

**Guide
for
parents
with
kids 15+**

The Porn Conversation

A Guide for Parents with teens over 15 years

"I love the idea of pornography. Simply seeing people have sex is not inherently misogynist or horrible to women. Pornography isn't the problem. It's the porn industry that's the problem...you don't ban things for being crass and dispiriting. No. What we need to do is affect a 100% increase in the variety of pornography available to us. It informs the imagination, as well as the mechanics...Feminism doesn't need to start banning pornography. It needs to start making it." - Caitlin Moran

You can watch her interview here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03pc35q>

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Your teens are watching porn

As much as it might feel embarrassing or shameful to talk about your teens watching porn, it needs to happen. Because we can guarantee that if they aren't occasionally watching it, they have almost definitely been exposed to it at least once. The stats vary at what age kids are first exposed to porn, but 90% of boys and 60% of girls see porn before their 18th birthday.

Most mainstream pornography is violently misogynistic, unrealistic and leaves people of all ages, genders and sexualities with a misunderstanding of what sex is. We teach our kids and teens to be good people: not to steal, or lie. But we don't take as much time to teach them to treat each other with respect, particularly in the bedroom. Boys watching porn that depicts women existing purely as sex objects can't be blamed for transferring that attitude into everyday life, especially their sex lives.

Pornographic material frequently normalizes degrading or violent behaviour towards women. 71% of girls aged 11-21 in the UK think porn gives confusing messages about consent and makes sexually violent behaviour seem normal. A teenage boy quoted in the NSPCC 2015 Survey said, "I'm always watching porn and some of it is quite aggressive. I didn't think it was affecting me at first but I've started to view girls a bit differently recently and it's making me worried."

Sex education isn't much help either. If your teen has had sex ed, it would be very unusual for the school to cover pornography. So what they are told at school will be completely disparate from what they see in porn. This is where you can help.

Why it's your responsibility

Fact: Most teenagers are learning about sex by watching porn.

But since 71% of teens hide their online activity from their parents they can't ask about the unusual or non-consensual porn they're exposed to online.

42% of Internet users age 10-17 said they viewed porn in the last year. 66% of adolescents who saw porn online said they stumbled upon it by accident, according to a study by the University of New Hampshire. 33% of Internet traffic is porn. Porn is unavoidable. So what are the effects?

Porn can confuse teens about how sex connects with sensuality and relationships. It can be damaging because it separates sex from emotions. Most porn doesn't teach women how to communicate their needs and desires. Furthermore, porn often gives teens unrealistic expectations about how to look and act. It can also teach girls to depend on men for pleasure or to prioritize a partner's pleasure over her own. How a woman's body appears often seems more important than how it feels.

Porn is a massive part of sex education for teens yet they're not equipped to think critically about porn. As sure as sex fascinates teenagers, porn is not going away. It's time to face porn. **It's time to have The Porn Conversation.**

From The Guardian, Aug 2016:

When a therapist friend told Allison Harvey that her then 13-year-old son was almost certainly viewing online pornography, she felt angry. "I was offended because I thought, why would he be doing that? It's deviant behaviour and he's not deviant."

If you don't talk to your kids about sex and, particularly porn, the only way they are going to learn about it is through their friends, or

through sex ed, which doesn't even cover porn. We want our kids to grow up respecting themselves and each other, avoiding dangerous situations and maintaining an idea that their bodies are their own and that they should never feel pressured to perform like a porn star, or expect their partner to.

Whether you, as a parent or mentor, enjoy or detest porn, your child or teen will definitely be exposed to it. **Even if it's uncomfortable to talk about pornography it must be addressed. Ignoring it only makes matters worse, and adds confusion to a young person's sexual future.** No matter where a parent stands, he or she should talk about it and explain how most porn is unrealistic and not a guide to sex.

