



The Pornography Problem Plaguing Parents

Online Masterclass Summary by Dr Kristy Goodwin



1. Pornography Problem & Prevalence

Average age of first exposure is 11 years of age. Australian teachers and health professionals anecdotally report that the average age of first exposure is likely to be around 8 years of age.

Kids and teens can access pornography on any Internet-connected device (including smartphones, tablet devices, laptops, gaming consoles and smart TVs).

It's easier to access pornography than to avoid it.



IT'S ESTIMATED THAT ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PORNOGRAPHY SITES HAS **81 MILLION** DAILY VISITORS AND IN 2017 ALONE, IT'S ESTIMATED THAT **4 MILLION** PORNOGRAPHIC VIDEOS WERE UPLOADED ONLINE.¹



14% OF YOUNG PEOPLE WERE EXPERIENCING 'PIED'- PORN INDUCED ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION - CONDITIONED TO ONLINE STIMULATION AND CANNOT PERFORM OFF-SCREEN.²



1/5 INTERNET SEARCHES ON A MOBILE DEVICE ARE FOR PORNOGRAPHY.



1/3 10 YEAR OLD CHILDREN (IN ONE STUDY) HAD ACCIDENTALLY SEEN HARD-CORE PORNOGRAPHY ONLINE.³



88% OF PORNOGRAPHIC CONTENT INCLUDES AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR (TYPICALLY DIRECTED TOWARDS FEMALES).



MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ARE TREATING YOUNG FEMALES WITH ANAL AND GENITAL INJURIES ACQUIRED THROUGH PORNOGRAPHY IMITATION.

1. <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/pornhub-new-zealand> 2. Pizzol D, Bertoldo A, Foresta C. Adolescents and web porn: A new era of sexuality. International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health. 2016 May 1;28(2):pp. 169-73. 3. Quadara, A., El-Murr, A., & Latham, J. (2017). The effects of pornography on children and young people: An evidence scan. Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at <aifs.gov.au/publications/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people>. 4. Parker, I. The New norms IPPR Survey. Opinium Research. 2014.

Surprising places they're accessing pornography:

- // Grandparents' houses
- // Smart TVs
- // Sleepovers and playdates
- // Siblings' or parents' devices
- // School bus or train
- // Video games (e.g. Grand Theft Auto and Roblox)
- // Instagram search with emojis

2. Preventing Pornography Exposure



// Install Internet-filtering & parental controls on all Internet-connected devices- I personally use and recommend **The Family Zone**. This is particularly important for younger children (under 14 years) and for vulnerable children (i.e. kids with additional learning or emotional needs).



// Continual conversation- have age-appropriate and ongoing conversations with your kids and teens about sex and pornography. Short, sharp conversations work best. Ask open-ended questions and don't lecture. (See section below regarding Pornography Conversation Starters).



// Don't use screen-time as a punishment tool- your children won't come to you when they've encountered pornography if there's the threat of 'digital amputation'.



// Keep digital devices in public areas at home- discourage kids from using technology in bedrooms, bathrooms or other 'private places'. Remember, your child is unlikely to be watching pornography whilst they're laying on the lounge next to you.



// Do regular, intermittent screen audits with your child/teen- explain to your child/teen that your job as a parent/carer is to keep them safe and conducting a screen audit will help with this. "If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to hide." Over time, you will need to do these audits less frequently as trust is built over time.



// Establish a pornography plan- just as you'd teach your kids to keep safe at the beach, teach them how to stay safe online. Work with your child/teen to establish a simple plan regarding what they should do *when* they encounter pornography. e.g. turn it off, turn away (close your eyes), leave the room, tell a trusted adult, don't seek it out).

3. Tackling the Tricky Topic

SOME GENERAL TIPS FOR TACKLING ANY TRICKY TOPIC:

// Keep conversation short and sharp.

// Ask your child/teen if you can chat about an important, perhaps awkward topic (and allow them to say no and reschedule for another time).

// Use open-ended questions and avoid lecturing.

// Allow for silence- don't feel like you need to fill the 'white spaces' with other explanations. Kids need processing time.

// If you're nervous, use a script to help you, or use books, You Tube clips (not pornography scenes) as a conversation springboard.

