

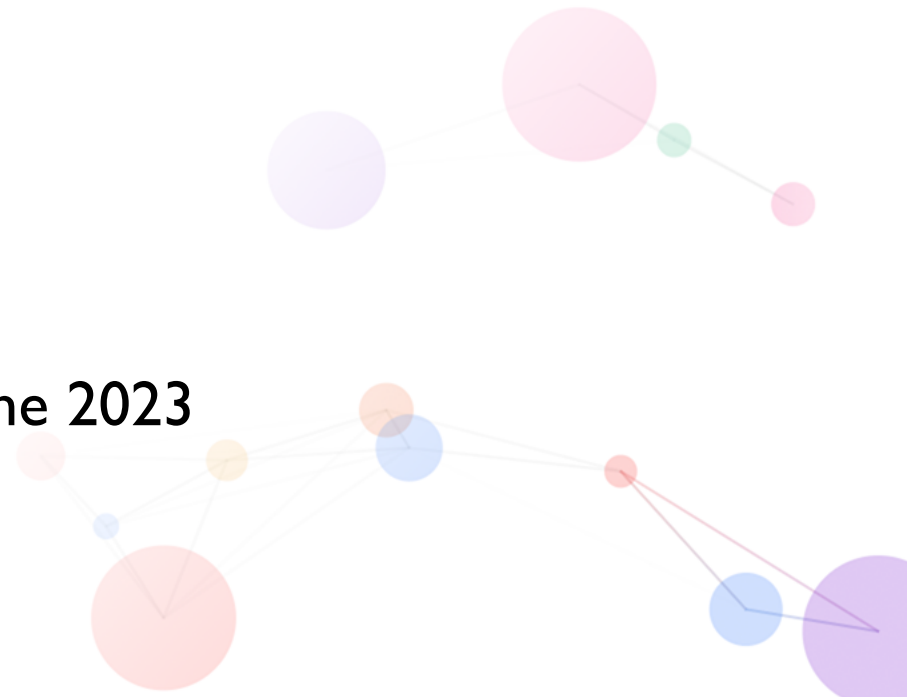
Pornography: what are the issues & how can we protect our children & build their resilience?

Dr Elly Hanson

Psychologist & Research Director of Fully Human

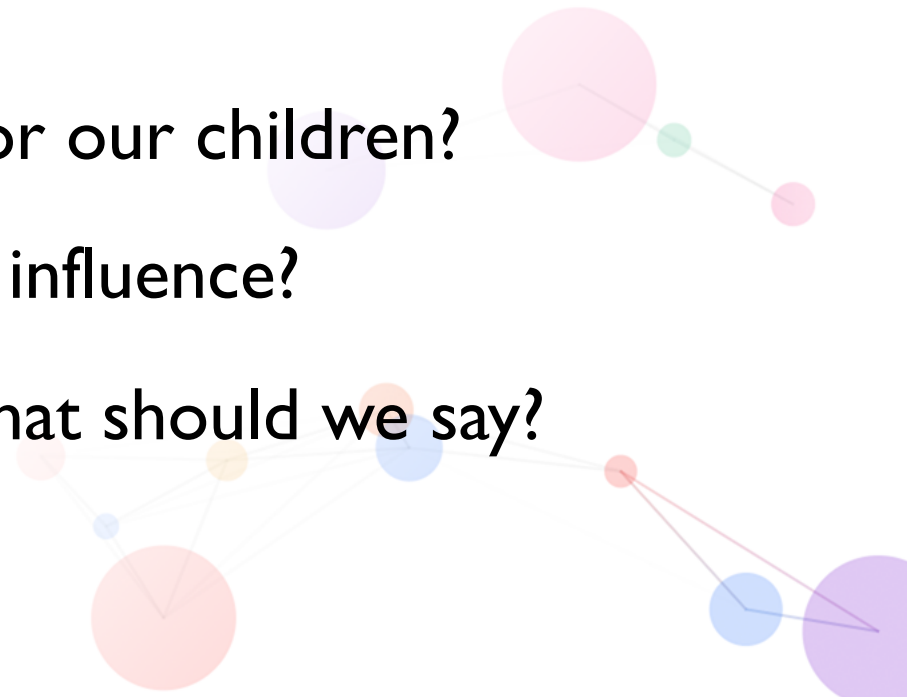
Bryanston School 21st Century Parenting Day

