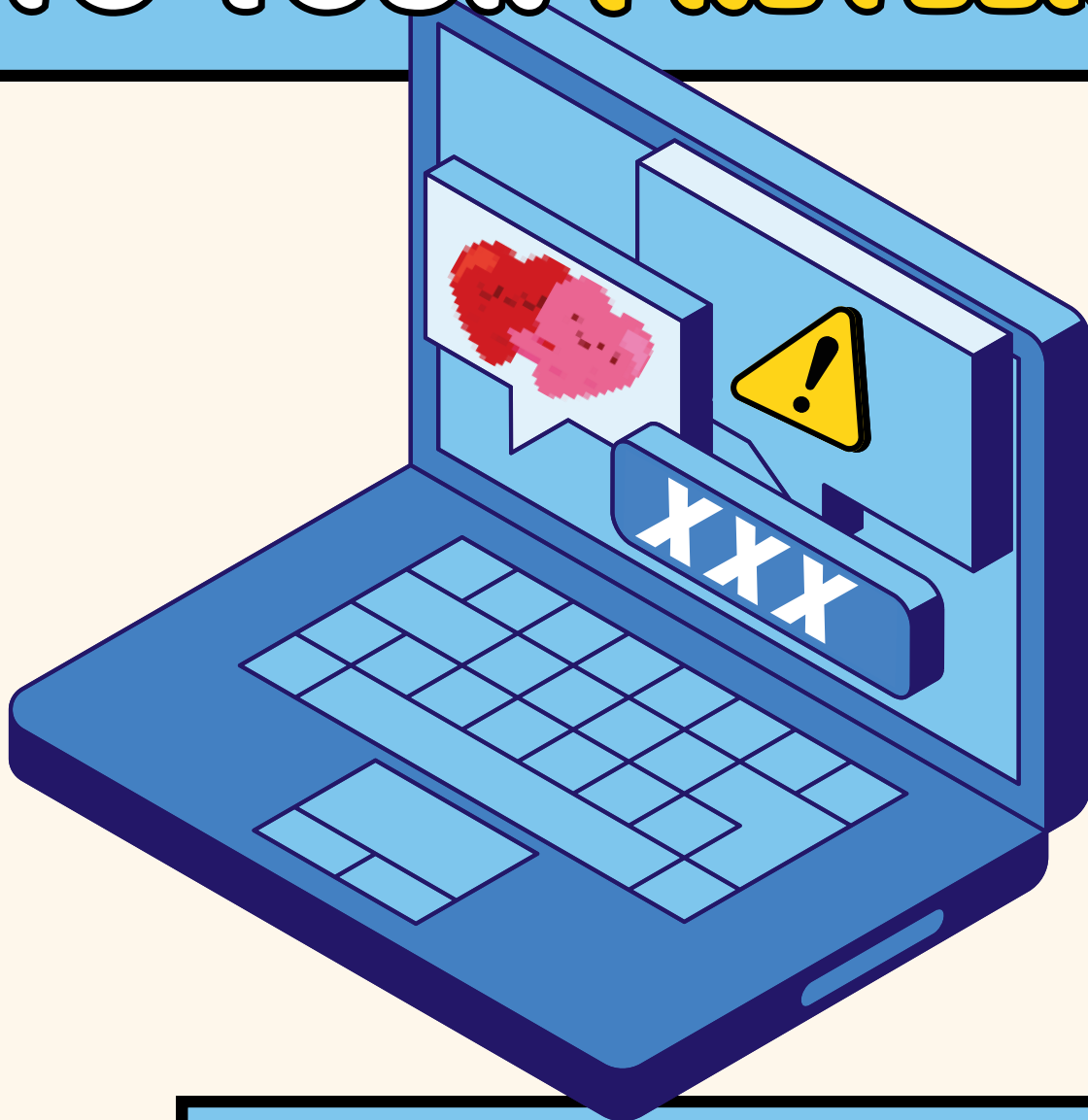


HOW TO TALK TO YOUR **PRETEEN**



ABOUT **PORN**




SEXUAL HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING ACT





Let us know if this resource has been helpful for you
or if you have suggestions.

 shfpact@shfpact.org.au

How to talk to your preteen about porn
Sexual Health and Family Planning
Last updated March 2025

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How to talk to your preteen about porn

A guide to planning and having conversations with your young person about online pornography, safety, consent, and healthy relationships.

BEFORE I TALK TO MY CHILD

Given the availability of online pornography, it is common for young people to come across this content in the later years of primary school. This is an important thing to talk about with your child and the best time to have these conversations is before they come across this material. The majority of parents know this is a conversation they should have, but many struggle to know where to start.

