Guide for parents with kids 9 to 11 years old

The Porn Conversation

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The facts about porn & sexual content

It depends what stats you look at – some sources say boys and girls are discovering porn at an average age of 14; others place it at as young as 11. Some researchers encountered multiple examples of children stumbling across pornographic imagery or being shown it by older friends when they were as young as 9 or 10. So although it will invariably depend on your children's circumstances (do they and their friends have smartphones? What gender and age are they?) exactly when they will first encounter porn or sexual content online, we can know for sure that it is before they are of the age of consent, and far before it's legal.

Which is long before many parents and schools are even thinking about sexual education. The younger generations are, through no fault of their own, learning that sex is what they see in porntubes– a medium that is, for the most part, violently misogynistic, devoid of intimacy, and completely unrealistic.

They may also develop the wrong ideas about sexuality and gender roles, on a seemingly safe site like Youtube, where you and your kids probably spend a lot of time.

In today's world, the sexualization of girls is prevalent. Children's clothing is becoming more revealing. TV, movies and advertisements subtly encourage girls to flaunt their bodies, dressed as adults and posing or acting suggestively. Young girls acting in a sexualised fashion is becoming normalised through clothing products such as swimsuits, knickers, Halloween costumes and dolls. A recent study found that 31% of children's clothing items had sexualising features.

This sexualisation has been linked to eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression by the APA, and the more a girl consumes mainstream media, the more likely she is to view women as sexual objects, and to think a woman's value is based on how she looks. Luckily, there are a lot of alternatives that feature young confident female characters without focusing on their appearance. Talking to your children about the sexualised images they are inevitably exposed to and encouraging girls to build healthy self-esteem based on attributes other than appearance is our responsibility as parents. As they grow, they will be able to make informed decisions about what they wear and what media they consume – and to question it's message.

Many teenagers and pre-teens are streaming porn from the numerous free redtube-style websites, such as YouPorn, Pornhub and the ever-popular RedTube. The sites are easily accessible from many devices, including mobile phones, tablets, and teens' PlayStations. Anyone can view the pornographic content, which is often aggressive or disturbing and inexperienced eyes can misinterpret the sexual situations as realistic.

Why talk to your kids?

Porn can confuse kids about how sex connects with sensuality and relationships. It can be damaging because it separates sex from emotions. Most porn doesn't teach boys and girls how to communicate their feelings. Furthermore, porn projects unrealistic expectations about how to look and act. It can also teach boys and girls that it's ok to take naked pictures of each other, or films of themselves and of other kids, without taking into consideration the importance of confidentiality, the right to intimacy or the relevance of consent in any relationship.

Pornographic material frequently normalizes degrading or violent behavior towards women. 71% of girls aged 11-21 in the UK think porn gives confusing messages about consent and makes sexually violent behavior seem normal. The vision of the male figure isn't positive for gender equality either: it's based on stereotypes and roles associated to male sexuality. Thus, men are portrayed as dominant, irresponsible, rude, forever willing and with uncontrollable desire.

We want our kids to grow up respecting and valuing 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 undress if they don't want to.

Whether you, as a parent or mentor, enjoy or detest porn, your child 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 explain how most porn is unrealistic, and not a guide to sex or sexuality.

Many parents don't discuss mature topics with their sons and daughters. That's why sex education in school is essential - and yet it never covers porn. We need to take this matter into our own hands.

Starting the talk

You may want to have this conversation if you are suspicious that your kid has already been exposed to sexual content, or to prevent him or her from coming across it because you think it may happen soon. If they are aged 9 to 11, they can type in Google "whore sex porn" at any moment, and Google will give them back a lot of yummy results. (Try this by yourself if you are sceptical)

If your kids are 9 to 11 you will have a much easier time having this talk now than when they are older. There is no such thing as the "right age". Speaking of sex is part of everyday conversations – and since they are very young, they probably already ask about their bodies and the names of their genitals. Kids also wonder how they got into their mother's belly, or feel curious about a pregnant woman they have seen. This means it's not a subject we haven't had chances to speak about, but many times we'd rather not answer the questions, maybe because we don't know how to do it or we think they are too young to understand. Nevertheless, we have to know that silence, not giving an answer, is educational in itself. And usually, when we don't speak about something, we assume it's dangerous, nasty or inappropriate to discuss.

