

It's time we talked about pornography

Parent tip sheet **4**



How can you start 'the porn talk'?

Pornography is now a parenting issue we can't afford to ignore – it is easy to access, communicates deeply problematic messages, and is shaping many young people's sexual understandings, expectations and experiences. Most young people won't initiate a conversation about pornography with us. It's up to us. Here are some ways to get started.

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 technology – such as 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, and your values and expectations regarding their use of the technology.

Pornography, sexting, privacy and online safety 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 story or personal experience.

Often our own lives provide plenty of conversation starters for a 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 into a porn talk.

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

Use the tip sheet

'How can you respond if your child has seen porn?' for more information.

Use a film, 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 or an unrealistic sex scene, ask your child what they think about it as a step into a discussion of media influence.

For example, you could ask: What do you think about how movies like this portray sex? Do you think it's realistic? How do you think it impacts on what people expect in their own lives? Where do young people learn about sex? Do people talk about porn? Do you think it's impacting on people's expectations of sex?

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

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Use a conversation about bodies.

Pornography is often the only place young people see naked bodies up close.

Although there are diverse body types in porn, the men in porn almost always have a very large penis and women often have small, flat labia with little or no hair. Trans people in porn often have breasts and penises.

Porn's portrayals can impact on how people think their own body – or their partner's body – should look. This can leave them feeling inadequate, since most people don't look like porn performers.

A conversation about bodies can be a good springboard for a conversation about porn. For example, if you hear someone make a joke about penis size you could use that as an opportunity to ask your child about where young people get the impression that having a large penis is normal (and important!), then lead into a conversation about other ways that porn can shape expectations.

Use a conversation about relationships and sex.

When you talk with your child about relationships and sex, use the opportunity to mention porn.

For example, you might talk with them about how important it is that relationships are respectful and equal, and that sex is mutual and consenting, and include a discussion of how media like porn often conveys the opposite messages.

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: 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.

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.