

SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MEDIA

PARENT/TRUSTED ADULT INFORMATION

A 2022 study conducted by [Common Sense Media](#) revealed:

- 75% of teens have viewed pornography by the age of 17
- 58% of teens came across pornography by accident while surfing the web or using social media
- 45% said porn provided helpful information about sex

This exposure, coupled with a lack of formal sex education in childhood and adolescence can lead to unsafe practices, aggressive behaviors and unrealistic expectations ([National Library of Medicine, June 2023](#)).

While curiosity is natural, it is important that young people get correct information about sex from trusted adults. This letter will provide some ideas for talking to your child about sexually explicit media and arm you with the information that you need to empower your child to make healthy decisions.

Sexually Explicit Media and Brain Science:

Viewing pornography activates the brain's reward center by triggering the brain to release a feel-good chemical called dopamine. This dopamine release tells the person that the activity is pleasurable. Therefore, the person wants to repeat the activity again and again. However, through repeated exposure, the brain becomes desensitized to the content and keeps the viewer looking for new, more provocative images. The developing teen brain is particularly impacted by this repeat exposure, as it is at peak neuroplasticity. This leaves teens more vulnerable to addiction as well as rewiring of the brain as it is developing. Some of the potential consequences of this repeated exposure are:

- Poor concentration
- Depression
- Social Anxiety
- Negative self-perception
- Libido Decrease
- Erectile Dysfunction

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Common Messages in Pornography:

Pornography sends some subtle and some not- so-subtle messages to its viewers. For a young person who may not have any prior relationship experience, these messages can be particularly confusing and potentially harmful. Here are some of the common messages that are portrayed through pornography.

Messages Regarding Consent:

- No verbal consent is needed.
- Many situations where consent cannot be given (i.e. under influence) are depicted.
- Harassment and pressure are portrayed as normal interactions.
- Inappropriate relationships are depicted (i.e. professor/student, step-parent/child).

Messages Regarding Gender:

- Male is dominant and female is submissive.
- All women are attracted to men.
- The focus is on the penis (size, pleasure, etc.)

Messages Regarding Prevention:

- Barrier methods are not used.
- There is no discussion of STI testing or status.
- There is no discussion of birth control.

How to talk to your child:

- Discuss the messaging that is implied in sexually explicit media. It is made to seem like these behaviors are the norm.
- How is the messaging unhealthy? How is it not in-line with reality?
- Discuss what healthy relationships look like. What do healthy relationships look like, feel like, sound like?
- Discuss that pornography is made for and by consenting adults. Anyone under 18 cannot legally consent to watching it. No one should feel forced or coerced to watch it.
- Often young people come across pornography accidentally or it is sent to them by someone else. Make a plan with your child to tell a trusted adult, so there can be a conversation and it can become a learning experience. Remind them that they have done nothing wrong.