

Porn and Your Kids

You don't want porn to be your kids' only source of information about sex

Despite the urban myth, sex education doesn't make kids have sex earlier. In fact all the evidence shows that the opposite is true - the more information kids get about sex, the later they wait to have sex [1]. Have a look at *Talk Soon Talk Often* (http://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Talk-soon-Talk-often) - a great online booklet for parents about how to talk to your kids about sex. Don't let pornography be the only source of information your kids have about sex – they need comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education at all ages.

Porn is the *Fast and the Furious* of sex education

You wouldn't want your kids to learn to drive from watching *Fast and the Furious* movies. Don't leave it up to porn to teach them about sex. It's entertainment, usually performed by "stunt sex performers". Porn usually does what looks good, not what feels good. Porn sex might last longer than real sex, or be more varied than real sex. Some porn performers have sex for literally hours, in uncomfortable positions. It's not usually meant to be an instruction book.

There's a big difference between pre-pubescent and adolescent exposure to porn

Research shows that if young children stumble across sexually explicit material online, seeing the material itself is less upsetting than their fear that you'll be angry at them for seeing it [2]. This is why *Talk Soon Talk Often* is so important. Keep the lines of communication open. The idea that your kids might talk to you about sex might seem weird – but that's because of problems with our culture. In countries like the Netherlands, for example, many young people

talk to their parents about sex and ask their advice [3]. That's a good thing. (And, not coincidentally, they also wait later to start having sex).

On the other hand, older children less often 'stumble across' porn. They're more likely to seek it out for purposes of information – particularly if they aren't getting the information they want anywhere else. It won't damage them – but you want to make sure that they're getting comprehensive sex education to give them a wider context.

Porn isn't great at teaching consent

The single most important thing to understand in sex education is consent – what consent is, how to ask for it, how to listen to it. Porn isn't generally great at teaching this. People in pornography don't usually stop and say 'I'd like to try X – is that OK?'. People in porn all seem to know telepathically what everyone wants, and they respond with vocal pleasure to everything their partners do. The real world isn't like that. Consent is a vital part of sex education. Make sure your kids understand that traditional romantic gender roles – women say no, men have to persuade them – are not sexy.

Porn teaches that sex can be fun and pleasurable

Porn says that sex can be fun and pleasurable, even if it's outside of marriage. It suggests that you can have sex for reasons other than love, or trying to have children. Think about how that fits into your value system. If you don't want your kids to grow up having sex outside of marriage be prepared to explain why. And when you're explaining it, try to avoid rigid gender stereotypes – don't tell them that women should remain virgins until marriage while men need to sow their wild oats: that's not good sex education. That's just old-fashioned sexism.

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1. UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an evidence-informed approach, revised edition*. 2018, UNESCO: Paris.
 2. Spišák, S., 'Everywhere they say that it's harmful but they don't say how, so I'm asking here': young people, pornography and negotiations with the notions of risk and harm. *Sex Education*, 2016. 16(2): p. 130-142.
 3. Brugman, M., S.L. Caron, and J. Rademakers, *Emerging Adolescent Sexuality: A Comparison of American and Dutch College Women's Experiences*. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2010. 22(1): p. 32-46.

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