a healthy way that porn cannot provide.

Stay strong and be consistent

If you're still not sure about the need to have these conversations with your kids, check out Fight The New Drug, a global non-profit organisation that's raising awareness about the real and wide-ranging impacts of pornography on relationships and how it drives the human trafficking industry. They have created a captivating documentary, [Brain, Heart, World](#), that's really worth watching.

Know that by keeping this conversation alive in your family, you will quite possibly be changing the course of your kids' lives for the better.