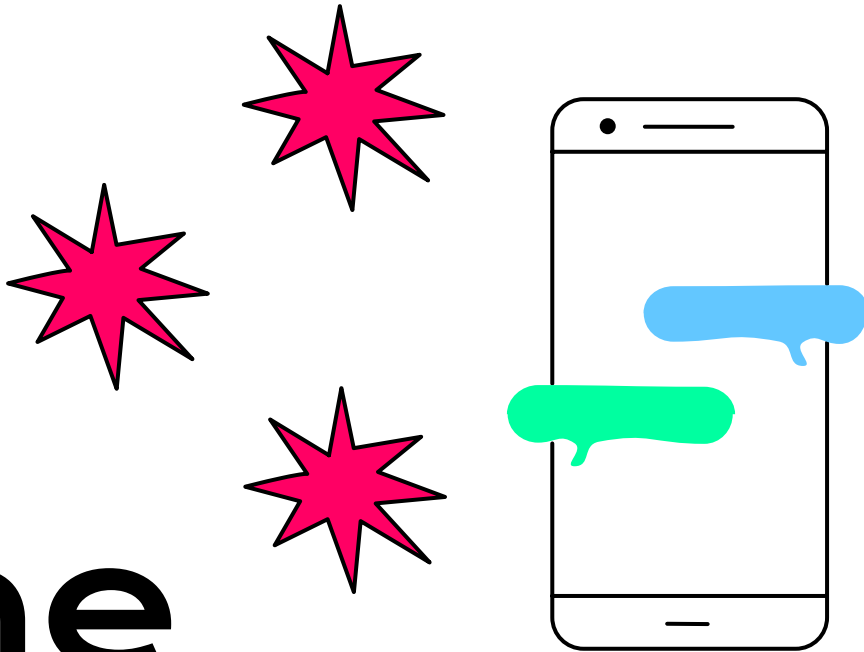


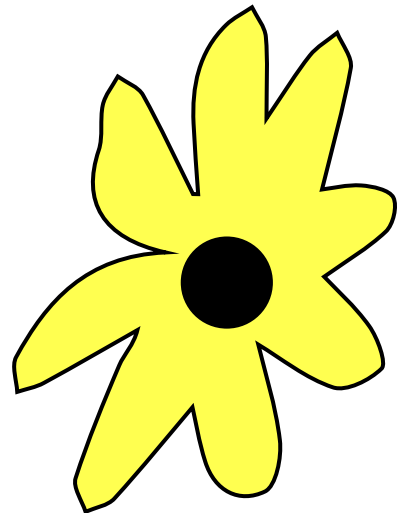
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The Conversation Guide

A guide to talking about porn
with your 8 to 11-year-old

The **porn** conversation
+not your average sex ed



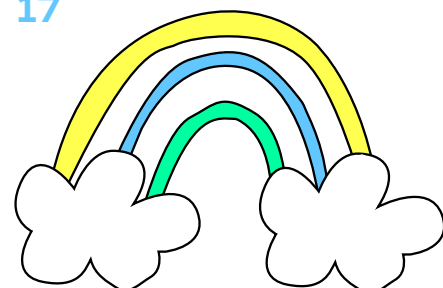
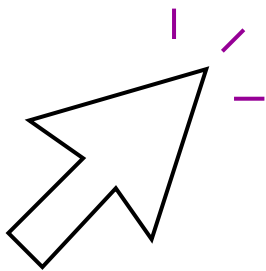


The Porn Conversation is a non-profit project created by mother, ethical porn film director, and activist **Erika Lust** along with her partner **Pablo Dobner**. The Porn Conversation offers free and easily accessible tools for families and educators to talk to young people about sex-beginning with the topic of porn literacy.

The educational materials were authored in collaboration with Sexologist **Avril Louise Clarke** and Dr. **Bianca I Laureano**.

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The Conversation Guide

A GUIDE TO TALKING ABOUT PORN WITH YOUR 8 TO 11-YEAR-OLD

What is The Porn Conversation?