When you both get past the moment of engaging the talk, with embarrassment or not, they will probably have loads of questions. Many educators say there are a lot of questions to ask about sex, but it's hard to find a source of reliable answers. They may even have seen something they found upsetting, or had someone ask them for something – you don't know what's going to come up, but you are the best person for them to ask, so give them the space to do so.

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.

Some suggested opening sentences could be:
> "Hey, I was recently online and some videos and images popped up that you might have seen too. When I'm buying something online, some advertisements just come on the screen out of nowhere. Have you seen them too?"
>
> "I know that at a certain age you might get curious about sexual content on the Internet and I would like that we could talk about it, if you want, and without me being the one who asks all the questions. I'd like it if you can ask me and I can answer your questions"

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 real relationships are.

→ It's not a bad thing that you see these kinds of videos and movies, but I would like you to think on whether you do it because you are interested in it or if it is because your friends send them to you or they pop up on your browser.

→ Do not undress for anyone, with or without a camera, if they are pressuring you, but specifically if there are cameras. Once that image is sent from phone to phone, it's impossible to stop it, and it can cause you great distress. You can tell us in case anyone tries to manipulate you into taking pictures of yourself or videos where you show your genitals, including your breasts.

→ Erotic relationships have to be fully consensual, and that means there has to be trust between both people, to treat each other with respect and do the things that you both want to. Bear in mind that, if at any point you feel uncomfortable with what you are doing, you should tell the person you are with and stop. You wouldn't be "ending" anything because you aren't looking to achieve an end, but to enjoy with what you are deciding.

And these are some things you definitely SHOULD NOT say:

→ Who showed it to you? Where did you find it? (with an accusatory tone of voice, making them feel it is something bad and they are guilty)

→ Why are you watching it? (with an accusatory tone of voice, making them understand that it is something bad and they are guilty)

→ Porn is bad/evil/manipulative (negativity and trying to make it look dangerous won't help)

And try and end with some positivity (even if you got to the issue but they refuse to have a conversation on it)

→ You can always talk to me about anything, I'm not going to judge you. Some things might feel shameful, but if they are, talking about them will make the shame disappear! And we will learn by having a conversation and by both contributing with information.

→ There will be things that you like watching... and things you won't. The good thing is that you know and can decide that if something feels uncomfortable you can just stop watching it.

Everything You Need to Know About Parental Controls*

Even if you've talked to your kids about screen-time limits and responsible online behavior it's still really tough to manage what they do when you're not there (and even when you are). Parental controls can support you in your efforts to keep your kids' Internet experiences safe, fun, and productive. But they work best when used openly and honestly in partnership with your kids -- not as a stealth spying method.

It's not about controlling every movement they make, but about making them critical of the content they see and offer them support if they have doubts.

Here's an overview of the different levels of protection available.

→ **Your device's operating system**. MMicrosoft's Windows, Apple's Mac OS, and Google Chrome come with robust built-in parental controls. To get the most benefits, you need to use the most updated version of the operating system, and each user has to log in under his or her profile.

Good to know: You don't have to pay extra for them and they apply globally to everything the computer accesses.

Good for: All ages.

→ **Web browsers. Browsers**, for example Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, and Apple Safari, are the software you use to go on the Internet. Each one offers different ways of filtering out websites you don't want your kids to visit. Learn how to set restrictions in your browser.

Good to know: Browsers are free, but if you have more than one on your machine, you need to enable filters on all of them.

Good for: Younger kids. Older kids -- especially very determined ones -- can easily defeat browser restrictions either by figuring out your password or simply downloading a new browser.

