

Communicating with children and young people about pornography.

Young people are growing up in a world of digital technologies, where access to pornography is easy and widespread. This fact sheet provides pointers on how to communicate with children and young people about pornography.



What is Pornography?

Pornography, more often referred to as porn, is widely defined as written, visual or audio material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement¹. The eSafety Commissioner specifies “online material”, recognising that most porn is now accessed and disseminated online. This includes text-based sexual content from chatbots and AI models and deepfake images that are AI generated.

Why do young people access porn?

According to Our Watch, the average age for first exposure to porn is 13.6 years², with sexually diverse young people more likely to encounter porn before the age of 13 (eSafety 2025). There are a range of reasons that young people might access porn. Some of these are:

- accidentally through unrelated online searches
- sent by friends or adults without their consent
- for curiosity or excitement
- masturbation or sexual arousal
- to get information about bodies and sex
- boredom
- peer pressure and rebellion.

Of all encounters, the latest research from Our Watch indicates that around 50% of experiences for young people with porn are unintentional, with girls around 1.5 times more likely than boys to have been exposed to porn accidentally³. In addition, this research shows that 31% of young people also watch porn to learn about sex.

Where do young people access porn?

Technology has opened a world of exciting opportunities where young people can create, learn and connect. In the past, parents and carers could choose when to introduce topics to their children. However, with the internet this is no longer possible; young people are curious to learn about the world and seek out information using online sources and AI platforms, they socialise and play in the digital world, and schools increasingly require young people to use the internet and technology to conduct research and aid in their own learning. Some of the places young people may access porn online are:

- advertising
- pop-ups (especially in free games or apps)
- searches (related or unrelated to porn)
- shown or sent by others
- shared by friends
- spam emails or messages.

The chances of encountering porn when using the internet are many, and children and young people need to be given the tools to help them to navigate the online world.

How can parents and carers support children and young people and help them to stay safe?

Limit tech access

Not all porn is harmful. However, the time and way that people access porn can result in harmful impacts. Research from the eSafety Commissioner for example, found that those who accessed porn unintentionally typically had negative feelings about their experiences. Limiting and monitoring access to technology can reduce this and ensure that supportive conversations are possible and timely. This is especially important for young children, whose brains are still developing, but is equally so for older children who do not have the experience or ability to always make the distinction between real and safe sex and porn (SASS), with 25% of 16-17 year-olds seeing porn as realistic (Our Watch).

Encourage critical thinking

Although digital devices such as laptops, mobile devices and gaming consoles can be protected with parental controls or commercial software that restrict and monitor access, a child will quite possibly have a friend with a device with unrestricted internet access. While we won't always be able to control what young people see, we can help them to ask questions and to seek help where necessary. We need to teach young people how to analyse what they see. For example:

- show young people where to access accurate information
- role model ethical internet use
- encourage open, honest and frequent conversations
- ask questions that challenge assumptions.

Examples of how to encourage critical thinking

- **On seeing an advert ask young people:**
 - What product is being promoted?
 - What messages is it trying to communicate?
 - What kinds of body types are shown in the advert?
 - Reinforce with young people that body types come in all shapes and sizes and people are different.
- **Help them examine different types of roles and relationships on TV and in life.**
 - What makes the relationship positive or negative?
 - Are people presented in diverse roles?
 - Why are people presented in those roles?

Create a safe space

In the research from Our Watch, 72% of young people said that they did not feel comfortable discussing porn with a parent or carer. This highlights the importance of helping children and young people to have open conversations and seek help when needed.

To create a safe space, we can:

- ensure conversations are shame-free
- withhold judgement
- be calm and curious
- make safety a priority
- focus on strengths
- be open and honest.

But what should I talk about with my children?

Talking to children and young people about bodies and sexuality in an age and/or developmentally appropriate manner is an essential part of helping them to navigate the online world and the things they see. Topics linked to porn may include:

- names of private body parts
- consent, respect and equality
- safe and positive sexual relationships
- body image
- stereotypes
- help seeking and reporting.

If young people receive accurate information from you, they may still be curious about porn and seek it out, but they will be able to critique what they see in an informed manner. Although it can feel awkward at first, comfort levels with this topic will increase the more you talk with your children, and it will show them that they can come to you for information.

Where can I go for further information?

As well as the links below you might like to read related True fact sheets:

- [Communicating about sexuality with children](#)
- [Feel safe - promoting personal safety](#)
Both of these give tips for communicating with children and young people.
- <https://www.true.org.au/search-result?kw=parents>
- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/online-porn>
- <https://yourrights.secca.org.au/internet-safety/pornography/> (disability focus)
- <https://itstimewetalked.com/parents/>
- <https://bodytalk.org.au/parents-and-carers/tips-for-talking-with-your-children/>
- <https://www.notthenorm.com.au/> (for parents and carers of children with autism).



References

¹esafety Commissioner (2025) "Inquiry into impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional, and physical health", New South Wales Standing Committee on Social Issues, January 2025
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/89076/0054%20eSafety%20Commissioner.pdf> [accessed 27/02/2026]

²Our Watch (2024) "Impacts of pornography on young people – summary"
<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/pornography-young-people-and-preventing-violence-against-women> [accessed: 27/02/26]

³Our Watch data quoted in Crabbe, M, Flood, M & Adams, K. (2024) "Pornography exposure and access among young Australians: a cross-sectional study", Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 48(3), June 2024
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1326020024000104?via%3Dihub#bib28> [accessed: 04/03/26]

 True acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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