'The talk' is known as that one awkward conversation that you have with your child that will most likely never be brought up again. [The Porn Conversation](#) believes in education through continued conversation - beginning with the topic of porn.

By shedding light on the highly controversial debate on **free online porn** and today's online sex culture, we are campaigning for a more educated and alert generation, who are prepared and ready to make better choices about their sexual health; driven by knowledge, and not by fear or shame. [The Porn Conversation](#) is guided by you, the parent, so you can adjust the script to align with your family's values and principles. We understand that porn isn't the easiest topic to speak to your child about, so we created this guide to help parents and trusted adults approach this subject in a meaningful way.

Why have The Porn Conversation?

From an early age, children are regularly exposed to sexualised images. Providing age-appropriate comprehensive sex education for young people is fundamental for their development, yet it is absent in many school curricula. Although most parents agree that sex education is necessary (Kantor et al., 2017), they often fail to talk about **sex** at home. It's only natural that young people are curious about sex. When young people don't have access to age-appropriate and evidence-informed sex education from trusted sources and adults, they are left to learn about sex through what they find online, which in many cases, is porn. Whether it's an advertisement, a video game, a social media post, a pop-up, or porn, it's nearly impossible to protect your child from ever seeing sexual content in their adolescence. According to several long term research studies, adolescent **pornography** viewing predicts a variety of sexual experiences that range from violence (Rostad et al., 2019) to the **objectification** of women (Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2017).

Comprehensive age-appropriate sex education has many positive impacts, including increasing a young person's knowledge and improving their attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health and behaviours (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018). The reality is, a large number of young people are streaming porn from the numerous free online porn websites, such as YouPorn, RedTube, and the ever-popular Pornhub and the probability that it is their first exposure to sex is high.

Having [The Porn Conversation](#) encourages your child to critically think about the content they consume – and to question its message! To accomplish this, [The Porn Conversation](#) Guide uses a **porn literacy** framework to guide these discussions.

What is porn literacy?

Porn literacy is a type of **media literacy**. Media literacy is a decades-long educational framework and approach to help us become more critical consumers of the **media** we are exposed to (Share et al., 2010).

The five key questions of media literacy are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

The five core concepts of media literacy are:

1. All media messages are 'constructed.'
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organised to gain profit and/or power.

Porn literacy works in a similar way to media literacy by using the same core concepts and questions of media literacy as a framework from which young people can critically examine and make sense of the sexual images they see (Hutchings, 2017). It is used to encourage an understanding that porn as a form of sexualised media, whether consumed intentionally or not, has a message. The main goal of porn literacy is for individuals to critique porn and construct their own meanings from the content (Defur, 2014). As one of the primary concerns regarding youth pornography engagement is the impact it can have on forming sexual expectations, developing porn literacy skills could assist young people to anticipate sexual outcomes that are realistic for their lives instead of the fantasy that porn creates.

The Porn Conversation guides parents and trusted adults on how to begin talking to their child about porn, and how to examine the harmful messages free online porn promotes, such as the unrealistic expectations of sex, objectification of girls and women, racism, violence, and the **sexualisation** of children and teens.

The issue with free online porn

Free online porn is defined as the most easily accessible pornography on the internet. It is found on websites where you can access unlimited amounts of content for free. Children and adolescents are led to believe the made up stories porn creates are real. Most pornography found online is violently **misogynistic**, and leaves people of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations with a misunderstanding of what sex

and respectful relationships look like - which furthers the **rape culture** we live in. Having **The Porn Conversation** promotes **consent culture**, which is a respectful and nonviolent approach to ending rape culture, teaching young people that only they control their own bodies, and that any interaction with another person should always be received with their **consent**. As parents and trusted adults of young people, it's within our best interest to be aware of the online sex culture of today and provide young people with the information they need to lead full lives - both offline and online.

