

# Sexuality



## Communicating about pornography and sexting with children and young people

### Pornography, or porn, is...

Printed, visual or audio material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.<sup>1</sup>

Young people are growing up in a world of digital technologies where access to pornography is widespread. This fact sheet provides pointers on how to communicate with children and young people about pornography. The term porn will be used throughout this document as this is a more commonly used term within the community...

### Sexting & nudes is...

Sending and receiving sexual messages through technology such as a phone, app, email or webcam. It can be a message written with sexual language, nude or semi-nude photos/videos, or photos/videos of sexual acts.<sup>1</sup>



Commonwealth law states It is illegal for someone to ask for, create, possess or share sexual images of someone under 18 years old, or who looks under 18 years old. Some state laws differ from this.<sup>5</sup>

Research shows sexting and nudes is now a common part of teenage courtship.<sup>4</sup>

### Young people and the internet

Technology has opened up a world of exciting opportunities where young people can create, learn and connect. Parents and carers may be learning along the way as this technology may not have been around when they were growing up. In years gone by parents and carers could choose when to introduce topics to their children, with the internet this is no longer possible. Young people are curious to learn about the world and are hungry for information. Schools encourage young people to research and aid in their own learning. They encourage critical thinking skills. Parents and carers can support this by having open and honest conversations with young people, exploring all topics that arise.

### Why do young people watch porn?

According to Our Watch the average age for first exposure to porn is 13.6 years.<sup>2</sup> The majority of early exposure to porn is accidental.<sup>3</sup>

While young people may view porn out of curiosity and excitement, many are looking for information on bodies and sex. The latest research from Australia, shows that more than 30% of young people watch porn to learn about sex.<sup>4</sup>

### How can parents and carers support young people?

Many experts suggest limiting and supervising access to technology. This is important especially for young children, but even the most diligent parent cannot monitor usage 24/7. Laptops, mobile devices and gaming consoles may be protected with parental controls or commercial software which can restrict and monitor access on devices, but your child will quite possibly have a friend with a smartphone or unrestricted internet access.

We need to develop young people's life skills to navigate the internet safely and independently. Young people should learn where to access accurate information. We can do this through role modelling, ethical internet use and having open and frequent communication.

## What to communicate

Talk to young people about bodies, sexuality, sex and porn in an age and or developmentally appropriate manner. This includes teaching them correct names of private body parts, teaching them about puberty, reproduction and sexual relationships. If they receive accurate information from you, they may still be curious about porn but they will be able to critique what they see in an informed manner. This shouldn't be a one-off talk but a series of conversations sparked by opportunities for discussion in daily life.

Talk to them about consent, respect and equality. Porn may not show respectful and safe relationships. Sex should be enjoyed by both parties, this isn't always depicted in porn.

They will have lots of questions, young people are naturally curious. Take your time and answer them all factually and honestly. You don't have to be an expert. If you're not sure of the answer, you could research it together. Comfort levels with this topic will increase the more you talk about it. You will demonstrate that they can come to you for information.

Instilling fear in young people doesn't work. Research shows that educating them with shame free, honest information about bodies and keeping lines of communication open is most effective.

## Encourage critical thinking

We need to teach young people how to analyse what they see. On seeing an advert ask them what product is being promoted? What message are they trying to communicate? Do they think the product will deliver? What kinds of body types are shown in the advert? Body types come in all shapes and sizes.

Help them examine different types of relationships on TV and in life. Ask them how do they think the person might feel in that situation? What actions could the people involved in the relationship take?

Support your child's self-confidence and assertive communication skills. This will also support development of skills to navigate peer pressure.

## Social media

Role model how to use social media. Consider the messages that you are giving with your actions, for example:

- Ask young people before putting a photo of them on social media. Give them the power to choose what is shared about them. They will also be learning that they shouldn't share photos of others without consent. Are you creating a digital footprint for them without their consent?
- Consider what's appropriate to share publicly when sharing private photos e.g. children wearing underwear.

## Where can I go for further information?

[www.true.org.au](http://www.true.org.au)

[raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/pornography-sexting/pornography-talking-with-teens](http://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/pornography-sexting/pornography-talking-with-teens)

[www.esafety.gov.au/parents](http://www.esafety.gov.au/parents)

[yla.org.au/?s=sexting](http://yla.org.au/?s=sexting)

[itstimewetalked.com/parents](http://itstimewetalked.com/parents)

[bodytalk.org.au/parents-and-carers](http://bodytalk.org.au/parents-and-carers)

### References

- 1 <https://www.lexico.com/definition/pornography>
- 2 <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/news/new-report-porn-is-shaping-young-peoples-views-of-sex-and-relationships-education-is-key>
- 3 <https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/Accidental-unsolicited-and-in-your-face.pdf?v=1737524588435>
- 4 <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/work/national-survey-of-secondary-students-and-sexual-health-2022>
- 5 <https://yla.org.au/>



For more factsheets and resources please visit  
[true.org.au](http://true.org.au)

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