



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



A family guide to talking about pornography

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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From understanding what's legal to protecting your child: knowledge is key

Pornography has existed for centuries. But what has changed significantly in the last 25 years or so is that the internet and, more recently, mobile devices have made accessing it easier than ever. Parents and carers will inevitably be concerned about the extent to which their child may be exposed to it, including extreme content.

This guide aims to give parents and carers a clear and balanced understanding of online pornography, specifically its legal aspects and how to put preventative measures in place, along with advice on how to discuss it with your child.

Is the internet driving pornography?

From printed material and photography, to film, video and websites, pornography takes many different forms. Fast internet connections mean pornography is readily available across the world. Research highlights that the ready availability of online pornography and the potential for children and young people to see it is a worry for many parents and carers.

What is and isn't allowed?

Generally speaking, the law targets producers of pornography rather than consumers. So in the UK, it's currently legal for adults to watch and buy it. Below that age it's not illegal to view pornographic material unintentionally, e.g. via pop-ups.

It is illegal however:

- **to possess or distribute 'extreme' pornography.** [The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008](#) defines what this is
- **for UK-made video on demand to show sex acts** banned by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in DVDs sold in sex shops (this law does not apply to companies based outside the UK)
- **for an adult to show pornography to a child or young person under 18** or allow them to watch it
- **to take, possess or distribute/share sexual imagery of anyone under the age of 18**, even if they're over 16 and consent to it. This is classed as child-abuse pictures – including computer-generated imagery.

Can viewing pornography harm children's health?

Research commissioned by the BBFC in October 2019 concluded that children and young people are watching and stumbling across pornography from an early age – in some cases as young as seven or eight. The majority of young people's first time watching pornography was accidental, with 62% of 11 to 13-year-olds who had seen pornography reporting that they stumbled across it unintentionally. Children described feeling “grossed out” and “confused”, particularly those who had seen pornography when they were under the age of 10.

[Research conducted by Internet Matters](#) highlighted parents and carers concerns about online pornography, specifically:

- a fear that children would develop a distorted view of healthy sex and relationships
- due to the poor portrayal of women, they would be more likely to objectify women and use violence
- it may lead to a poor body image and self-esteem as they may compare themselves with the actors.

In most instances, try to act calmly if you discover that your child has viewed pornography.

How to deal with the reality of your child watching pornography

In 2016, research carried out on behalf of the NSPCC and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) by Middlesex University found that nearly half of 11 to 16-year-olds had seen pornography online, and they were as likely to have viewed it accidentally as they were to have actively searched for it.

In one month (October 2017) alone, 1.4 million children in the UK visited a pornographic website.

There are trusted and reputable UK websites that provide useful, constructive information for teenagers and young people about sex, love and relationships. Talking with your child is the key. You may find it helpful to do so in the third person ('people might...some people do...') which can help de-personalise the conversation but still allow you both to talk about pornography.

What can I do to stop my child viewing pornography?

There are various things that can make it more difficult for your child to access pornography. These include:

- setting parental controls on your home devices
- using network level filters and parental controls provided by your home and mobile broadband provider
- age-verification mechanism that the Government is proposing for over 18s.

Be careful in your approach, though, or you may risk achieving the opposite result. And they'll be reluctant to engage in any conversations about pornography or other aspects of sex and relationships, conversations which could support their healthy natural development and curiosity.

Have the conversation: five starter tactics

Young people tell researchers that they want to be able to talk to adults – including parents and carers – without being judged or being told that whatever they're doing must be harmful and damaging. So it's worth making a start by:

- **discussing what constitutes a normal, loving and fulfilling relationship.** From consent and gender equalities through to treating your partner with mutual respect
- **talking in the third person.** Ask in general terms if 'young people' or 'their friends' access inappropriate content. Be interested in what they have to say, without abandoning your own values
- **having conversations about privacy and safety online.** Finding inappropriate images or media online when searching for celebrities and TV characters, and not meeting strangers. With older teens, ensure they are aware of the dangers of malware (harmful software, e.g. computer virus, hidden in a program or file) that may be shared through pornography sites
- **questioning 'unrealistic' media images of men and women.** Due to the prevalence of airbrushing and social media filters, not everything is as it might appear. Challenge the pressure for children to conform to social stereotypes
- **debating the ethics of industries.** From fast food and fashion to pornography, campaigns exist to make video-streaming services such as YouTube pay fairly for music and other creative content.

For more resources and information about online pornography visit:

Online Safety zone on Hwb

[Information about online safety issues, hints tips and advice](#)

Public Health Wales

[Information about sexual health](#)

Internet Matters

[Support for enabling and managing parental controls](#)