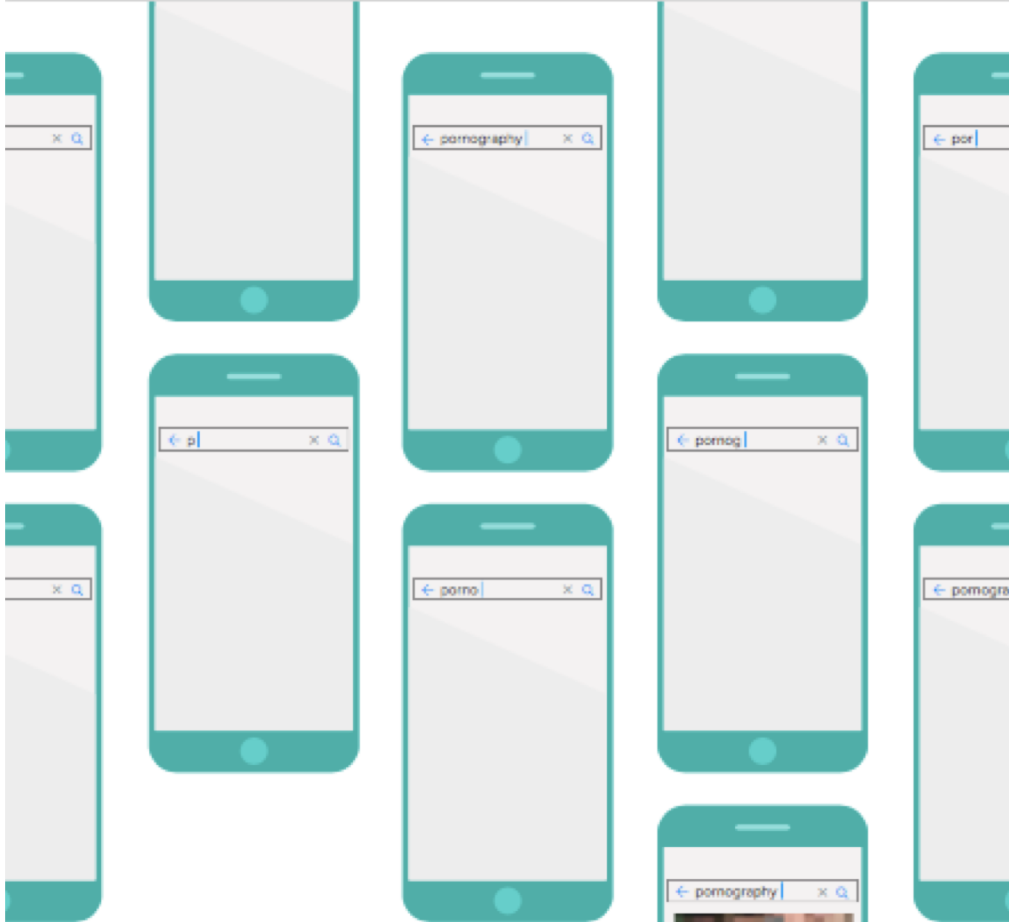
6th June 2023



Pornography is a key issue facing young people today

- What are we talking about when we talk about pornography?
- What is its impact?
- What are the core issues at play?
- What does it mean for our deepest aspirations for our children?
- How can we protect our children from it and its influence?
- When should we talk to them about it? How? What should we say?





Many children & young people are being exposed to pornography

	Ever seen	In last 2 weeks
11-13 year olds	51%	18%
14-15 year olds	66%	32%
16-17 year olds	79%	41%

- Average age first seen 13 years old
- 11-13 years old 62% 'more unintentional'
- 79% had seen violent porn by age 18

Young people, Pornography & Age-verification

January 2020

Main ways of seeing pornography

Social media & messaging: **Twitter** (41%), Instagram (33%), Snapchat, TikTok, WhatsApp, Reddit, Facebook

Pornography site (37%)

Search engine e.g. Google

OnlyFans

Many parents are under-estimating their children's exposure

75% of parents of 11-17 year olds thought their child had not seen it

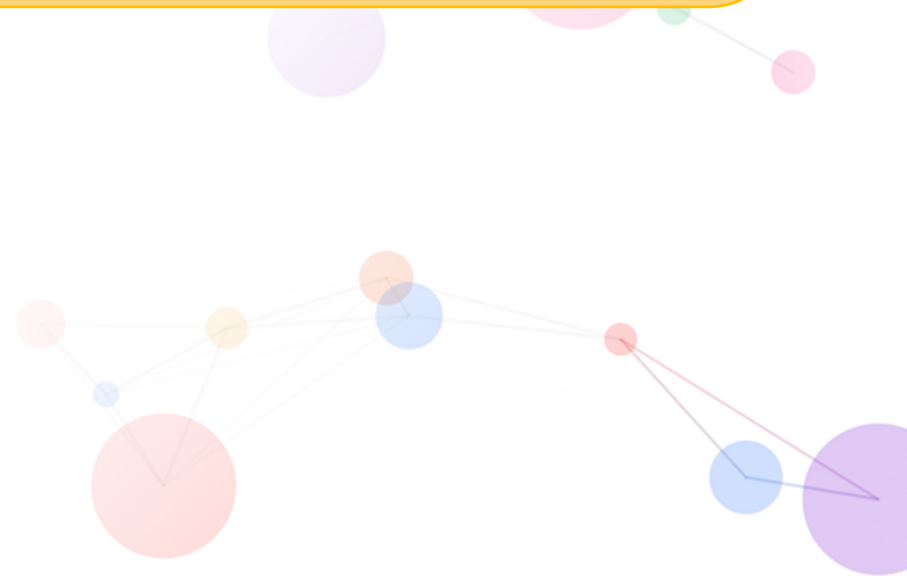
53% of their children in fact had

**Young people,
Pornography &
Age-verification**

January 2020

bbfc View what's
right for you

REVEALING REALITY



Research finds that porn increases the risk of:

