

It's time we talked: Pornography, young people and sexuality today

Parents: How can you start 'the porn talk'?

Pornography is now a parenting issue we can't afford to ignore.

Easily accessible and widely accepted, pornography is now the most prominent sexuality educator for many young people.

Young people's sexual understandings, expectations and practices are being shaped by what they – or their partners or peers – see online.

But porn is a very problematic sexuality educator.

Be prepared. Create a private, unpressured opportunity to talk.

It is understandable that both parent and child may prefer to avoid the porn talk. You may feel equally uncomfortable and awkward. But there are ways to make the porn talk easier for everyone.

Think through what you want to ask and say, and how you can create a good opportunity to talk privately and without pressure or interruption.

If you think getting your child alone or keeping them in the conversation will be difficult, consider starting the porn talk on a car trip together.

Link the porn talk to your child's access to technology.

Your child is most likely to be exposed to pornography through their use of information and communication technologies – such as mobile phones, computers, tablets, and music and gaming devices.

Parents are the 'gate-keepers' for their child's access to technology. A child's request to access or purchase technology provides a perfect opportunity to discuss the associated risks and benefits, your values and expectations regarding their use of the technology.

Pornography, sexting, privacy and cybersafety can all be part of this broader technology conversation.

Consider creating a written agreement describing how technology will – and will not – be used.

Use a film, television program, advertisement, article or website as a springboard.

Using something you or your child have seen or read can be a great way to open up the conversation.

When an advertisement uses sexualised imagery to sell an unrelated product, or a film portrays gendered stereotypes, ask your child what they think about it as a step into a discussion of media influence.

Use a newspaper article about the influence of porn or a website such as www.itstimewetalked.com to get started.

Use a story, personal experience or incident.

Often our own lives provide plenty of conversation starters for the porn talk. If you stumble across porn when searching for something else, or someone you know tells you their child did, use the opportunity to ask your child about their own experiences and lead in to the porn talk.

If you discover that your child has been exposed to or searched out porn, stay calm and plan a porn talk.

Write your child a letter.

If having the porn talk in person feels just too hard, consider writing your child a letter. A letter allows you to carefully select exactly what you want to say, and gives your child time to absorb it.

For inspiration, see this letter written by a mother for her son: www.mamamia.com.au/parenting/talking-to-kids-about-porn/

Do the porn talk in chapters.

If your first go at the porn talk wasn't all you had hoped for, don't worry. There is always tomorrow. And next week. And next year.

This is a conversation best revisited at various ages and stages, so take a deep breath, relax and give it your best.
