

How to talk with your child about online porn

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with California mothers, parents, and caregivers to understand how parents are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives.

Sexually explicit material, including pornography, is pervasive online. A mother of three in Oakland expressed concern that “the internet is a big place” and she wished there was a pamphlet about how best to approach conversations about online porn with her children. Another mother of two boys from the Conejo Valley noted that it is sometimes difficult to control content streams that her children see. She noted it is possible to go from a video “about puppies or something silly followed by a woman with mostly exposed breasts” without warning.

The average age children typically see porn online, whether purposely or inadvertently, is 11 or 12, and approximately 70% of young people report seeing online porn. This means waiting to speak to your children until they are teenagers may miss the chance to have these important, if uncomfortable, conversations before they are exposed to sexually explicit media and age-inappropriate images and videos.

Tips from [Shafia Zaloom](#), health educator and author of [Sex, Teens & Everything in Between](#)

TIP 1: Prepare yourself ahead of time for the conversation to maintain your composure.

Let your child know that pornography is not representative of most people's sexual reality or healthy sexuality practices. It's not for educational purposes, but for the entertainment of some adults. If your child has seen sexually explicit material, ask if they have questions about what they have seen. Be straightforward with your answers and focus on how your child may be feeling by asking, “what feelings came up for you?” instead of talking explicitly about the porn itself.

TIP 2: Make space for conversations in the future.

Parents could say to a child, “if you see something online that seems inappropriate or makes you upset, please tell me or a trusted adult. You may come across something online that you didn't mean to find.” Help a child understand it is not their fault.

TIP 3: Acknowledge it is normal to be curious.

Many kids are understandably curious about sex and may look to porn as a resource to learn more about it. A parent may prefer to set the tone that you can be the “askable” parent so that your children feel comfortable asking you questions about sexuality. Provide alternative resources through medically accurate and credible [books](#) and websites. Scaffold conversations about sex and porn over time depending on the age of the child. Validate your child's curiosity and make sure to speak in ways that don't create shame.

TIP 4: Provide youth the tools to say no to a classmate who may try to show them explicit material.

Guide your child through a potentially uncomfortable situation by suggesting language to respond, “I'm not into that right now. Let's get back to what we were doing.”