- Sexual, relational and body dissatisfaction
- Relationship break-ups

- Sexual preoccupation
- Risky sexual practices

- Sexual coercion and aggression
- Wider unethical behaviour & passive bystanding
- Sexism, objectification & attitudes supportive of sexual coercion

Sexual victimization

The nature of mainstream pornography

Bombarding, disorientating & confronting

The overall effect of the homepage layout is not the impression of any individual video or scene but rather the endless variety and availability of them, flowing inexhaustibly down the screen

Margaret Macdonald (2019)

This mode of design promises satisfaction while delivering unintelligibility and disorientation in order to remove one's sense of autonomy and intentionality... The aim is to softly persuade viewers into continuing to search for an imagined perfect image

Patrick Keilty (2018)

The average viewer spends 10 minutes on the site & views 10 pages
Tangmanee (2019)

The content of mainstream online porn

37% contained violence towards women – typically spanking & gagging

Women's responses to this typically neutral or positive

39% involved men dominating (cf. 13% women)

43% involved women submitting (cf. 10% men)

Content analysis of free, popular porn videos
Klaasen & Peter (2015)

What do young people see when they view porn?

Downing et al. (2014)

	Women	Men
Frequently seen dominant	17%	70%
Frequently seen being called names or slurs	36%	7%
Frequently saw 'consensual' violence towards them	35%	9%
Frequently saw non-consensual violence towards them	11%	1%

By age 18, seen sexual violence in porn	79%
Seen degrading act(s)	74%
Seen physically aggressive sex	73%
Seen sexual coercion (e.g. manipulation or pressure)	66%

'A lot of it is actually just abuse'

Children's Commissioner research (2023)

How sex is narrated

Titles of videos on Pornhub's front page on a random visit:

Fucked hard from black man

Redhead allowed to fuck her ass for iphone

Daughter knows her stepdad wants her

Finally my mom let me fuck (first time with my thai mom)

Too cute amateur girl for anal sex casting

Depictions of practices that meet criminal standards of sexual violence, including rape, incest and so-called 'revenge porn', are labelled in ways that not only minimise or remove their criminality, but often mock or belittle the possibility of harm

Fact or fiction? Immersion & denial

The contradictory yet simultaneous rendering of porn as both fact & fiction is central to its existence & success

- Viewers experience immersion & identification – can feel like they're having the sex they're viewing
- Sex often narrated as 'real' versus acted
- And often it is unclear what is staged or not
- Even if it is staged, it is fundamentally different from other staged events
- But when moral qualms might arise, they are quickly dismissed by the notions that it's just actors acting and viewers fantasising: nothing is 'real' anymore



Pornography's implicit messages:

Invitations to think similarly & act accordingly

In sex the primary concern is your arousal
Following your arousal is sexual freedom
This is all there is to your sexuality

Transgression, violation & dominance are sexy
Equality, connection & communication aren't

Sex is about using someone else's body for your gratification

Everyday values (like respect and kindness) don't apply in sexual situations

Men should be dominant and lead in sex

Women just want to please men & they like sex in which they are hurt, humiliated, pressured or manipulated

Good sex

A conversation between two people in their bodies

- Interpersonal chemistry
- Positive spirals of pleasure and connection
- Appreciation
- Attunement & communication
- Equality
- Authenticity

You are able to be yourself, you want to be real with that person

It was more of two people coming together to be as close as two people can be and I guess I kind of let go of my masculinity in a way

vs mainstream porn sex which (at its best) is instrumental & performative

- I'll use your body while you use mine
- Acting out gendered roles
- Viewer, judge, object
- Avoiding shame
- Disembodied

You'd want her to be exactly like the girls on the internet... if she's not... you'll move on to the next one... it's ruined any sense of love

Why is porn like this?

