

Talk Today, Safe Tomorrow: Top 10 Ways to Start Conversations about Pornography

Talking to kids about the dangers of pornography is important – and really stressful! But if you can get started, the hardest part is behind you. Adapt these ideas and keep talking as your children grow and experience new things. You can do it! Every time you talk, your children are safer.

1. Start with what they already know. You have already been talking about family values, their bodies, and personal safety issues. Build on that to help them be aware of the dangers of pornography in age-appropriate ways.

- “In our home we know to wear our clothes around other people. We take them off only in private or when we need help from someone like mom, dad, or a doctor. Sometimes you might see pictures of people who are not fully dressed. They may not be wearing any clothes at all. When that happens we look away, and tell mom or dad right away. We can help you know what to do and you’ll feel better.”

- “We have talked about good touch and bad touch before. We know that the private areas of our bodies are special. Sometime you might see pictures of people showing these private parts. This is not good. If you see this look away and quickly come tell me.”

2. Teach children what pornography is in age-appropriate ways. Definitions give power. From the simplest explanation to a full definition for older children, giving children the words to describe what they have seen opens the door to them coming to you in the future.

- “You know we have fun together sharing our favorite family pictures. But you should know that sometimes people share very bad or inappropriate pictures or videos that show people without any clothes on. Have you ever seen anything like that?”

- “You might have heard kids at school making jokes about something called pornography. Pornography is media that openly shows or describes nudity or sexuality and is intended to create sexual feelings. It can be online, or in video games, movies, photos, music, magazines, ads, and books. It is a false and harmful way to

experience sexuality, so it’s a good idea for us to plan together how to avoid it.”

3. Practice with your family what to do if they see pornography. Just like a fire drill, your children need to have a plan so they can react quickly when they encounter pornography.

- “Let’s make a deal with each other, OK? If you see anything like pornography, get away from it as fast as you can and tell me right away. Let’s agree to tell each other within 10 minutes if we can.”

- “What could you say to a friend who wanted to show you pornography? Do you have some ideas? Maybe you could turn away and say: I don’t want to see that! That’s disgusting – put it away. You shouldn’t be showing that.”

4. Be upfront about your concerns. Are you worried about talking about pornography? Being honest about your concerns can go a long way to opening up a conversation.

- “It may be awkward to talk about this but it’s better than not talking at all, isn’t it?”

- “I’ve just started learning about this subject, and I know there’s more to learn. I would like to hear what you know about pornography, and then we can learn together to be smart online.”

- “I wish I had done a better job of talking to you about this in the past, but it’s not too late to start now.”

- “I worry that if you hear about pornography, you might want to see what we are talking about. It is natural for kids to be curious and want to learn more about things, but the reason I am talking to you is because pornography is very dangerous, and I want you to be prepared to avoid it anytime, anywhere.”

5. Take opportunities to praise kids for good decisions. Children gain self-control and personal power when they learn to see themselves as good decision makers. Water what you want to grow!

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- “I noticed that you changed the channel when that inappropriate ad came on. I’m really impressed that you made that good decision and acted so quickly. I bet you feel pretty good when you take control of what you watch. That will keep you safe from things like pornography.”

6. Build on their desire to be trusted and grown-up. Children look forward to growing up and want to be respected and trusted with important things. Give them credit for how difficult it is to grow up in this time.

- “You are growing up so fast and I think you are ready to talk about a really important thing. I know I can trust you to make good decisions when you understand how important it is to stay away from pornography.”

- “You are such a wonderful kid, and this is a hard world we’re living in. I know you’re trying to keep away from bad stuff online. It’s tough! Are there some rules we could set together that would help keep you safe? I trust you, but I don’t trust people who want to get you trapped. What do you think might really help?”

7. Use examples in the media and news. Our cultural environment is littered with sexualized media, and the news is filled with stories of sexual misconduct. So use them as natural conversation starters! When you see or hear something, think of it as a learning opportunity and ask your kids what they think. Give them lots of space to talk, even if it means being silent for a few uncomfortable moments. You’ll be surprised at how much they open up.

- “Goodness, there’s another ad showing a woman who is barely dressed. Why do you think advertisers use scantily-dressed women in their ads? What kind of a reaction are they trying to get from you?”

- “This morning I read a news story about hundreds of students at a school that were sexting and sharing these photos with everyone.

Have you heard of anything like that at your school? What do you think about it?”

8. Share a personal experience. Sharing your experiences can be life-changing for your kids. Have you seen images that you wish you hadn’t? How did you react? Did you wish later that you had been prepared to know what to do? What have you learned to do better now? It will help them to feel like they can share their own experiences and feelings without shame and judgment when they understand that you have experienced some of the same struggles.

- “Sometimes when I’m on the Internet, I’ve accidentally seen pictures that make me feel very uncomfortable, but at the same time it is hard to look away. They show naked people and often they are treating each other in disrespectful ways. It’s called pornography. Have you ever seen anything like that?”

- “When I was about your age, a friend showed me some pictures of some naked people that were in a magazine. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t tell anyone because I was so afraid I’d get in trouble. So I never told anybody. Now I realize that I was just a child and I didn’t do anything wrong. Sometimes we see things that are a little shocking. Has anything like that ever happened to you? I hope you know you can always tell me. You won’t be in trouble at all.”

9. Read current blogs on this issue. The time you spend preventing problems now can save years of tears later. So periodically, spend some time to get educated to help your children. You can use these topics as conversation starters with your family. See a list of some good websites below.

- “I read something really surprising today. I learned that most parents think they have talked to their children about Internet safety more often than their children say they have. I bet that’s true here too! What do you think?”

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- “I read an article today that says that viewing pornography can become an addiction just as bad as any drug addiction. Have you ever heard that?”

10. Follow up on these conversations and check in regularly. Once you have done the hard work of starting, keep it going! It will get easier over time and your kids will become more comfortable coming to you when they have challenging experiences.

- “Is there anything like pornography stuck in your mind from a long time ago? Do you want to tell me about it so you can let it go and forget it?”

- “Sometimes kids see pornography accidentally or when friends show them things. Have you seen anything like pornography since the last time we talked? What did you do? What could you do if that happens again?”

Let’s raise the first generation to be prepared to reject pornography.

The Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation Prevention Group, a project of The National Center on Sexual Exploitation, includes these organizations that collaborated to share this message:

- National Center on Sexual Exploitation
- Porn Proof Kids
- Educate Empower Kids
- Utah Coalition Against Pornography
- Women for Decency
- White Ribbon Week
- Fight the New Drug
- Enough is Enough
- Purity Works