// Pick your time wisely. Conversations late at night can be problematic because kids/teens are often tired and their emotional brain is switched on (their amygdala) and their frontal lobe (logical, thinking brain) which helps with impulse control, working memory is switched off.

// Find neutral territory- taking the dog for a walk, cooking together in the kitchen, driving in the car, going for a walk can be great opportunities for difficult conversations as you're side-by-side. Males and teenagers much prefer side-by-side than face-to-face conversations.

// If your child or teen asks you something you don't know the answer to, tell them that you'll find out for them. They'll appreciate your vulnerability.

// Reassure them that the conversation will be kept confidential and that they won't be reprimanded if they disclose anything. Kids and teens really need to feel secure and supported to have these conversations.

The following scripts are a guide only and are not intended to be prescriptive. Keeping the conversation natural, free-flowing and authentic is more important than 'getting it right'. You know your children and teens better than anyone, so follow your intuition and their lead to have these conversations.



5-8 year olds



Parents/carers are encouraged to start informally talking about pornography from around 5-6 years of age (obviously you know your child best, so this isn't a strict prescription). Start discussing 'public' and 'private' photos and videos (avoid the words 'good' and 'bad' as this can create unnecessary stigma). *Don't* show them photos or videos as examples. Explain that when they see private photos/videos that their body will tell their brain that something makes them feel unusual or uncomfortable and when this happens they should tell a trusted adult immediately. Remind them they won't be punished for reporting pornography. Have ongoing conversations about body awareness, safe touch and personal boundaries. Explain what sex and pornography are first, before their siblings, peers or other people share it with them, so they're armed with facts.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES-

Safe 4 Kids- I highly recommend Holly-ann's picture books and protective education programs

The Lighthouse Project- an incredible resource from New Zealand with a wealth of resources for parents

SUGGESTED SCRIPTS-

Sometimes on the Internet you might see private pictures or videos. These photos or videos may include nude people and they may make you feel uncomfortable or unusual. You might get some strange feelings in your body, or you may feel different or uncomfortable. Have you ever felt like this before (allow them to articulate those feelings and explain the situations where they've felt like that)? Do you think you may have seen anything on the iPad/laptop/TV that makes you feel like this? What do you think is the best thing to do when this happens?

You don't need to talk about the mechanics of sex at this age, if you feel your child isn't ready, or if they haven't asked yet. Kids at this age may still lack developmental readiness to learn about sex. However, some kids are starting to ask about sex and reproduction at this age, so it's best that you have direct and honest conversations about sex if they do ask.



9-12 year olds (tweens)



It's at this age range when kids are very likely to be first exposed to pornography, so remember, if you don't have these conversations with your kids and arm them with the facts, then they'll consume information from other people and online sources (which are likely to be unreliable or inappropriate).

SUGGESTED SCRIPTS-

Remember to ask for their consent to have a discussion about an important, but perhaps uncomfortable topic. If they agree, start with... *I've been reading lately that kids who are a similar age to you are accessing pornography. Have you heard that word before?* If not, explain in very precise language that pornography can be accessed on the Internet and it can include quite photos and/or movies of people having sex or doing sexual things.

Or you could start the conversation in a non-confrontational way by telling a story that they can relate to or a personal anecdote. For example, *I was Googling some information for work the other day and a pop-up video with nude people appeared in my browser. I felt really awkward and closed the laptop lid straight away. Have you had similar experiences seeing nude people on the Internet? How did you deal with this?*

Where or how did you find it? How did seeing pornography make you feel? Reassure them constantly that they won't be in trouble for anything they disclose and you will keep their discussion confidential. Wrap up the conversation by allowing them the opportunity to ask any questions by saying: *Do you have any questions about what you've seen, or heard, or about pornography in general?* Be direct and honest in your answers and if you don't know the answer tell them that directly (they'll appreciate your vulnerability.)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES-

Safe 4 Kids- I highly recommend Holly-ann's picture books and protective education programs

Sex Ed Rescue- Cath has some brilliant resources to help parents to talk to kids about sex.

13-18 year olds



By this age, most teenagers will have heard the word ‘pornography’ and many will have seen it, so you can have probably have very explicit and direct conversations.