We're seeing corporations using powerful artificial intelligence to outsmart us & figure out how to pull our attention towards the things they want us to look at, rather than the things that are most consistent with our goals, our values and our lives

Justin Rosenstein, former senior engineer at Google & Facebook (2020)

It's the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behaviour and perception that is the product – and that is the product, it's the only possible product ... changing what you do, how you think, who you are

Jaron Lanier (2020)



Follow the money

- The porn industry makes between \$35b and \$97b a year
- It can't make this money from a person's relational sexuality
- Human sexuality contains a multitude of potentials, which entwine with other parts of the human psyche, history & culture
- The porn industry looks to find, develop and bring to fruition potentials for voyeuristic, impersonal, misogynistic, violent, objectifying & boundary-breaking forms



The manipulation based business model:

Shaping people towards corporate profit

Every action taken by a user on a web property generates dozens of data points.

You leave a trail of data you're not even aware of

When carefully analyzed, these data points reveal important information about products and the way they are used by clients...

From this data we can work out a huge amount about you and your vulnerabilities

It is critical to collect this data... in order to drive better business decisions. Gathering, storing, processing and analyzing billions of data points a day is a colossal challenge that MindGeek Engineering embraces...

So we gather it without your informed consent to order to shape you to our profit

MindGeek data scientists have developed sophisticated machine learning algorithms to mine the data and extract the meaning from the noise.

We are strategic, unrelenting and intelligent in this manipulative, parasitic endeavour



INITIAL BOMBARD OF PORN



USER'S SEXUALITY SHIFTS TOWARDS CORPORATE INTERESTS

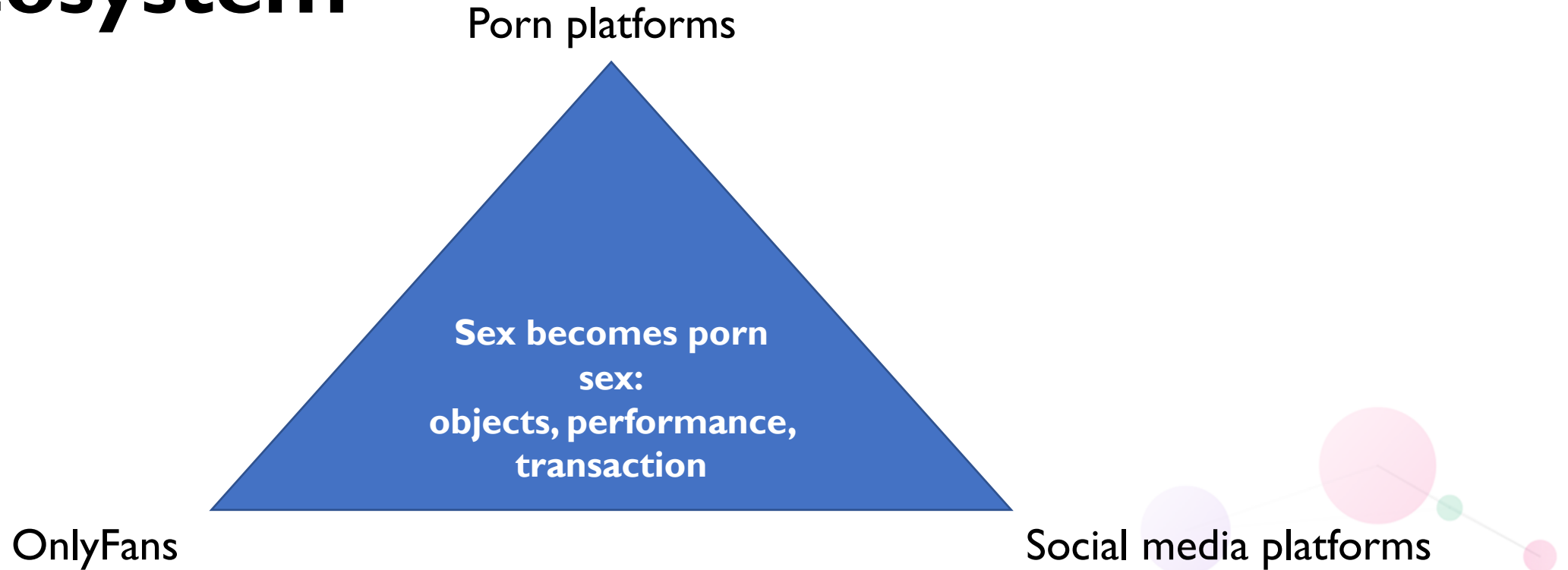
Eg.

