

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

Parents: How you can make a difference

Understand that pornography is today a parenting issue.

Pornography is everywhere. It's now almost impossible for young people to avoid it. Porn has become the most significant sex educator for many young people.

But at the same time as it has become mainstream, pornography has become more aggressive – with the acts of aggression overwhelmingly directed towards women.

As a result, young people are learning very problematic messages about sex, and about men and women.

This new reality means it's time we talked with our kids about sex and pornography as a matter of urgency.

Acknowledge that while you may not be able to control porn, we can control how we choose to respond to it.

We can *limit* young people's exposure and access to pornography.

We can equip and encourage young people to *critique* what they see.

We can help young people develop the *skills* required to resist pornography's influence.

We can *inspire* young people that relationships and sex can be better than what they see in porn.

Set appropriate limits on technology use.

Technology enables us to connect, learn and create all sorts of amazing things – but it also brings risks.

Young people's exposure to pornography commonly occurs through technology – on laptops, desktops, mobile phones, tablets, or even music or gaming devices.

Put age-appropriate limits on your child's internet and technology access – including when, where and for how long they can use it.

Filters can be helpful but they're not foolproof. Time-limited access in supervised spaces is safest.

Encourage critical thinking.

We need to coach our kids to analyse the imagery they see, such as advertising and TV programs. Encourage your kids to ask: Who made this image? Why did they make it? What did they want it to communicate? How might it be different if it was told from another point of view?

Young people need to understand that porn is not reality. Porn misrepresents what bodies are like, what people enjoy, what is safe and how people – particularly women – want to be treated.

Support kids to learn the skills they need to respond to pornography's influence.

Young people need skills to respond to peer pressure to watch porn, or when a partner initiates porn-inspired sex.

Support your child to develop self-confidence and assertive communication skills. Encourage your child to seek support from you or another trusted adult if they ever feel pressured or unsafe.

Help young people to understand that relationships and sex can be so much better than what they see in porn.

Talk with your child about how important it is that sex is consenting, safe, respectful and mutually pleasurable.

The significance of modelling respectful gender relations in your family and community can't be overstated.

Support your school to talk with your teenager about porn.

Young people deserve better than what porn serves up to them. If we're serious about equipping young people for a healthy, respectful, consenting sexuality, schools and parents will need to work together.

Support your school to deliver sexuality education for the twenty-first century, where students learn to critique porn's influence and aspire to something better.