Many parents don't discuss mature topics with their sons and daughters. **That's why sex education in school is essential.**

Take Denmark as a case study: In Denmark, (the first country to legalize pornography), sex education is required in every school. Most schools teach an entire week of lessons about sexual health and relationships. Statistically, Denmark has a very low rate of teen pregnancy, abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (much lower than the U.S.A. or the U.K.) By discussing sex and demystifying it, they are reducing the potential consequences of early sexual experiences.

Christian Graugaard, a Danish sexologist, suggests going a step further: showing pornography to 15 and 16-year-old students in the classroom, followed by critical discussions about gender roles, misogyny, diversity, and decision-making. Is that too radical or just practical?

How to start the conversation

We know it's horrible. It's not meant to be fun. They will have as much, if not more, of a sinking feeling and sense of embarrassment and shame as soon as you bring this up. They may even refuse to talk about it. So here are a few tips on trying to get them to discuss it with you.

Don't sit them down for "a chat". You don't want them to think they're in trouble! Or that you are going to lecture them.

A good opening few sentences might be:

"Hey, before you say anything, this is an extremely embarrassing thing for me to bring up, but I want to talk to you about porn. I'm not going to tell you not to watch it, but I wanted to talk to you about how most of what you're probably seeing online is really violent and unrealistic. I don't want you to think that that is what sex is supposed to be. I'm not saying it's about love, but it is about mutual respect, and it's important to me that I make that clear to you, even if you know already..."

What to say

Here are the main pointers that you can try and hit:

- Porn isn't real sex. It's people performing and it's nothing like what sex is actually like. Maybe you've started having sex already, and maybe you've been made to feel like you have to perform a certain way - but you don't. Sex is different for everyone and finding out what you really like is the best part.
- I'm not going to tell you what to do, but if you really want to watch porn, you should try finding some more ethical stuff - the mainstream free porn is not representative of everything that is out there.
- Women and men are hairy - they have pubic hair and it's totally normal.
- Racism is abundant in porn - and defining whether you find something appealing or not based purely on the race of the performers is as offensive as if you do so in real life.
- Mainstream porn profits from making you believe that clichés are real - always remember that what you are watching is designed to make as much money as possible. So the performers' real pleasure is normally secondary.
- No-one should be expected to perform sex acts in exchange for anything.
- Sex doesn't have to be with someone you love, but it is always better when it is with someone you trust and who treats you with respect.
- If someone wants to take pictures of you or film you, be aware that the most likely scenario is that they won't be the only ones to see it. In fact, it could go viral - at least within your community or group of friends.

And these are some things you definitely SHOULD NOT say:

- Who showed it to you? Where did you find it?
- Why are you watching it?
- Porn is bad/evil/manipulative (negativity won't help)

And try and end with some positivity (even if they storm off in an embarrassed huff, but lets hope not...)

- You can always talk to me about anything – I know it's embarrassing but I will understand.
- If you get a weird feeling watching something, that probably means you're not enjoying it. Everyone likes different things and that's okay! It's totally normal for you to not want to watch it.
- It's also normal for you to want to – but try and think about what you're watching and how it affects you, because what you're watching is most likely very violent and deeply misogynistic.

How to encourage understanding porn rather than trying to make abstinence work (not gonna happen) / Ethical porn

How much your teen listens to you and take your advice depends on you and your teen. What we do know is that a lot of children's first experiences of porn is through being shown something by their friends or by it popping up when they're browsing on their phone or ipad or computer. When they get older it's natural to want to watch people having sex. They are full of hormones. But going on the usual sites only results in seeing the kind of porn that encourages negative, disrespectful or violent behaviour; or for them to believe they have to look/act a certain way to be attractive.

It's key when you talk to your teen about sex and porn that you encourage understanding rather than just telling them not to watch it - because if you do that, they'll never talk to you about it. Notice the difference between healthy porn and unhealthy porn.