SEXUALITY CENTRED ON YOUTH & 'INNOCENCE'
INCREASING INTEREST IN INCEST
GROWING DESIRE FOR 'SEX ON DEMAND'



CONVERSION TO PAYING CUSTOMER

The ecosystem



- In this system, children are being broken into a sexual-economic mindset
'Free porn is the same as the tobacco industry handing out free cigarettes to kids to get them hooked without fear of prosecution' (Gail Dines)
- Groomed to develop a sexuality which makes others money & which makes it harder for them to author a sexuality rooted in respect, intimacy & connection

Dr Elly Hanson

Edited by Jonathan Baggaley

PORNOGRAPHY AND HUMAN FUTURES

Pornography's dystopian approach to us damages core human goods:

- Intrinsic values
- Autonomy
- Self-embrace
- Sexual relating
- Relationships

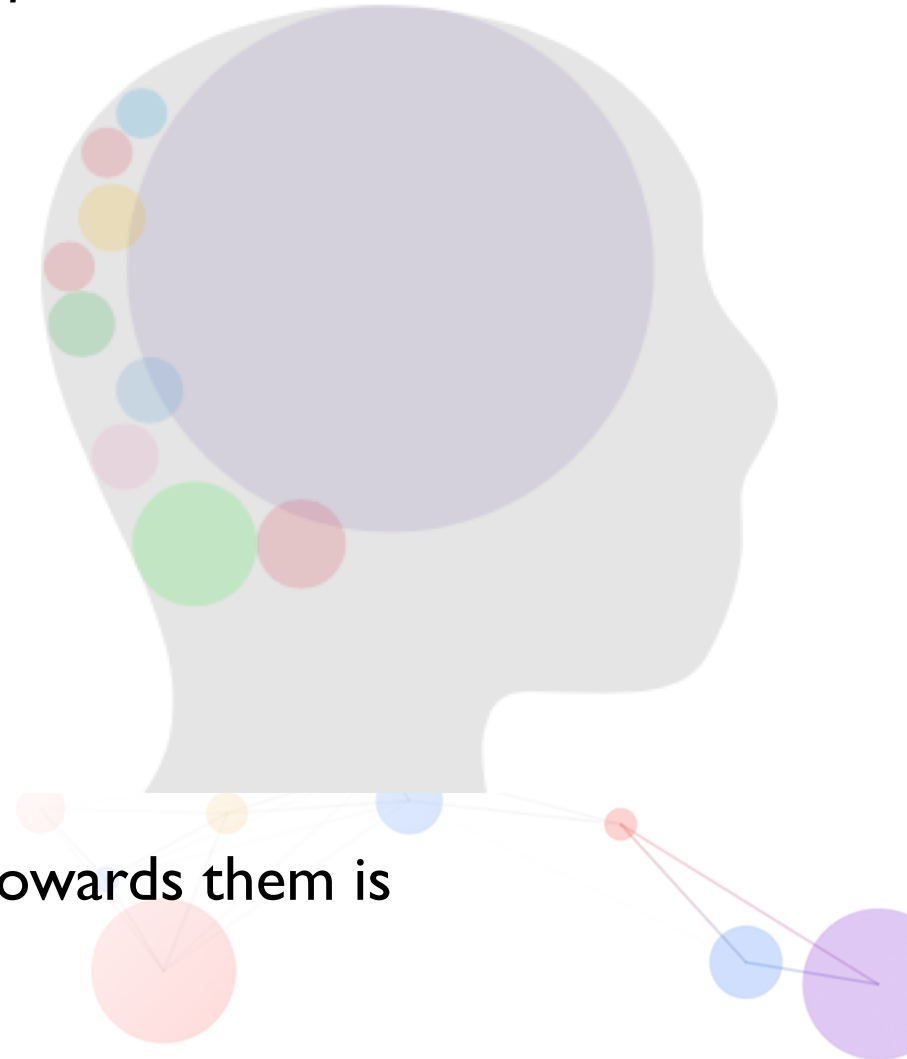


PSHE
Association

<https://fullyhuman.org.uk/issues/pornography>

Our intrinsic values

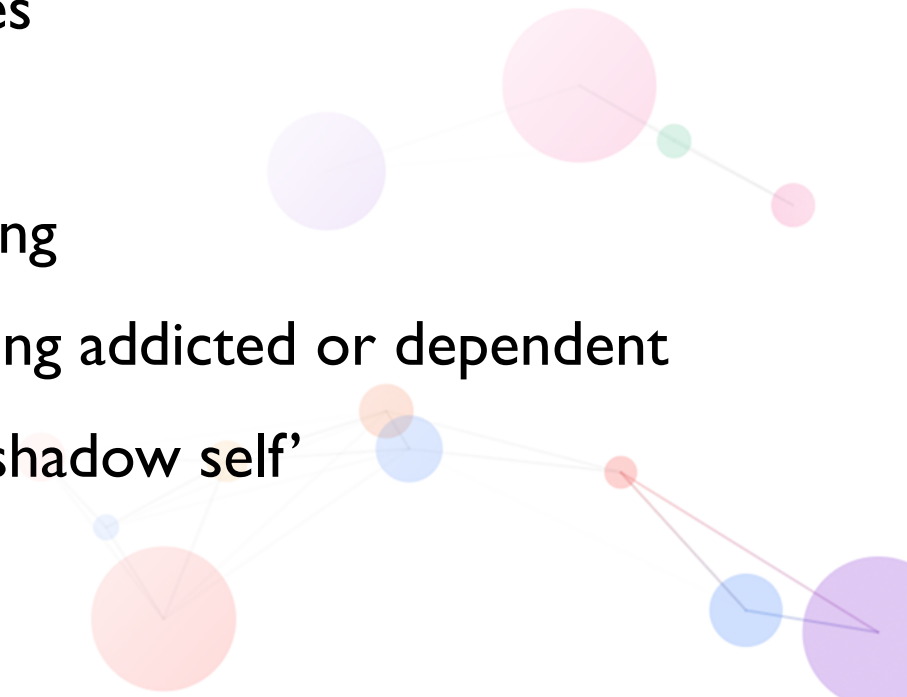
- Mainstream porn promotes selfish values *at the expense of* intrinsic, compassionate ones
- And it encourages and promotes objectification
- When people are objectified, they are seen as:
 - having less of a mind
 - being less competent
 - less sensitive to pain
 - less deserving of moral treatment
- People are treated as means to an end & ill-treatment towards them is legitimized