This resource has been developed to help you have those conversations.

Perhaps you have picked up this resource because you know your child has already seen pornography or because you want to be prepared for a conversation.

Regardless of whether they came across this content accidentally or otherwise, it is not too late to have this conversation.

If your child has already seen pornography, the best thing to do is to talk to them about what they might have seen, how it made them feel, and help them to make informed choices.

It is not helpful to punish your child or shame them for their curiosity. When children fear punishment, they may hide their behaviour and feel an unhealthy sense of shame about bodies and sexuality.

Talking to them about what they have seen will limit distress and let them know you are a safe person to turn to for help.



According to the Australian eSafety Commission, the average age of first viewing pornography is 13 years old. This means that some young people will see this content earlier than 13 while others come across it later. Boys and girls are equally likely to see pornography, with boys being slightly more likely to report having deliberately searched for it.



While most young people first come across pornography by accident, there are reasons why they may search for images or videos of sex. This is usually out of curiosity, excitement, or to figure out if their bodies are 'normal'. Without access to accurate educational resources, pornography is one way that young people sometimes try to learn more about sex.

Sometimes it is a one off or occasional look, other times young people may deliberately and more routinely seek out pornography.

Often the reason children search for pornography is because they are looking for information that is relevant to their specific experiences, bodies, and communities.



POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF MY CHILD SEEING PORNOGRAPHY

As a whole, researchers are unclear exactly how and to what extent watching pornography influences sexual and emotional development in the long term.

They do agree that while seeing sexual content is not necessarily harmful, what can be harmful is free and easily accessible online content that doesn't often show open communication or consent, doesn't demonstrate safer sex practices (like condom use), and rarely shows a diversity of bodies. Some of this content is violent, and the people who are shown as the perpetrators are often men.

We know that **most people who access pornography do so without harm**, but some of the **possible effects** of a young person regularly watching pornography could include the development of:

Unrealistic ideas about sex

Including what sexual acts people tend to enjoy, and how people communicate and negotiate consent.

Negative body image

Such as beliefs about what genitals and other body parts 'should' look like. This could impact their self-esteem and/or their shaming of other people's bodies.

Unsafe sexual health practices

Increased willingness to participate in unsafe sexual health practices later in life like not using condoms and lubrication.

Harmful ideas about gender

Including that men should be active, dominant and aggressive sexual partners, and women should be passive and submissive.

HOW TO TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

General approach

The following pages contain examples of how to talk to your child about pornography. **These prompts are generally appropriate for neurotypical children between 10 and 12 years old.**

Your approach to these conversations may differ depending on whether your child has accidentally seen pornography or is intentionally seeking it out (and, if so, what their motivations might be).

It is important to think about how you would like the conversation to go. Spend a bit of time thinking about how to make your child as comfortable as possible and what else might help them engage in the conversation.

Consider what you might say and how you might feel if your child talks about, or asks, something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

If your child has accidentally come across pornography, the conversation should **emphasise messages about staying safe online, not sharing the content with other kids, and debriefing what they saw.** If you know your child has deliberately found pornography, which is more likely the older your child is, you should emphasise the importance of them making active decisions about their own attitudes and behaviours and **respecting other people's boundaries.**

You will need to consider how much information to share and tailor the conversation based on your assessment of your child's maturity and needs.

It could be that your child has already heard some of these messages and developed their own strategies for managing online safety.

HOW TO TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

How to start



Beginning conversations like these can be tricky.

Try some of these openers:

'Have you heard the word pornography? What do you know about it?'

'I read something recently that said kids are seeing inappropriate content online at young ages. What do you think about that?'

'I think we should have a chat about sex and pornography.'

If they indicate they have not seen or heard of pornography, providing a brief description like 'videos of naked people' might help them understand what you are talking about.

Sometimes questions about your child's behaviour may be too confronting, so asking about their peers feels safer:

'Do any of the kids at school ever talk about pornography? What do they say?'

KEY MESSAGES FOR MY CHILD

Curiosity about sex is normal. You are not in trouble.

You can always talk to me.

Searching online



If you think your child came across pornography by accident, teach your child why young people should avoid certain websites, as well as how to search for health information and assess the reliability of information. Looking for **.gov.au** or **.org.au** at the end of a web address is a good starting point. Do the searching with them, and explain your process as a learning moment.

Other resources



To meet your child's curiosity needs, you might also like to provide them with alternative sources of information such as a book or a website you think is appropriate. You can see a list of suggested books and websites on page 22.