Your 8-11 year old child in the digital age

By the age of 8, your child will have shown curiosity about their genitals, awareness of gender and racial stereotypes, and may have asked "where do babies come from?". Research says the average age a child first encounters porn is 11. **Your child may have already been exposed to pornography.** Puberty is on the way which means preparing yourself for a lot of physical and emotional changes that may be confusing for both you and your child. Puberty is different for everyone. By beginning these conversations early you and your child will build trust, gain knowledge, and prepare for what's to come. By the age of 8, children are interested in learning what is myth and what is fact when it comes to what they're hearing around sex (Sellers, 2021). Children of this age group are naturally curious about growing up; it's supportive to show interest in their thoughts and feelings by providing them with the correct information they can use to develop confidently. Your child wants you to talk to them about these topics.

Once you get talking, they might have some questions - more than you could imagine! For this age group they may not need specific details, but some may be helpful. Children need details so that they don't get too scared when they experience these changes themselves and remain excited about their growing bodies. For example, sharing how their body hair will begin to grow is helpful and telling them which parts of their body they may notice first is helpful guidance too (e.g., facial hair, pubic hair, under arms, etc.). [See scripts on more topics here.](#)

It's helpful to decide how your family will have these conversations. Ask yourself:

- Will you be having **The Porn Conversation** one-on-one or as a family?
- Are there some topics you would prefer to discuss with your child one-on-one versus as a family?
- How do you wish other trusted adults (grandparents, co-parents, aunts, etc.) communicate about the topic of sex and porn with your child? Or do you not want them to speak about these topics with your child?
- What values would you like to promote as a family?
- How can you as a family use teachable moments throughout your child's life to promote your family's values?

Initiating The Porn Conversation

First of all, it is okay to feel nervous! This can be an awkward moment for both you and your child. Remember that your child will follow your lead- if you feel too embarrassed to talk comfortably about sex, they will feel equally as uncomfortable. The goal here is to make more common conversations around topics of sex and porn, not to shame or embarrass your child. Some talking points to start off can include:

“I want to talk to you about something really important that we will talk about a bunch of times but starting could be weird...”

“I know you may see porn at some point, it’s practically unavoidable! So here’s what you need to know about it...”

“Could you put your phone/tablet down for a moment? I want to talk to you about some of the images or videos you may have seen online...”

You might agree that having a conversation with your child is not always the easiest thing to do, so we completely understand that it’s helpful to have some support initiating **The Porn Conversation**. Although it may not seem like it, teens report that their parents have the greatest influence over their decisions about sex—more than friends, siblings, or the media (Albert, 2012). Start the conversation out slow with supportive reminders such as, “I love you no matter what may be happening.” or “I had a hard day today and I always have time for you.”

When you initiate **The Porn Conversation**, not only are you supporting your child’s lifelong sexual and reproductive health and well-being, but they are more likely to come to you for advice again in the future. As parents and trusted adults, your child’s health and safety come first - which should include their sexual health and online activity too.

Tips for having The Porn Conversation

It’s never too late or too soon to have The Porn Conversation

*Having **The Porn Conversation** is better than having no conversation at all!*

Don’t panic, stay calm

Think about what will help you stay calm: take deep breaths, drink water, make sure you are in comfortable clothing, create a relaxing and private space. Be honest and say, “I’m going to take a deep breath before I answer you.”

Keep the tone of the conversation casual

Don’t use a tone that may suggest your child is in trouble.

See your child as the teen they are soon becoming

Remember that you want your child to feel comfortable with coming to you when they are a teen.

Listen more than you talk

When listening to your child talk, be aware of any negative body language like crossing your arms or looking at your phone.

Be clear that it is a judgment-free conversation

Tell your child, “I am not here to judge you for being curious. I am here to support you.”

Build trust

Let your child know this is a private conversation that won't be shared with others without their consent. Tell them, “I won't share what we spoke about today with anyone else unless you tell me that it's okay with you.”

Don't have [The Porn Conversation](#) just once

Having continued conversations throughout your child's life shows continued support.

Don't make assumptions

For example, don't assume your child has not seen porn.

