

Pornography: What do I need to know?

Overview resource by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre



It is normal to feel interested in sex and how it works – it is part of growing up. Pornography may be readily available to a lot of young people and some young people may see it as a way to find out about how sex and relationships work. However, pornography does not present a real-life version of relationships or sex, because it is a performance. So it is important to realise that seeing it as real can impact young people in some negative ways.

- As young people’s brains are still developing, porn can have a deeper impact on them than it does on the adult brain. Young people can form their tastes and expectations of sex from what they see in pornography, which is typically very different from how sex works in real life. Due to the developing brain, young people can become addicted to pornography easier too resulting in feelings of guilt and shame as they can’t stop watching it.
- Unlike real sex, porn involves a performance where actors are hired to have sex as part of an invented storyline that is produced for certain audiences. How the performers portray the duration, behaviour and pleasure in sex is made up to keep people watching. However some young people may believe that this is how they need to actually behave in relationships, which will impact on their real life relationships in a negative way.
- Many porn scenes show unsafe or violent sexual behaviour which can leave young people with a messed-up attitude and expectations towards sex, especially if they haven’t had detailed sex education elsewhere.
- The human bodies that are presented in porn are often unlike unrealistic – sometimes even enhanced through surgery - as the performers are required to look a certain way for the camera and their audience. This may result in young people questioning the way their own bodies are and lead to body image problems and even eating disorders.
- Often, sex in porn is portrayed as not involving any emotional connections. So love, care and consent appears to be missing from sexual encounters and relationships shown in porn. There may be little or no talk or mention about being happy with the way a sexual experience is going which sends unhelpful messages about consent - the basis for healthy sex.

- Contraception or condoms are most often not mentioned or seen in porn, which means those learning about sex for the first time may assume that they are not important to healthy sexual relationships.
- Gender norms, roles and identities are often stereotypical in porn scenes. Both partners may appear to be always in the mood for sex, the male partner may nearly always be the dominant one and the female partner always eager to please.
- This portrayal of unequal power in porn and stereotypes can also be present in LGBTI+ representations in pornography, imposing the stereotypical dominant partner into a same-sex setting, for example.

Understanding that porn doesn't represent what sex is like in real life is very important. In real life, sex is about more than being turned on, it involves feeling comfortable, respected and good about yourself.

Consent is an important ongoing part of healthy sexual relationships which will result in both people enjoying sex more.

If you are worried about the impact that pornography is having on you, talk to someone you trust and look for help.

- If you are under 18, you can [contact Childline](#) on 1800 66 66 66 or text 50101 for help.
- More information can be found [on the SpunOut website](#).

If you have experienced rape or sexual assault, and need confidential, non-judgemental support, please call the [National 24-hour Helpline](#) on 1800 77 88 88 and find information on <http://www.drcc.ie/>