Example messages



'Being curious about sex is a normal part of growing up but the information you find online might be incorrect or scary. If you have any questions about bodies, sex, or babies you can talk to me about it.'

'Some websites have videos of naked people that are not meant for kids. If you find something like that online, don't show other kids. If you see that, you can talk to me about it and you won't get into trouble.'

KEY MESSAGES FOR MY CHILD

Is there anything you want to know?

Check for questions



Check if your child has any questions or if you have explained things clearly enough.

Check for knowledge



Before you begin to answer, clarify what they are asking or ask them what they already know. This may give you more context for the answer.

Brief and accurate



Answer them briefly and factually using clear and simple language. Make sure to use the correct terms (no slang).

It's ok not to know



If you do not know the answer, tell them you will find out. Then use that as an opportunity to have another chat.

KEY MESSAGES FOR MY CHILD

No one should show you porn.

It's important you don't show porn to other kids. They might not be ready.

Some young people first watch pornography with their friends. Remind your child it's okay to tell their friends that they don't want to watch it.

Introduce the idea that while friends are great supports as you grow up, sometimes young people bond with each other by being disrespectful towards others.

Example messages



'Not all adults choose to watch pornography and not everyone who has seen it wants to see it again. It is perfectly okay to not want to watch those kinds of videos.'

'You should say 'no' if you don't want to see pornography. No one can make you watch it.'

Given that sharing pornographic content is common, often shared in humour without malicious intent, some of these messages are important for you to share with **your child, who could be the one sharing this material:**



'Pornography is not made for children.'



'Always check if it's okay with others before showing them images or videos that might make them uncomfortable. Make sure you listen and respect their boundaries.'

KEY MESSAGES FOR MY CHILD

You don't have to do what your friends are doing.

You're always allowed to say 'No'.

Even when young people are clear that they want to say no to something that they feel uncertain about doing this is usually because they are concerned about upsetting or disappointing other people. It can be helpful for parents to acknowledge this and help their child feel more comfortable saying no - practising helps.

Things they could say to their friends



'Dude, I don't want to watch that with you.'

'Let's do something else. I'm not into that.'

'Pass.'

KEY MESSAGES – TEENS

**Sex is a consensual, mutually enjoyable experience people negotiate together. It's not a thing done by one person to another person.
Porn doesn't usually show real sex.**

Young people are more likely to watch pornography as they progress through their teenage years. As your child approaches their early to mid-teen years, some of these more complex but important messages may be useful:

Example messages



'Some people watch pornography thinking that they can learn about sex, but most pornography doesn't show what real sex and relationships are like.'

'Pornography is filmed in the same way as other movies with scripts, actors, and directors. The actors are told to behave like they are enjoying what they are doing, even if lots of people would not enjoy it or even find it painful.'

KEY MESSAGES – TEENS

It's not okay to be disrespectful to women and different people, even if you see that in porn.

It is important to always hold and reflect positive and respectful attitudes towards women and other minorities.

Example messages



'Women and men are equals and have similar wants and needs when it comes to sex. Everyone deserves respect, and lots of pornography can be very disrespectful to women and people of different racial and cultural backgrounds.'

'Pornography is made for entertainment. It is not real life. You should not replicate what you see in porn without consent.'

KEY MESSAGES – TEENS

Porn isn't real sex. The reality is more like...

Rather than just stating 'pornography is not real', try to explain what reality is like instead.

Example messages



'Most pornography just starts with sex, whereas sex in real life should start with lots of conversations, mutual respect, and consent.'

'Sex is a mutual thing that people do together. Not something one person does to another.'

'In pornography, sex seems to progress very smoothly without awkward moments and discussion between the people having sex. Sex in real life involves resting, taking time to talk to each other, and changing what you do to make sure everyone is happy and comfortable.'

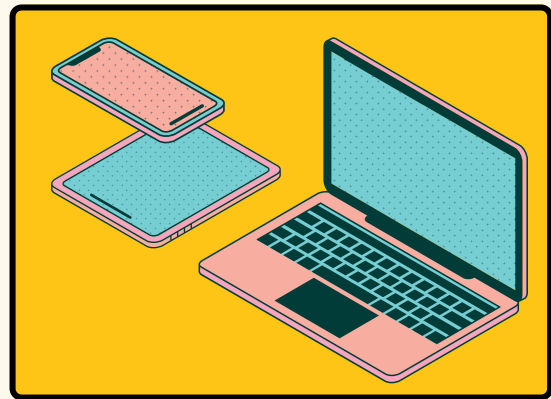
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

BE A SAFE PERSON TO TALK TO



Giving your child the language and confidence to talk to you about puberty, sex, and sexuality means that if they are worried or concerned about something they have seen, they will be more likely to tell you about it, and ask what you think, or for advice. With issues regarding sexuality and personal development it is important to take a long-term view. We encourage families to normalise talking about bodies, puberty, and sexuality in age and stage appropriate ways as much as possible. This includes reinforcing the idea that your child can always come to you for help.

