

# Yes, your child will be exposed to online porn. But don't panic—here's what to do instead

November 17 2020, by Alan McKee

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2020 has been the year of the coronavirus lockdown, the year of online

education, the year of excessive streaming of entertainment ... and the year when people are watching more pornography than before. The website PornHub reports [porn viewing has increased](#) by up to 24% this year.

And this may not just be for adults. According to [some sources](#), the average age of first exposure to pornography is 11 years old. Those aren't reassuring statistics for [parents](#).

Despite this, it's surprisingly difficult for parents to find straightforward, expert advice on [porn](#) and their kids.

To address this problem our team—including experts from psychology, sexology, sociology and media studies—spent three years reviewing over 2,000 pieces of academic research about the ways healthy—or unhealthy—sexual development is related to the consumption of pornography.

Then we synthesized all of that information into a [plain-English factsheet](#) setting out the key points for concerned parents. Here's what you need to know.

## **What if they just stumble across porn?**

The most important thing to know is—don't panic! With the right support from you, exposure to porn doesn't need to cause damage.

First things first—you want to make sure porn isn't the only way your kids find out about sex. Comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education is vital—both from you and from schools.

With more people having educated their kids at home this year, the role of the parent has become more important. Sex education doesn't make

kids have sex earlier. In fact all the [evidence shows](#) the opposite is true.

Yes, it can be embarrassing talking to your child about sex. So, have a look at [Talk Soon Talk Often](#), a great booklet about how to talk to your kids about sex.

As soon as your kids start asking questions—which often happens when they're just a few years old, with questions like "Where do babies come from?"—answer them honestly, using age-appropriate language, without volunteering extra information, and, vitally, without acting like you're embarrassed.

Make it seem normal, and that you're happy to talk to them about it.

That's going to make the next part easier. Research [shows when prepubescent kids](#) stumble across explicit material online they're often more upset their parents will be angry with them for seeing it than they are about the material itself.

You want to make sure your kids know that if they do see something that upsets them, you won't be angry at them for talking to you about it.

## **What about what they go looking for it?**

Of course, after puberty, the situation changes a bit—at that point kids are less likely to "stumble across" porn and more likely to go looking for it.

Again, the key here is comprehensive sex education and open communication. If they already know about sex, they're less likely to go searching for information about it.

Most porn isn't good at sex education. For example, it rarely talks about

sexual consent. Which is why it's so important you make sure your kids have a good understanding of how to talk to [sexual partners](#) about what they like and what their partners want for when they reach that stage in their own lives.

Tell them about the importance of asking their partners questions about what they prefer, what they'd rather do or not do, and how slowly (or quickly) they may want to take things.

And let them know that consent is ongoing—even if you've started doing something sexy, at any point you can say no and that's fine. If a partner asks them to stop, make sure they know the correct response isn't to try to convince them, or get angry at them; it's to ask them how they're feeling, and listen to the answers honestly.

There's nothing sexier than being fully present with a partner and really engaging with them.

## **The final challenge**

One final challenge for many parents is that pornography may not teach the same values about sex as you hold. Porn shows sex for fun and pleasure—not for love or procreation. You need to make sure you explain to your kids, openly and honestly, your own values around sex, and be prepared to explain why you hold those values.

Yes, it can be challenging—particularly to keep those lines of communication open as children grow up and start exploring their own sexual lives.

But other cultures manage it. For example, [in the Netherlands](#) kids often ask parents for advice about sex, and value it.

And always remember, open communication is the thing most likely to ensure your kids aren't harmed by the sexual content they see, or anything else disturbing they might find when they're spending all this extra time online.

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