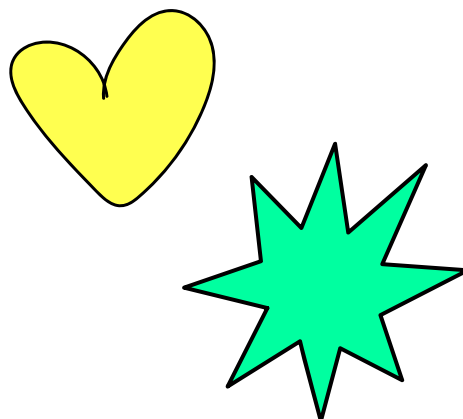
Don't be afraid to ask questions about their own thoughts and opinions

Ask your child, “What do you think about that?” throughout the conversation to keep the conversation two-sided.

Whether you enjoy, are indifferent, or detest porn, your child will be exposed to it at some point. Ignoring it only adds confusion to your child's sexual future. No matter what your values are, you must explain how most porn is unrealistic, and not an ideal guide to understanding sex.

Many parents find it easier to start the conversation when they are in person, but not face-to-face. For example, while you are driving your child to basketball practice or taking a walk through a park. When initiating, don't sit your child down for “a chat”, you don't want to make them feel like they're in trouble. It may never feel like the perfect time to have ‘the talk’, so just go for it! Remember that the worst conversation a parent or trusted adult can have about these topics is no conversation at all.

Through this conversation guide, you can choose different approaches and talking points to help you navigate [The Porn Conversation](#). After all, you know your child the best!



Avoid saying

Avoid using shaming statements that can make your child feel embarrassed or uncomfortable to open up to you about sexual topics in the future:

“Who showed it to you?”

“Where did you find it?”

“Why are you watching it?”

“Porn is bad/evil/dirty.” (negativity won’t help)

“Can you tell me what you already know about that?”

“You shouldn’t be watching this.”

“What do you think you are doing?”

“What kind of family do you think this is?”

“I can’t believe you did that.”

What should my opening line be?

If you are unsure if your child has seen porn yet...

“I know you may see porn at some point, it’s practically unavoidable! So here’s what you need to know about it.”

“You will come across some pornographic images or videos online someday, and I want to talk about what you might see.”

“When I say the word ‘porn’ what do you think of?”

“I’ve got some questions for you about the internet. Sometimes I get pop-ups of naked people and people having sex. What do you do when that happens to you?”

So you’ve got the proof they’ve seen porn...

“Nothing is wrong, but I want to let you know about free online porn.”

“Hey, I noticed that you have come across some adult websites. I want to talk to you about the content you are seeing.”

“Could you put your phone/tablet down for a moment? I want to talk to you about some of the images or videos you may have seen online.”

“Have you noticed how much sexual content is on the internet? You must know that most of what you see is not exactly like that in real life. Just like how in superhero movies, the characters have superpowers like the ability to fly - but humans don’t in real life!”

How do I respond?

If your child is willing to talk

“I understand that you may feel a little uncomfortable, and I am thankful you are open to talking about this with me.”

“Being able to talk about this is important. It is completely natural to talk about sex.”

“You’re smart, and I don’t want you to think what you’re seeing is necessarily how you should act or look.”

“I wasn’t able to have these conversations with my parents growing up, so I really appreciate being able to talk to you.”

“I am so proud of how curious you are!”

“Thank you for speaking with me, I want you to know that you can always talk to me about anything.”

“There is a lot of pressure out there to be different than who you really are, but it’s important for you to know that you never have to be anyone but you!”

If your child asks you a question you don’t know the answer to

“I am not sure! How about we look that up together.”

“I’m also curious to learn more about that. Let’s look for some resources on that.”

If your child is unwilling to talk

“That’s okay, I understand this isn’t the most comfortable conversation to have with me. You can always come to me when you feel ready.”

“I hear you. This isn’t an easy topic to discuss. I am always available to talk.”

“I want you to know that I am on your team. Your health and safety is my number one priority.”

“If you are ever curious about something I am a person you can talk to at any time.”

“I know this may be awkward for you. If you ever have any questions or need help, I am here for you.”

“I want you to know that I will never judge you for who you are and you can always come to me if you want to talk.”

“Let’s pause this conversation for now. I want to come back to it in the future when we both are ready to share more.”