Our autonomy

The feeling & reality of driving oneself and one's life

- Autonomy is relational & central to flourishing, being human & having meaning
- Pornography is both the archetypal & most thoroughly modern manipulator:
 - it exploits psychological vulnerabilities
 - is deceptive, hiding its intentions & how it operates
 - is extensive in its scope
 - is disinterested in our rationality, values or wellbeing
- People may feel the loss of autonomy, for example by feeling addicted or dependent
- Or alternatively not realise this, having lost sight of their 'shadow self'

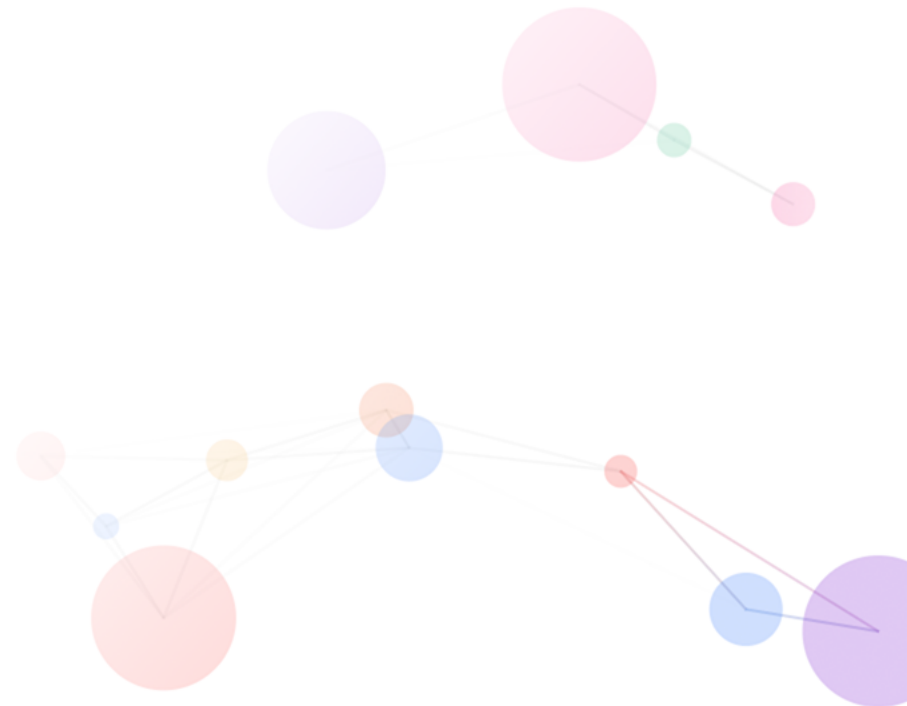


How can we protect our children & build their resilience

- Parental safety controls: with Internet Service Provider and mobile network

The harder something is to do, the fewer people do it

- Conversations with our children
- Conversations with other parents
- School: teaching & protection



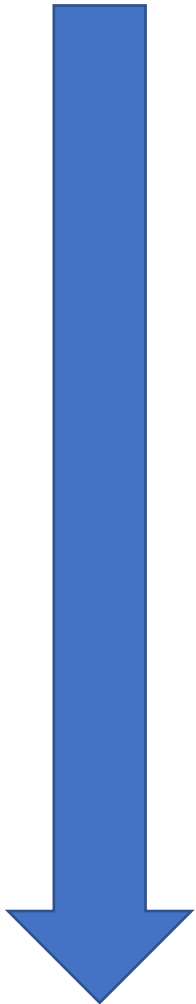
Approach to conversations

- Your input & influence is important: don't under-estimate it
- Little & often
- Start young (e.g. 10 years old), but never too late – different opportunities at different ages
- It's OK if it's awkward or embarrassing: lean in
- Grab spontaneous opportunities, as well as purposeful conversations
- Focus on friends
- Brainstorm hypothetical situations: 'What would you do if...'



