

#publichealth5-19service



Pornography FACTSHEET



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This factsheet will provide you with very helpful tips and links to websites regarding children and young people accessing online pornography.

The online world has created incredible opportunities for young people to explore, experiment, socialise, create and educate themselves but it has also exposed them to the risk of harm, including seeing extreme pornography.

It's normal for young people to be curious about sex and relationships. The internet gives them a way to access information and get answers to questions they may feel uncomfortable about asking you. We know that there are a number of other reasons young people may be accessing pornography online. Whether by accident – website pop-ups and misleading links, or because they're actively searching – it's important for us to help young people understand the impact pornography can have on them and their relationships.

Why young people look for sexual content

- To learn about sex and sexual identities
- Curiosity
- For sexual arousal and pleasure
- For "a laugh"
- To break the rules
- To "freak out" their friends
- Peer or relationship pressure

Risks of online pornography to children and young people

Studies have shown that when children and young people are exposed to sexually explicit material, they are at greater risk of developing:

- Unrealistic attitudes about sex and consent
- A more negative attitude towards roles and identities in relationships
- A more casual attitude towards sex and sexual relationships
- An increase in 'risky' sexual behaviour
- Unrealistic expectations of body image and performance.

How to talk to your child

- Talking to your child about online porn is something that you may find challenging but it's important to be open and honest.
- Finding the right time to talk to your child about pornography can be tricky but you know your child best and will know when it's the right time to have these conversations.

Things to think about

- Feelings of embarrassment - Acknowledge that your child might feel embarrassed or worried about talking to you. Reassure them that it is ok to feel curious about sex and that they can always talk to you. Remember that they may have seen something online by accident or been pressured to look/watch by another person or group.
- Online porn is not real - Explain that sex in porn is often different to how people have sex in real life. People are acting and putting on a performance so things are exaggerated and the lines between consent, pleasure and violence are often blurred. It's important for young people to know the difference.
- Not everyone watches pornography - Sometimes children and young people feel pressured to watch pornography. Explain to your child that whilst some people watch pornography online, not everyone does and it's definitely not something they have to do. Let them know it's OK not to want to watch or do something that makes them feel uncomfortable and they should never be pressured or forced into anything. Explain why you think that online pornography may be inappropriate for them.
- Healthy relationships - It is important for your child to understand that relationships they see in pornography are very different, often not realistic, compared to real relationships. Talk to them about what makes a positive and healthy relationship. Ask them what they think makes a good relationship. You can prompt them by discussing respect, personal boundaries and consent. This conversation may vary depending on your child's age.
- Awareness of online pornography algorithms – Watching any online pornography video will result in suggested videos from the website. Even videos that portray a more 'normalised' scenario will then lead on to more explicit, more violent and more degrading material being suggested due to the algorithms of these websites. An individual might be unaware of these subtle changes but overtime this will bring in a big shift in the material that is being viewed.
- Pornography addiction - Some young people worry that they watch too much pornography, and might feel like they can't stop viewing it. This can make them feel guilty or ashamed, and they may want help to stop viewing a lot of pornography. There is a growing body of research looking into the impact that pornography has on the brain. Watching pornography can become "a high" similar to the way addicts feel when they take drugs. Scientists are discovering that excessive pornography use can have a negative impact on key parts of the brain. For children and young people, these effects can be greater as their brains are still developing.

A forthcoming change in the law means that all pornography sites will be legally required to have age checks, or age verification, in place. These checks will vary across different sites but could include checking credit card details, using a digital ID app which scans your passport or driving license, or entering your mobile phone number. It won't completely protect children from seeing online pornography as the law doesn't include social media sites, and some young people may find ways around the checks. However, it will help to reduce the chance of young people accidentally stumbling upon pornography, which we know they're more likely to do than actively search for it. It's also a clear message that pornography is not for children or young people. There are also parental filters that can be applied and browser settings that can be changed. There are step by step instructions regarding this on the online safety section of the NSPCC website.

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VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-porn/

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/online-porn/