Non-verbal ways to communicate with your child

It’s also possible to have **The Porn Conversation** through non-verbal communication techniques. Some ideas include:

- Sending a text.
- Leaving a note.
- Sending an email.
- Creating a question box in your home your child can use to ask handwritten questions.

Let's get critical

A major part of **The Porn Conversation** is encouraging your child to be critical about what they are consuming online. Through pop-ups, their own curiosity, a typo, or friends - they'll likely be exposed to pornographic content. The source of online sex culture is all-encompassing. From browsing the typical free online porn sites to scrolling through social media, this often results in seeing the kind of images that encourage negative, disrespectful or violent behaviour; or leading your child to believe they have to look or act a certain way to be attractive.

Through encouraging your child to critique what they consume online they are able to make smarter decisions about sex and relationships. Critical thinking will encourage your child to question their relationship with porn and how the messages they receive from it might shape the way they feel. Offering this intentional critical lens allows them to be mindful of their porn consumption and to grow as confident and secure individuals. Remember, if you don't **shame** them, it encourages them to open up to you more in the future.

An important part about The Porn Conversation is helping young people make sense of the sexually explicit media to which they are exposed to.

"What did you see?"

"What did you think about it?"

"How did you feel about it?"

"What did you understand?" / "What didn't you understand?"

"Do you have any questions about anything you saw?"

"What about it surprised you?"

"If you saw something and it made you feel uncomfortable, what was it?"

"Did you see something you liked but are confused by liking it?"

"What do you think is appropriate and inappropriate touch?"

"When someone likes someone, how do you think they could express their feelings?"

Reminding your child what they see in free online porn is not the whole picture. Discussing what happens off camera helps separate the fact versus the fantasy of sex seen in porn.

Connecting this part of **The Porn Conversation** to a show or film that your child enjoys helps your child understand the difference between fantasy and reality in media they can relate to.

- The people you see in porn are actors. They negotiate contracts and get paid for what they do. This is their job and they are not like this when they are not working.
- They never show the conversations around consent that occur between actors before, during and after scenes.

- There are filming techniques like lighting, directing, and camera angles that create each video/ad/etc.
- Editing is used to make scenes shorter and don't show foreplay or communication between the performers.
- Performers shoot scenes throughout a period of time that allows for bathroom, water and food breaks.
- We don't see the awkward scenes or bloopers that will be edited out of the final cut.

Be Proactive!

There are many programs you can use to make sure your child is navigating the internet safely. By monitoring your child's devices, you can keep an eye on the content that is being seen and even restrict what they can access. It is impossible to guard them against ever seeing porn or sexually explicit content, yet taking proactive steps in your home is always an option.

Let your child know about the steps you are taking to protect them:

"We are using parental control on the TV and internet which means we will know if you come across or try to access certain content. It is not to catch you, it's to protect you, and we can discuss when it's time to change these settings."

- **Turn on Google Safe Search** when Google is set as the browser's default search engine. This allows you to filter explicit search results.
- **Use 'Screen Time' settings** for Apple and Android devices to set what content is allowed and limited for each device.
- **Talk to your internet service provider.** Depending on the company, there may be free or paid filters to add.
- **Install parental controls.** There are many companies that provide website blockers, screen filters, and social media monitoring.

Let's keep The Porn Conversation going

Free online pornography often promotes harmful and demoralising behaviour that can affect the health and safety of our children. When encouraging your child to remain critical about online media, it's important to explore the following messages they might be receiving:

- Sex
- Body image
- Consent and Boundaries
- Objectification of girls and women
- Racism
- Violence*
- Sexualisation of children and teens
- Online safety

* Content warning:
This theme contains content that may be triggering for people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse.

How to talk about...

Sex

“Sexual attraction is a big part of being human. This means being able to one day express your emotional and physical attractions to others through consensual touch and maybe even having sex.”

“Being curious about sex is totally common and it is something you must be comfortable to talk about.”

“When you begin to like someone it can be really exciting! It can also be very confusing.”

“You don’t have to like someone or something just because of your gender.”

Body Image

“As you get older, your body will go through many changes. You will grow taller, gain weight, and grow body hair. Puberty happens to everyone at the right time for them. It could be sooner or later than your friends!”

