

# Young adults say porn is their most helpful source of information about how to have sex

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Young adults ages 18-24 years old in the U.S. say that porn is their most helpful source of information about how to have sex, according to a new study led by a Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) researcher published in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

In the nationally [representative survey](#), a quarter of [young adults](#) said [porn](#) was their most helpful source of information about how to have sex. Slightly less than a quarter said [sexual partners](#) were the most helpful source, and fewer pointed to friends, parents, media, or healthcare professionals. However, female respondents were much more likely than male respondents to report that their partners were the most helpful source of information about how to have sex. Heterosexual men were most likely to say that porn was their most helpful source of information about how to have sex.

"The evidence suggests that young adults, and in particular heterosexual men, undervalue talking to their partners about what is pleasurable—too many of them may believe that it's possible to be 'good at sex' independent of any feedback from a particular sex partner, which is a belief they may be getting from pornography," says study lead author Dr. Emily Rothman, professor of community health sciences at BUSPH.

Rothman and colleagues at Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington used data from the Indiana University-based 2015 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, and analyzed responses from 357 young adults (18-24 years old) and 324 adolescents (14-17 years old) who said that they had gotten helpful information about how to have sex. (Nearly as many young adults and adolescents in the survey reported that they hadn't gotten any helpful information.)

Among 14-17-year-old adolescents, parents were the leading source of information, followed by friends. Only 8% of the adolescents said porn was the most helpful source of information. However, among adolescents who had never had a helpful conversation with parents about sex, media (23.4%) and sexual partners (12.8%) were their primary sources of information. Like their older peers, boys were also more likely than girls to report that porn was their most helpful source of information about how to have sex.

"The good news is that, when parents have conversations with their [teenage children](#) about sex, we think that their children are listening and are less likely to see porn as a good source of information," Rothman says.

"The bad news is that young adults are misunderstanding what porn is there for. Most free, online pornography is there for entertainment and to make money for the creators. It isn't there to teach you what you are supposed to do when you are having sex."

From a public health perspective, Rothman says it is worrisome that a sizable percentage of young adults consider porn a helpful source of [information](#) about how to have sex. "Comprehensive sex education that teaches what I think of as 'sexual social skills,' or [interpersonal communication](#) about sex, is needed and important, and research that helps us determine how to teach young people how to have fulfilling, safer, consensual sex is crucial."

**More information:** Emily F. Rothman et al, The Prevalence of Using Pornography for Information About How to Have Sex: Findings from a Nationally Representative Survey of U.S. Adolescents and Young Adults, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-020-01877-7](#)

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