→ **Kids' browsers.** Sometimes called "walled gardens," these are protected environments that fill up your entire screen (so kids can't click out of them). They typically offer games, pre approved websites, email, and various activities. Examples include Zoodles, Kido'z, and Tweens Browser.

Good to know: Kids' browsers are usually free for the basic version, but cost money for a premium upgrade. They also sometimes display ads or

promotional content.

Good for: Younger kids. Walled gardens are too limiting for older kids who need (or are allowed) greater access to the wider Web.

→ **Computer-software controls**. Full-featured parental-control programs, such as NetNanny and Qustodio let you block websites, impose screen-time limits, and monitor online activity (for example, which sites your kid visits) on your computer or laptop. Many of these programs also offer added security against malware and viruses and will send you a summary of what your kid does online.

Good to know: They usually require a monthly subscription fee.

Good for: Kids of all ages -- and especially kids who need a lot of support in following your rules.

→ **Smart phones and tablets**. Some mobile devices come with basic parental controls -- but the options vary a lot depending on what you have. You can also download apps such as Bark, Limitly, and TeenSafe to track and control online activity, including text messaging and social media. If you're an Amazon user, Kindle Fire tablets come preloaded with Kindle FreeTime parental controls. (Learn how to set parental controls on the iPhone and how to lock down your iPad.)

Good to know: To monitor your kid's social media accounts, you'll need their passwords and usernames.

Good for: Younger kids. Once kids get older, they will either resist any attempt to limit their access or simply figure out a way to defeat what you've restricted.

→ **Home networking**. There are both hardware and software solutions to control your home network and your home WiFi. OpenDNS is a download that works with your existing router (the device that brings the Internet into your home) to filter Internet content. Circle Home and Torch are newer types of WiFi router controls that are designed to be easy for parents to operate. They include the ability to turn off the internet with a single click when used in conjunction with the app.

Good to know: Mucking around in your network and WiFi settings can be challenging.

Good for: All ages.

*This "Parental Controls" article is written by Caroline Knorr on 7/14/2016 and was originally published in COMMONSENSEMEDIA.org https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-parental-controls

Other things you might want to consider:

→ Using Pop up blockers (such as AdBlock)

→ Using tools to clean your device and optimize it, getting rid of junk files and improving the privacy of your PC (such as CCleaner)

→ Use a password to access every tablet, computer and phone.

Testimonials

I've found in the history of my laptop browser the search in Google "9 years old whores", and when talking with my 9 years old son Teo, he told me that he did that search with his 11 years old cousin. If you follow the links you'd be amazed :(

I now have parental filters and more control in all our devices, but I'm worried about what he has already seen or about how other computers and tables are set in her friends homes. – Pablo, Barcelona

Our daughter Liz is 10 years old. Her friend Emily happen to have very permissive parents, and she is in Facebook, Youtube, Instagram…. They push her to be very digital. Last week when she came from spending time at Emily's place, she told me that have watched weird videos of people naked. These are very difficult times, but I have faced the problem and started with my daughter a conversation about sex, Internet, consent…. I've also spoke to Emily's parents so that they are aware about her daughter's digital adventures. – Mary, London

My son is 11 years old, and he is lucky enough to have his own ipad. I picked it up the other day to have a nosey and I found naked pictures on it. I was very shocked, and I didn't want to look too closely, but it looked like pictures of a girl at their school. I don't know how old she was but they were clearly being passed around, and they'd ended up with my 11 year old. I tried to talk to him about it - he was very embarrassed at first, but afterwards he came back and said he felt upset about it. I explained that it is a criminal offense and that seemed to work. – Andrea, Wales

Some more useful links

So How Do We Talk About This?
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/garden/when-children-see-internet-pornography.html

Children as young as seven caught sexting at school, study reveals
https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/mar/25/children-young-seven-caught-sexting-school-study-reveals

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