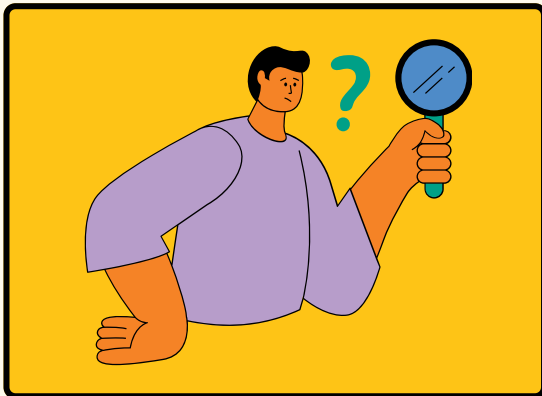
FAMILY TECHNOLOGY AGREEMENT



Making a family technology agreement is a way that you can discuss with your children and agree on shared rules about how devices, like mobiles, tablets, computers, TVs and gaming consoles will be used in your home. This helps to limit where and when your child accesses the internet. Example agreements and tips on how to make them can be found on the websites of the Daniel Morcombe Foundation and the eSafety Commission.

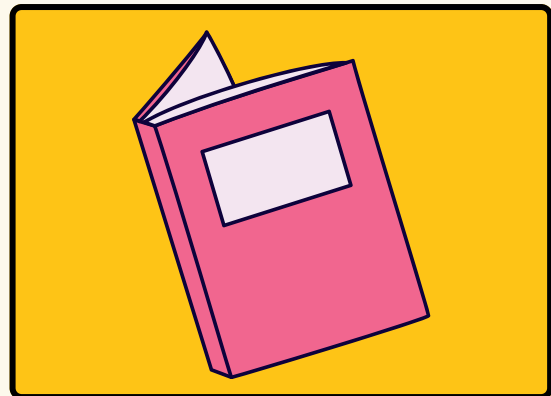
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING



It is important that as young people grow up, they learn to think critically about all types of media, including pornography. Your child's capacity to do this will be strengthened by your ability to talk to them about it. If children are given reliable information about the inaccuracy of most pornography, they will be more likely to think carefully about it if, or when, they come across it. Helping young people to build critical thinking skills and help seeking behaviours gives them a way to understand and respond to the content they come across.

PROVIDE ALTERNATE RESOURCES



Provide your child with alternate, more reliable resources for finding out more about sex.

The benefit of providing other sources of information is that you can meet your child's curiosity needs while ensuring they have access to accurate, age-appropriate information. See suggestions on page 23.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

FOLLOW UP WITH OTHER ADULTS

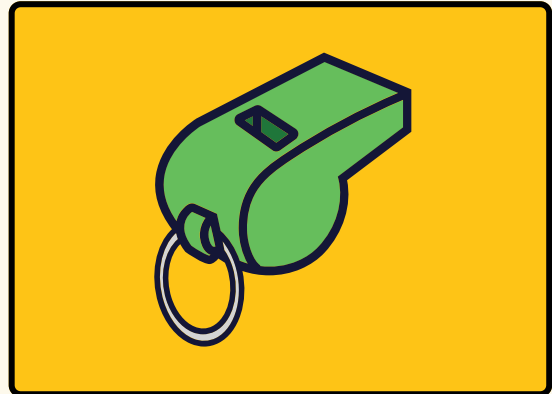


You can speak to other adults from places where you believe your child might have seen pornography, such as a friend's house or at school. Some ways you could bring it up with other parents and carers:

'This is a bit awkward, but I think the kids might have seen pornography at the sleepover the other night.'

'I was reading something the other day about how most kids first view pornography at sleepovers with friends. Let's make sure we all keep an eye out for this when the kids are at each of our houses.'

