

# It's time we talked about pornography

Parent tip sheet **1**



## A new normal is here

Pornography has become a parenting issue we can't afford to ignore. Parents need to understand how pornography is impacting on young people and what we can do to support them to navigate this new normal.

### Pornography is available like never before – access is easy, anonymous and free.

For young people today, technology is part of life. With mobile phones, laptops, tablets, music and gaming devices, they can be online anywhere, anytime.

Technology opens up a whole range of exciting, creative possibilities for learning, connecting and creating – but it also means that pornography is more pervasive than ever before.

**48%** of boys have seen porn by the age of 13. **48%** of girls have seen porn by the age of 15.

### Porn is everywhere. For many young people, it's harder to avoid it than to watch it.

With the click of a button, young people can now access a vast array of free pornographic imagery via the internet.

Young people are being exposed to porn accidentally, as well as actively seeking it out. It's not so much a question of *if* they will see it, as *when*.

Porn's influence can be seen throughout popular culture – in music videos, films, television, fashion and advertising.

**56%** of girls first saw porn unintentionally. **46%** of boys first saw porn unintentionally.

### Many young men – and some young women – use pornography regularly.

Young people's views and experiences of pornography are highly gendered. Young men are much more likely than young women to hold positive views about porn and to use it regularly.

Young women are more likely than young men to express concern about porn and about its impacts.

**56%** of young men use pornography at least weekly and **17%** use it daily.

**15%** of young women use pornography at least weekly and **1%** use it daily.

### Young people seek porn out for a range of reasons.

The reasons young people give for intentionally seeking out porn include out of curiosity, for sexual arousal, to keep up with peers, for sex education, for entertainment, to prevent boredom and to manage difficult feelings – such as frustration, fear or anger.

While they may see it with friends or a partner, most young people see pornography alone. And home is the most common place they watch it.

**78%** of young people whose first exposure to porn was intentional say that curiosity was their main motivation for viewing it.

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### The nature of contemporary porn has changed – and it's very different from the centrefold it used to be.

With the evolution of technology and the growth of the porn industry, porn producers look for an angle that will sell – and what sells is men being in control and rough sex.

Acts of aggression – including gagging, strangulation and slapping – are commonplace in contemporary porn.

Women's degradation and humiliation are also common themes. Gay male pornography can also communicate similar messages about gender, power and aggression.

**97%** per cent of the aggression in porn is directed at women.

**35%** of pornography includes non-consensual behaviour.

### Pornography is now the most significant sex educator for many young people.

Young people are at a formative stage in their development. They are forming their understandings and expectations about who they are, and about relationships and sexuality. For many, porn has become a default sexuality educator.

**60%** of young men and **41%** of young women report using pornography as a source of information about relationships and sex in the last 12 months, even though most of them think it is neither realistic, nor a good place to learn about sex.

### Pornography's influence undermines healthy relationships.

A 'new normal' in pornography is here, and it's providing a disturbing model of sexuality for young people today.

Pornography's influence has serious implications for young people's capacity to develop a sexuality that is safe, respectful, mutual and consenting.

For example, young men are increasingly asking or expecting their partners to engage in what they have seen in porn. Practices such as ejaculation on faces and bodies, 'deep-throating' fellatio, strangulation and anal sex have become normalised.

Young women often describe struggling with how to respond. Some young men are genuinely surprised when their partner does not want or enjoy what they attempt to mimic from porn.

### As parents, families, schools and communities, we need to talk about porn with our young people.

Yes, this is territory that is tough to talk about.

But it's time we put aside our discomfort and discussed the issue as a matter of urgency.

We can't let young people's sexuality be shaped by the pornography industry. We can do better than that.

We need to help young people navigate pornography's influence – and equip them with the skills they will need for a sexuality that is respectful, mutual, consenting and safe.

Schools and parents can tackle these new challenges best by working together.

### Where to now?

Learn more about how you can talk with your child about porn. To view the other tip sheets in this parent series, visit [itstimewetalked.com/resources](https://www.itstimewetalked.com/resources).

### References:

Our Watch, 2020. *Pornography, young people and preventing violence against women background paper*.

Fritz, Malic, Paul and Zhou, 2020. "A descriptive analysis of the types, targets and relative frequency of aggression in mainstream pornography", *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49.

New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2019. *Breaking Down Porn*.