At this age the important thing to convey is that pornography *isn't* a depiction of real sex. It doesn't typically show loving, consensual relationships- it is about performance. Discuss what loving, consensual relationships look like (e.g. intimacy, connection, vulnerability) as pornography doesn't typically depict this and our teens imitate this behaviour in their relationships. Many teens will have seen pornography by this age and may have a misinterpretation of the reality of sex, based on what pornography they've consumed. So it's important to have an accurate starting point. Explain to your teenager about their brain and how/why pornography can be addictive. Reassure them that it's normal and okay to be interested in sex and sexuality at this age.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTS-

Address the elephant in the room and ask your teen (yes, ask their permission) if you can have an important but awkward conversation with them (and select an alternative time if they'd prefer- you need to start off on the right foot). Start by talking about sex (as this is a normal thing for teens to be interested in) and then move onto pornography. Reassure them from the outset that they won't get into trouble for what they disclose and you will keep their conversation private. Start with generic, third-person conversation in the hope they'll open up and you can continue the dialogue based on what they say.

Are kids at school watching pornography? What do you know about pornography? You don't need to name names or tell me exactly what they're watching. (Reassure them that you respect their allegiance to their peers and will preserve their anonymity). *What are they saying?* (Don't be accusatory and ask, 'What pornography are you watching?'). *Have you ever seen any pornography? How did you find it? How did it make you feel? Have you or your friends had any bad experiences as a result of viewing pornography? Do you think what's shown in pornography is an accurate representation of real relationships?*

Give them time to articulate their feelings and simply repeat their feelings and information back to them. Don't try and add any other emotions to their list, or describe things that you've heard other people describe, as this may invalidate what they're saying (and possibly give them more information than they need). Don't focus too much about *what content they've consumed* as this may cause them to shut down and terminate the conversation. Keep the conversation in neutral, third-party language to begin with and then ask more direct questions of your teen, once rapport has been established. Reassure them repeatedly (teen brains need *lots* of repetition) that they won't be reprimanded and that you will keep the conversation confidential (unless, of course, they disclose that they've been hurt, or have observed others being hurt). Explain the harmful effects of pornography (if you find this too difficult, you could direct them to online (ironically) resources (see Recommended Resources below) . Remind them that the sex depicted in pornography is not real sex.

These conversations are likely to take place over time- don't expect to have this conversation in one go.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES-

[Talk to Your Kids About Pornography](#)- for parents wanting more scripts and ideas on how to tackle this topic.
[Pandora's Box Is Open Now What Do I Do?: A Parent's Guide for Helping Children Who Have Been Exposed to Pornography](#)- for parents wanting further guidance if their child or teen has seen pornography.
[The Naked Truth](#)- a great video for teens and parents to watch together

4. Handling the Harmful Effects



WARNING SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY HAVE SEEN PORNOGRAPHY determining if your child has been exposed to pornography can be challenging, as many of the following 'red flags' can also be considered to be 'normal' child behaviour at different developmental stages. The presence of one or more of these warning signs may indicate that your child has seen pornography.



DIGITAL DEFENCES if your child quickly shuts the laptop lid, or hides their device when you approach, or won't leave their devices unattended. (This could also be completely normal behaviour, especially for tweens and teens who crave independence and privacy).



NIGHTMARES prolonged periods where your child has nightmares may indicate that they've seen something unsuitable for their age.



PEER-ON-PEER SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR this is a particularly strong red flag with children under 12 years of age and should be immediately reported to the relevant authorities.



WITHDRAWN if your child suddenly withdraws from activities they previously enjoyed, or participated in, for no apparent reason, it may warrant further investigation. (Again, it is also considered 'typical' behaviour at particular ages.)



RAPID CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR OR Demeanour if their behaviour or demeanor suddenly changes this may indicate there are calls for concern. They may become anxious, agitated, upset for no apparent reason. They may also become increasingly secretive or defensive.



EXTENDED PERIODS IN BATHROOM OR BEDROOM may be cause for concern. This can be an easy way for kids/teens to hide their habits



SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY IN THEIR BROWSER HISTORY (OR NO HISTORY!) regularly do screen audits with your child or teen and ask them to explain any dubious sites or activity. If their online history has been deleted this can be a strong red flag. (This is where the **Family Zone** weekly report can help. Each week parents/carers are emailed a summary of their individual children's online activity. This can be a great catalyst for conversation).