REPORT CONTENT



Most social media, apps, and gaming companies have ways that you can make complaints directly to their websites about inappropriate content. You can also make a complaint to the Australian Government eSafety Commission who are empowered to take action on your behalf. The eSafety Commission website provides advice on how to do this:

[eSafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide](https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide)

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

PARENTAL CONTROL SOFTWARE

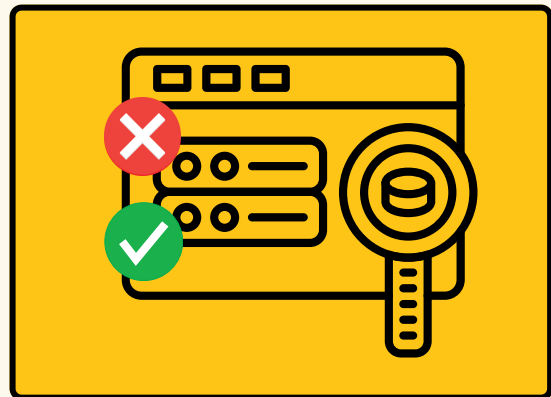


You may wish to install parent control software on any devices your child is using at home.

This will reduce the likelihood of them coming across this content accidentally but unfortunately will not be able to end access entirely. This is why it is still important for you to have these conversations even if you have installed this software. The eSafety Commission has useful resources about how to install software like this:

[eSafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide](https://esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide)

BE CAREFUL ABOUT SEARCH HISTORY



This can include things like pop ups on gaming and video streaming websites.

Make sure other family members clear their search history so younger siblings or children do not accidentally come across content others may have viewed.

SHOULD I BE **CONCERNED?**

You should raise your concerns with a professional, such as the school psychologist, student support services and other wellbeing professionals if you observe attitudes or sexual behaviours in your child that are:

Excessive or compulsive

Coercive, forceful, degrading, or threatening

Secretive or manipulative towards others

This is especially the case if these behaviours are shown towards other children where there is a significant difference in age, developmental ability, or other form of power.



What specific behaviours are worth reaching out to a professional?

Masturbation which interferes with regular daily activities.

Masturbation in public or that causes them injury.

Disclosure that someone forced them to watch pornography.

Forcing other children to watch pornography.

Using technology to share sexual images or videos of themselves or others.

Requesting sexual images or videos of themselves or others.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES

For you



Questions Children Ask and how to answer them by Dr Miriam Stoppard.

Yarning quiet ways by the Western Australian Government.
A resource about talking to children about sex and consent designed by and for First Nations people and families.
LetsYarn.health.wa.gov.au/documents/316969/0/Yarning+Quiet+Ways.pdf

Talk Soon. Talk Often published by the Western Australian Government.
A resource on how to have relaxed and comfortable conversations with your child about sex.
HealthyWA.wa.gov.au/~media/HWA/Documents/Healthy-living/Sexual-health/talk-soon-talk-often.pdf

Raising Children
Parenting website supported by the Australian Government.
RaisingChildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/puberty-sexual-development/sex-education

The Doing 'IT' Podcast by Sexual Health Victoria.
DoingIt.podbean.com

Sex Ed Rescue: A better way to talk to kids about sex.
Parent reviewed resources for kids and carers on sexual health and pornography.
SexEdRescue.com

Become an askable parent with Amaze.
Amaze.org

Raising Real People: Creating A Resilient Family by Andrew Fuller.

The Line, The Australian Government Department of Social Services.
TheLine.org.au/key-messages-for-young-people/

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

It is important that you read through these resources and determine if they are age and stage appropriate before giving them to your child.



For your preteen

Welcome to Sex and **Welcome to Consent** by Yumi Styles and Dr Melissa Kang.

Wait, what? A comic book guide to relationships, bodies, and growing up by Heather Corinna and Isabella Rotman.

Sex is a Funny Word by Cory Silverberg and Fiona Smyth.

Girl Stuff: for girls aged 8-12 and **Girl Stuff: for ages 13+** by Kaz Cooke.

Let's Talk About It: The Teen's Guide to Sex, Relationships and Being a Human by Erica Moen and Mathew Nolan.

Guy Stuff: the body book for boys by Dr Cara Nattersson.

Can We Talk About Consent: A book about freedom, choices and agreement by Justin Hancock.

The Secret Business of Relationships, Love and Sex by Heather Anderson, Fay Angela and Rose Stewart.

Planet Puberty for children with intellectual disabilities and/or ASD.
PlanetPuberty.org.au

Staying Safe Online by Louie Stowell.

ASK US MORE

Online

shfpact.org.au

Email

training@shfpact.org.au

Book appointment

(02) 6247 3077

Address

Level 1, 28 University Ave
Canberra

SHFPACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise any other people or families with connection to the region.

Supported by



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SEXUAL HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING ACT