Conversation topics

9 / 10 years old



What is pornography & its impact

Knowing your core values & living by them

Social media & wider tech – attention & manipulation
Inviting children to be more ‘in control’

What to do in different tricky situations, e.g.

- Friends joke about porn
- Friend shows porn
- Child sees it by accident
- Peer sends nude
- Peer is harassing someone

Messages of body & self acceptance

And what is not OK

What good sexual experiences involve
Key principles

Pornography’s business model & its messages about sex & genders

Attempt to shape your sexuality towards its profit

‘Safeguarding your sexuality’
& how our sexuality affects ourselves & others (is relational)

Support to those struggling with dependency

Masturbation & fantasy
Linking to ‘good sex’

The aspiration...

What are my core values?

- Kindness
- Justice
- Respect
- Equality

What do we mean by good sexual connections?

- Mutual enthusiasm
- Feels good for both
- Think & care about oneself & the other
- The connection

Who & what do I want to influence my relationships & sexuality?

- Myself
- Those whose opinion I value & who have my best interests at heart

How does pornography risk these things?

- It says inequality, manipulation, deception are OK and sexy
- It promotes sex as performance & others as objects
- Wants to shape your sexuality away from your best interests and towards its profit

Preventing & managing defensiveness & brush-offs

- Chatting whilst doing something else
- Coming to it through something else (e.g. tv show, news story etc)
- Openness & consideration of their perspective
- Focus on friends (e.g. managing peer pressure; how porn might have shaped them)
- Have a sentence or two lined up to manage and challenge these
- Is there a better time to talk?
- Directing them to things they can read, watch or listen to online
- Don't lose heart – key messages often still take root



Some common pitfalls

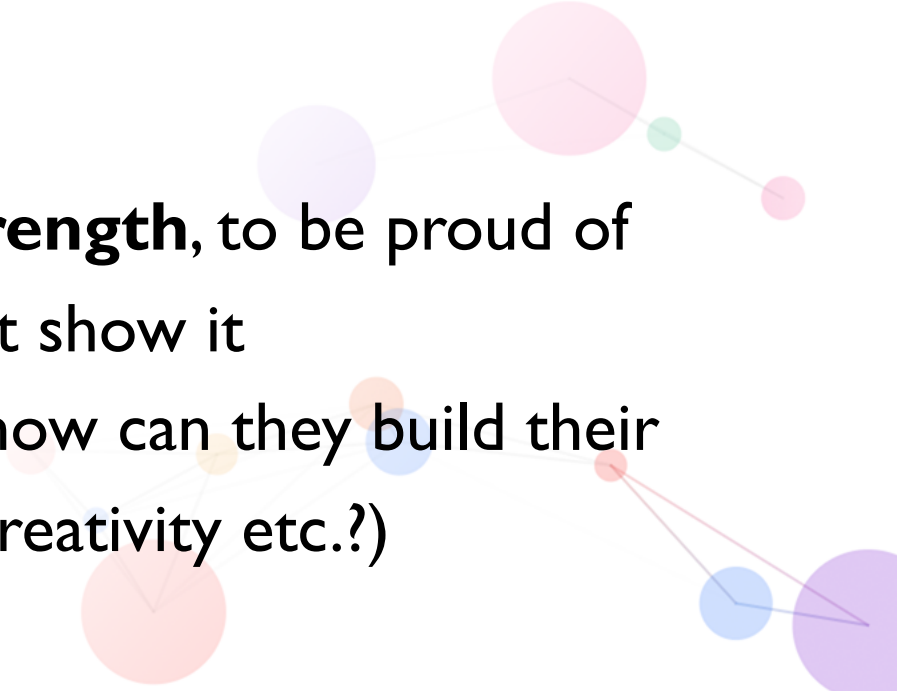
- Normalising porn use (e.g. 'I know everyone watches it but')
- Shaming those who view it
- Minimising it ('a lot of it's fine but')
- Gender stereotypes (i.e. boys watch it, girls don't)
- A simple focus on it being unrealistic (which can imply that real sexual experiences aren't as good)
- A focus on addiction beyond the wider harms



If you're worried your child has (or is coming across) negative attitudes or behaviour

- **Challenge attitude or behaviour** without shaming them
- Shifting and **reclaiming the language**
- Be **practical** – for example, help them think through how they can realistically step away from negative peer chat

Helpful narratives:

- Resisting invitations to join in with the crowd is **a strength**, to be proud of
 - **Many people will agree** with you, even if they don't show it
 - Sexist jokes & the like can be a **sign of insecurity** (how can they build their identity around positive things like sport, friendship, creativity etc.?)
- 

Supporting your child to be a 'positive bystander'

We can often make more of a difference than we think we can – for example bullying usually stops within a few minutes of a challenge