INCREASED POP-UPS these may indicate your child has been accessing pornographic websites.



DIGITAL DEMANDS is your child/teen asking for excessive amounts of time online? Are they using devices at night? Remember, keep devices out of bedrooms.

What to do if Your Child Has Seen Pornography

If you discover that your child *has* seen pornography:



STAY CALM the situation will escalate if you convey your emotions, or exhibit signs of disappointment.

DON'T PUNISH THEM as they won't come to you for further guidance or when there are other issues. This includes *not* removing digital devices, in most instances (some serious cases may warrant confiscating devices).



 **ASK QUESTIONS** ask them how watching pornography made them feel. Focus on feelings rather than the content of what they saw.

 **NORMALISE THEIR CURIOSITY** explain that pornography can arouse the body and how the brain responds, meaning that it can be very appealing to watch pornography.

 **CO-CREATE A PORNOGRAPHY PLAN** help your child/teen develop a plan to deal with seeing pornography in the future.

 **REASSURANCE** reiterate to your child or teen that they won't be reprimanded for reporting pornographic exposure. They need to feel secure and safe when they talk to you.

 **BUILD TRUST** parents need to build trust over time with their kids (this is why we need to start these conversations when kids are young). Remember, research confirms that having a trusted adult is the single most important factor in reducing risky behaviour.⁵

5. Morrongiello, B. A., & Lasenby-Lessard, J. (2007). Psychological determinants of risk taking by children: an integrative model and implications for interventions. *Injury prevention*, 13(1), 20-25.

Addiction

If your child admits to being addicted to pornography:

// Reassure them that you can help and try not to appear disappointed or shocked.

// Reassure them that what they disclose will be shared in a judgement-free zone.

// Tell them that thousands of teens are feeling this way (not to normalise their behaviour but more to reassure them).

// Ask them to clarify how frequently they're watching pornography, where and when.

// Determine if they've attempted to curtail their usage.

// Seek the advice of a medical practitioner who has experience with this type of addiction.

// [The Science of Porn Addiction](#) may be a helpful resource



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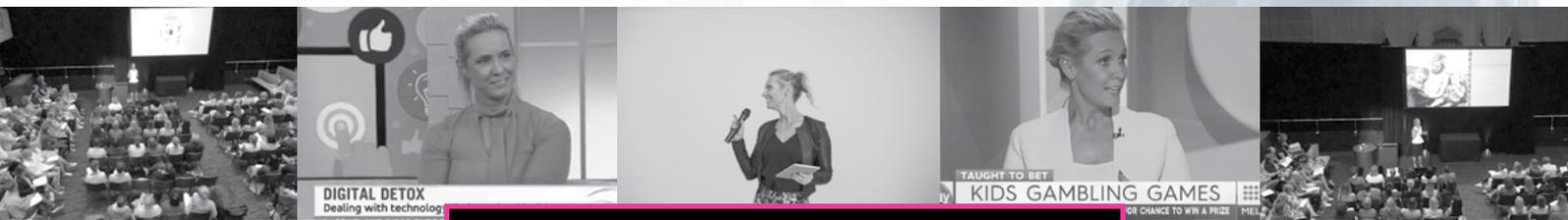
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About Dr Kristy

Dr Kristy Goodwin is one of Australia's leading digital health, wellbeing and productivity experts (and mum who also deals with her kids' techno-tantrums!) She's the author of *Raising Your Child in a Digital World*, a speaker, media commentator and digital wellbeing researcher, who doesn't suggest that we ban the iPhone (digital abstinence isn't the solution). Kristy worked as an educator for fourteen years before becoming an academic and speaker. She has worked with clients including Apple, Westfield, Bank of Queensland, Nickelodeon Channel, the National Broadband Network, McDonalds, NSW Department of Education and Optus, she's spoken at national and international conferences, at schools, workplaces and medical conferences throughout Australia. Kristy's on a mission to empower people to tame their technology habits and not be a slave to the screen!



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