“Bodies come in all shapes and sizes! Never compare yourself to others, there is only one you.”

“You may feel pressure to look or act different than who you are, especially when what you see online is not what you look like. There are many valuable things about you that go beyond how you look.”

“Sometimes you may be treated a particular way because of how you look. In this family we treat people well because they are human beings.”

“The body types you see in mainstream media, social media, and in porn is only one type of way to have a body.”

“Online content uses filters, editing, lighting and heavy makeup to make people look like they do.”

“The bodies you see online are often of people who are not disabled. Why do you think that is?”

Consent and Boundaries

“Consent is when you give someone you love and trust permission to touch you. When someone touches you in any way, it must always be with your consent.”

“The words “no” and “stop” must always be honoured, even in our family. When someone uses those words, you must immediately stop what you are doing, including us, your parents.”

“Giving someone consent is more than saying “yes”. You must tell the other person exactly what is and isn’t allowed.”

“Think about whether or not you feel good and safe with some people. If you don’t feel good or safe you can always come to me to talk about it.”

“Be specific. For example you can tell someone, “You can hold my hand, but you can’t kiss me” or “I don’t like it when you hug me, please don’t do it anymore.”

“If you want to show affectionate touch to someone it’s important that you also ask for consent. This can be as simple as asking them, “Is it okay if I hug you?”

“Consent can also be nonverbal! If you look uncomfortable with something, someone should know to leave you alone by seeing your face or body language. If they don’t notice that you are uncomfortable, tell them to stop.”

“No one should ever make you feel bad, guilty, or pressured to do anything.”

“You will never be in trouble for telling me the truth.”

“Sometimes people might try to pressure you to do or see something you don’t want to do or see. They may offer you a present or threaten to tell on you. Don’t give in to anything you do not want to do - no matter what the other person says.”

The Objectification of Girls & Women

“You may notice there are different expectations for people based on gender. What do you think about that?”

“You might notice that girls are expected to behave in certain ways that boys aren’t! Girls are taught to accept being treated differently than boys and that is unfair.”

“All people have feelings and emotions. Depending on how they are treated, they can feel a range of those emotions.”

“Girls are often called bad names online and in the real world. These words are used to hurt people and make them think they are not worthy of respect.”

“Girls and women may often feel pressured to act “polite” to people harming them. A person’s limits and emotions are to be respected”

“Boys are taught to be tough and girls are taught to accept being teased. You don’t have to laugh at a joke that is disrespectful because others think it is funny.”

“You should never feel unsafe just because you are a girl. You can always come to me or another trusted adult if you’re experiencing insults, teasing, or touching that doesn’t feel right.”

Racism

“It’s perfectly okay to notice skin colour and talk about race. Let’s talk about what these differences mean and don’t mean.”

“Remember that each of us has lots of identities inside and outside our bodies (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, ability, etc.) and that we also don’t always know another person’s identities and experiences from just looking at them.”

“Diversity is a strength. Having friends and crushes on people with different experiences, backgrounds, and cultures is great and we encourage you to build those relationships each day!”

“In society, we often see and are told to believe lighter skin people are better. This is not true.”

Violence*

“Sex is a very adult decision, but it isn’t supposed to be something to bring a person bad feelings. It’s about pleasure and trust.”

“Relationships are supposed to be about respect, not about being forced to do anything that you don’t want to do.”

“Lots of sexual images and videos online can be extremely violent, especially towards women.”

“Forcing anyone to do something they don’t want to, even by a trusted friend or adult, is not okay. I want you to know you can always come to me and tell me if anyone ever hurts you or your feelings.”

Sexualisation of Children and Teens

“Children and teens are sometimes directed to behave or dress like adults in the media.”

“You may notice that some of your peers may choose to look older than they are to gain gifts or attention.”

“Some people, especially girls, believe they are expected to dress and pose online much differently than boys to appear more attractive.”

“In society, especially online, people offer gifts and access to people based on how they look and behave. In this family, you do not have to please anyone by being anything but yourself.”

