

It's time we talked about pornography

Parent tip sheet **5**



How can you respond if your child has seen porn?

You can't stop what's happened already, but if your child has seen porn, you can help them understand that porn is not reality and support them to develop healthy expectations of sexuality.

Don't panic. Stay calm.

If you discover that your child has accessed porn, you may feel a whole range of things – from fear to anger to amusement or wishing you didn't know!

Young people learn a lot more from a parent's response than just what we say. Try to stay calm and talk reasonably with your child.

If the situation requires an immediate response, calmly intervene. If you're ready to talk, great! If you need some time to prepare, tell your child you will talk about it with them more later.

Don't make assumptions.

Don't make assumptions about what's going on. It may be the first time your child has seen porn, or they may have already seen lots of it. They may have gone looking for porn, or they may not have wanted to see it at all. Sometimes exposure can occur accidentally, or by someone else introducing them to it.

While boys are much more likely to use porn, and to use it more often, girls may also seek it out.

Whether your child wanted to see it or not, they may feel upset or even distressed by the experience. Or they may have felt fascinated or aroused. Or all of these things at once – which can be very confusing!

Remember that curiosity is normal and healthy, and sex is good.

The problem with porn is not so much that it is sexual, it's the fact that it conveys problematic messages about gender, and about bodies, sexual health, power, aggression, humiliation, performance, and more.

Don't confuse sex with pornography – or pornography with sex. Be positive about bodies and sexuality.

Keep the communication lines open.

Through your words and actions, let your child know that you care about them, you are approachable, and you're happy to talk about anything.

Ask questions and listen. Invite your child to talk about their feelings and thoughts. For example, ask: How did you feel when you saw those images? What did you think of what you saw?

Encourage your child to talk to you about anything they feel uncomfortable about. Reassure them that you won't stop them accessing technology if they report seeing something inappropriate or disturbing.

Use the teachable moment.

Learning that your child has seen porn may raise a range of concerns for you, but it provides a great opportunity to have important conversations about things like bodies, sex, respect, peer-pressure, online safety, consent, pleasure, safety and exploitation.

Ask your child questions such as: What do you think porn says about women? What does it say about men? Why do you think people like it?

Talk about values of respect, equality and consent, and how porn often does not portray respectful, safe sex that is likely to feel good for everyone involved.

Use the tip sheet

'What do young people need to know about porn?' to explore with your child how porn misrepresents reality.