Healthy porn shows:

- Consenting adults as equals, who care about respect and mutual pleasure.
- A variety of bodies and sexual situations.
- Sex can be more than physical; it can involve emotions and connection.
- Porn can be intelligent, funny and realistic.
- Sexual communication is encouraged, even in casual situations.

Healthy porn doesn't mean boring or conservative. It can be sexy, bizarre and even kinky. It is created to turn people on in a positive way.

If you watch porn aim to do it ethically: find out who produced it, who directed it. Consider on-set conditions and how the performers are treated. If the creators and performers are open and happy with their work it will show in the film. When the cast and crew are visible and proud (within credits or on their website) it is probably created with pleasure instead of exploitation.

Unhealthy porn portrays:

- Sex as something to be done to a person, instead of with a person.
- Manipulation, violence, degradation, or depersonalization.
- Unrealistic body types and standards of beauty.
- Anything other than heterosexual sex between white people as fetishised.

This kind of porn doesn't respect the performers, their requests, or their well-being.

A couple of great articles and websites for you to look at, and maybe share, are below:

<http://www.gq.com/story/how-to-watch-porn-ethically>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nica-noelle/do-i-make-feminist-porn_b_3002905.html

<http://www.feministpornawards.com/>

Other Parents Experiences

I consider myself quite open-minded and liberal but I didn't expect to find porn videos on my 12-year old son's smartphone. I noticed he had been spending a lot of time in his room with the door closed. He doesn't have a laptop or television in there so it seemed unusual. Out of curiosity I looked at his smartphone and found some very shocking videos. I felt embarrassed to be snooping there but also responsible, somehow. -Mélanie, 40, Paris

One night I went into my daughter's room to say goodnight and noticed she had fallen asleep with the lights on. She was lying in bed with headphones on and her laptop open. When I closed the laptop I was shocked to see a pornographic movie playing. She's only 13! Why is she watching this kind of movie? I never thought of her as a sexual person before. She has never even had a boyfriend. I told my husband and we decided to tell her these kind of movies are not appropriate for someone her age. Now I wonder if we should have explained them more...but I don't know where to start! -Alicia, 42, Madrid

I was writing emails when my laptop ran out of charge. I didn't want to go upstairs to get my charger so I just grabbed my son's laptop. There were lots of windows open and one had a very provocative name, so I checked it out. It was a porn website... I couldn't believe it - he's eleven years old! When I was eleven I was reading comic books and collecting baseball cards. Clearly, times are changing. When I asked him about it he said the site appeared as an ad on a video game website and he was curious so he clicked on it. -Michael, 51, Chicago.

I walked in on my son masturbating to a violent sex film on his tablet. It was mortifying for both of us. He's 14. Also, the film itself disturbed me. What if he thinks this is how you're supposed to have sex? Will these movies affect his relationships? -Karen, 45, London

Some more useful links

Ways High Schools Teach Rape Culture

<http://www.attn.com/stories/8056/ways-high-schools-reinforce-rape-culture>

40% of teenage girls pressured into having sex

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/40-percent-teenage-girls-pressured-into-sex/>

14 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Ever Had Sex

<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a63121/before-i-had-sex/>

Sex Before Kissing: How 15-Year-Old Girls Are

Dealing With Porn-Addicted Boys

<http://fightthenewdrug.org/sex-before-kissing-15-year-old-girls-dealing-with-boys/>

Students turn to porn for sex education

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jan/29/students-turn-to-porn-for-sex-education>

Sex education without porn is not sex education

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/17/porn-sex-education-consent-sexual-exploitation>

Porn as sex education: a cultural influence we can no longer ignore

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/04/porn-as-sex-education-a-cultural-influence-we-can-no-longer-ignore>

When Porn Consumption Goes Up, Sex Crimes Go Down

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/standard-deviations/201609/when-porn-consumption-goes-sex-crimes-go-down>

How porn is damaging our children's future sex lives

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/sep/10/how-porn-is-damaging-our-childrens-future-sex-lives>