Online Safety

“There is a lot of content on the internet that can make you feel confused or scared. You can always come to me if you see something you disagree with.”

“I cannot protect you from everything you see online, but knowing how you can be safe online and to question what you see is a top priority.”

“Your privacy is important to me, and there are certain things you can not access from your devices until you are older.”

“Sometimes people use the internet to hurt the feelings of others. If this is happening to you or someone you know, let me know so we can talk about it.”

“When we talk to people online, it is possible they aren’t who they say they are. Never give anyone your personal information.”

“Sharing naked pictures of yourself or others is against the law and can get you in lots of trouble.”

“That site seemed to make you feel uncomfortable. It’s okay to tell your friends that you’d rather not see things like that.”

***Content warning:** This theme contains content that may be triggering for people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse

Going beyond the first conversation

When advocating for the sexual health of your child, it's critical to discuss topics beyond porn. As parents it is crucial to remain and maintain communication with your child to support their decisions. [Educating yourself](#) before having [The Porn Conversation](#) is beneficial in providing your child with the most comprehensive sex education.

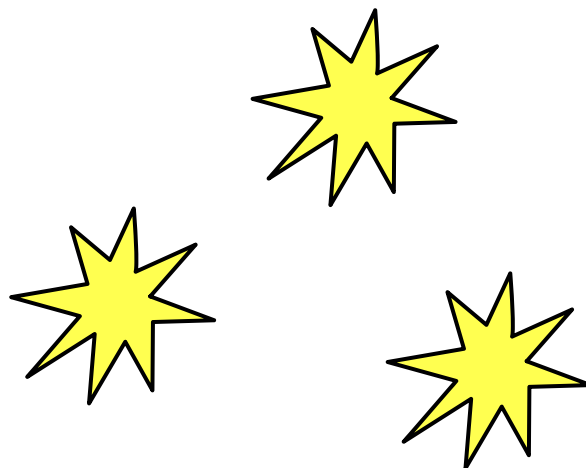
For lessons and activities, check out our [8 to 11-year-old Curriculum](#) for more on:

- [Anatomy & Physiology](#)
- [Puberty & Adolescent Sexual Development](#)
- [Gender Identity & Expression](#)
- [Sexual Orientation & Identity](#)
- [Sexual Health](#)
- [Consent & Respectful Relationships](#)
- [Media Literacy](#)
- [Interpersonal Violence*](#)

***Content warning:**

This topic may be triggering for people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse.

For a comprehensive list of sites and apps for families to be aware of, visit [Erika's no-go list](#)



The Glossary

Consent

When someone freely chooses to agree to do something.

Rape culture

An environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is standardised and excused in the media.

Objectification

The action of degrading someone to the status of an object.

Sexualisation

When a person is sexually objectified by others to the point that their value is based solely on their perceived sexual appeal or behaviour.

Consent culture

The creation of an environment that promotes the use of consent throughout your life in all relationships.

Media

The many different forms of communication that carry a message (e.g., social media, TV, advertisements, porn, etc.).

Media literacy

The ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms.

Porn literacy

A framework based on media literacy used for critical examination of porn as a type of media.

Free online porn

The most easily accessible pornography on the internet.

Misogynistic

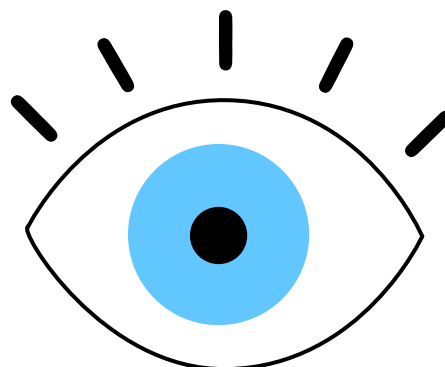
The hatred or discrimination against women or girls.

Pornography

Printed or online media containing the explicit description or display of naked bodies and/or sexual behaviour. Otherwise known as “porn”.

Sex

A consensual activity that adults, and some older teens who feel ready, may do. Sometimes just for pleasure and sometimes to make babies.



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