

My child exhibits risk taking behaviour by accessing adult pornography

What are we talking about?

By adult pornography we mean sexually explicit images and videos featuring consenting adults aged 18 or over.

Websites from around the world operate under different rules and regulations and with varying degrees of access. For example, some UK sites require age verifications before you can access material. However, many websites which operate abroad do not; leaving doors wide open for young people to find all sorts of legal pornography (soft through to hard) and in some cases illegal pornography.



What you need to know

Coming to terms with what has happened

It is often a shock to parents when they realise their child has accessed adult pornography

You may be worried about what your child may have seen, the effect it may have on them and how you will talk to them about this. You may feel you are being forced to explain sexual matters a lot earlier in your child's development than you thought you would.

If your child is very young and has stumbled across pornography or been shown something by a friend they may be upset by what they saw. It is likely your child is feeling confused and they may have lots of questions. It is difficult to give a 'one size fits all' approach here, as each child is different and will be at different stages in their development. Nevertheless, it is important to remain calm and talk to your child.

If your child is purposefully accessing pornography it is important to remember that many young people access adult pornography at some point and for most, it is unlikely to have an adverse impact upon their development in the long term.

However, given the increasing ease with which more extreme images can now be accessed, parents need to be extra vigilant in trying to reduce their child's exposure to such material.

When coming to terms with this behaviour, it will be important that you:

- talk to your child about what they have seen
- let them know why you are concerned about their access to such material at their age
- try not to make them feel bad or ashamed about what has happened. This will encourage them to talk to you if they have problems in the future.

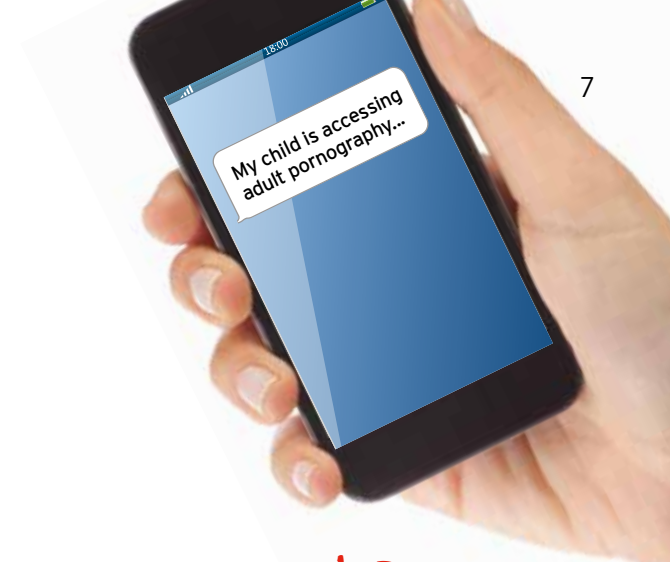
How safe is my child?

There are many factors to consider such as the age and vulnerability of individual children; how much time they have spent looking at pornography and the nature of the material they have viewed as well as whether they have been influenced by others or if the activity took place in the presence of older children/friends.

Having some initial conversations with your child will help you figure out the extent of what has been happening.

If you want to talk to someone about this, you can call the Stop it Now! Helpline on 0808 1000 900 for confidential advice.

Do remember that many young people access adult pornography at some point and for most, it is unlikely to have an adverse impact upon their development in the long term.



Golden Rule:
If it's illegal offline
it's illegal online



Telling others, if, when and how

Children and young people will often be very embarrassed when a parent or carer discovers they have been viewing pornography.

It is important not to react in a way that results in the child experiencing extreme feelings of shame. This includes thinking carefully about who needs to know and why. For example, other adults who may be responsible for supervising the child or young person may need to be made aware, but extended members of the family who have no regular direct contact with your child may not need to know.

Try to be as open as you can with your child about who you plan to talk to and why. A key message should be that you have a responsibility to try and keep them safe and that involving other adults is a helpful way of doing this.

The Law

In the UK, adult video on demand websites are regulated by the Authority for Television On Demand (ATVOD) and sites must keep explicit sexual images out of reach of under 18s. However, the internet is global and websites operated from other countries, many of which have no regulation, can be easily accessed from the UK.

There are a number of legal acts which cover pornographic material. The law applies to the online environment in the same way as it would apply to any other type of media.

What is illegal offline is illegal online.



Extreme material

In the UK possessing extreme pornographic material – such as images depicting rape – is illegal under Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

Indecent images of children

Making, distribution and possession of indecent images of children is illegal under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 and section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. This means sexual images and videos of anyone under 18.

Obscene publications

The Obscene Publications Act 1959 covers material which depicts extreme scenarios ranging from sexual acts with animals to realistic portrayals of rape.



Discussion topics

Talking about pornography with your child can be daunting and the conversation will differ with children of different ages. Here are some suggested areas for discussion with your child if they have been accessing pornography:

Impact on future relationships:

You can talk to your child about how the use of pornography can lead to unrealistic expectations of sex and relationships in the future. Perhaps ask them to describe how they would like relationships to be, encouraging them to think about love and trust. You could then consider with them whether love and trust is what they see happening in pornography.

Pre-occupation:

You could talk about the time they spend looking at pornography and how this may have been impacting on other day-to-day activities. You could talk about what they could have been doing instead of looking at pornography.

Consider posing the question: How many young people do you think would have chosen to pursue a career in the pornography industry when they were at school?

This prompt will help you discuss how many vulnerable people end up in the industry.

The legal dangers of pornography:

It would be a good idea to talk about the risk of looking at illegal images of children or young people. It's important your child understands that it is illegal to view or be in possession of sexual images of people under the age of 18 and if they do so they could end up in trouble with the police. If your child is under 18 it is also illegal for them to send sexually explicit images of themselves to others.

'Porn on the Brain' TV documentary:

You could search the Internet for Channel 4's 'Porn on the Brain'. As part of Channel 4's Campaign for Real Sex, *Porn on the Brain* is an authored film by journalist Martin Daubney, who walked away from his position as editor of lad's magazine *Loaded* after becoming a father. Confused by alarming headlines and driven by the knowledge that his boy would soon reach the age at which most children first see porn (10 years), Martin explores the effects of porn on children and young people. Once you have watched this yourself, consider whether it is suitable for your child. This will depend on their age, stage of development and their use of pornography.

Healthy relationships, consent, compliance and coercion

Viewing pornography can result in young people developing distorted and/or unhealthy attitudes towards sex and relationships. It can also negatively impact on self-image with young people questioning why their bodies do not look like those they see in pornography.

Adolescent girls may have mixed feelings about pornography, and to feel pressure to look and behave like the women involved in pornography.

Young people, both male and female, may develop unhelpful sexual arousal patterns and unrealistic expectations of sex.

Young people are also increasingly more technologically proficient and there is the danger that access to adult pornography could lead to additional risk taking/harmful behaviours on the Internet.

Specific resources that may help

Talking to children about porn:

<http://familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/sex/porn>

Internet Matters www.internetmatters.org

An internet portal which aims to direct parents and carers to credible information on how to keep children safe online.

Reward Foundation www.rewardfoundation.org

Includes information on how to quit porn.

BISH UK www.bishuk.com

A guide to healthy sex and love for everyone over 14.

O2 and NSPCC <http://www.o2.co.uk/help/nsppcc>

Advice on how to keep children safe online