Treating someone with disrespect often has a big impact even if someone acts like they don't care

Challenging small wrongs make bigger ones less likely

When we act, we often inspire others without even realising it

This is a chance to live up to our core values and stand up for people's rights
This helps us be 'more ourselves' and feel proud

We all have a responsibility in our community and the groups we're in

Some different ways to be a positive bystander

- Challenge in the moment
- Change the situation some other way
- Follow up afterwards

This could be:

- Checking-in with the person who did something wrong
- Supporting the person who was the target
- Telling someone or reporting (for example to a platform)
- Reflecting

This could be:

- Direct challenge / calling out
- Offering an alternative viewpoint
- Using your body language, such as a frown
- Going quiet
- Naming your feelings

This could be:

- Changing the subject
- Physically moving to change the dynamic
- Starting a conversation
- Getting others involved

👉 Safety is something you should factor into your decision about what to do

Conclusion

- We are bringing up our children in a challenging and complex time
- We are faced with powerful corporations trying to manipulate our children towards their profit, and this involves them being bombarded with toxic content and messages
- Through close relationships and regular conversations with our children, and support from one another, we can do much to protect them and build their resilience



Reading & resources

- Pornography and human futures report

<https://pshe-association.org.uk/fully-human>

- Culture Reframed

<https://www.culturereframed.org/parents-program-on-porn-hypersexualized-media/>

- Center for Humane Technology

- The Social dilemma (Netflix)

- Jaron Lanier, e.g. Ten arguments for deleting your social media accounts right now

- Article on conversational role-playing

<https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-best-kept-secret-in-preparing-kids-against-pornography>

- Expose the Harm

www.exposetheharm.com

- Parent Zone

<https://parentzone.org.uk>

<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/porn-incel-culture>

<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/elly-hanson-online-pornography-blog>

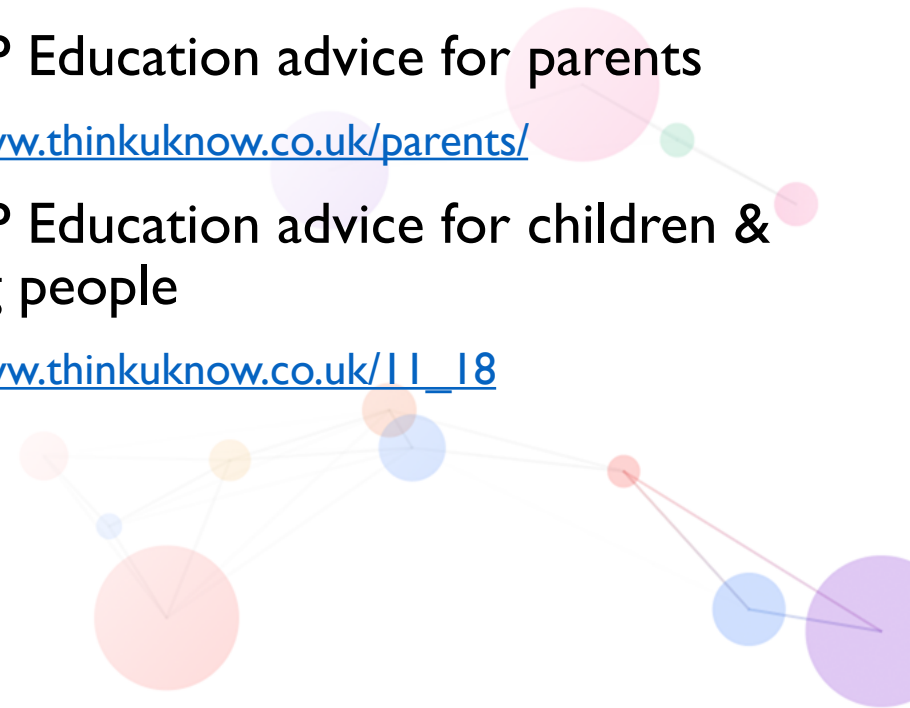
<https://parentzone.org.uk/tech-shock-parent-zone-podcast>

- CEOP Education advice for parents

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

- CEOP Education advice for children & young people

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_18



Healthy sexual connections

For sexual experiences between two adults or two young people of around the same age to be healthy, these principles should be present:

1. Mutual enthusiasm

- Both people only doing things they feel **enthusiastic** about, without any force or persuasion
- Both people **feel positive** and there are **no negative** feelings
- They know they can withdraw at any point and signals that a person might want to are heard and acted on

2. Equality and respect

- Sexual experiences happen in equal relationships in which people are **equally able to agree** to sexual activity, or withdraw from it without fear of negative consequence
- Both people treat the other as of **equal worth** to themselves

3. Attunement: both people's feelings

- **Before, during and afterwards** people think about, care about and respond to their own feelings and the other person's feelings
- Each person's feelings are as important as the other person's

4. Communication

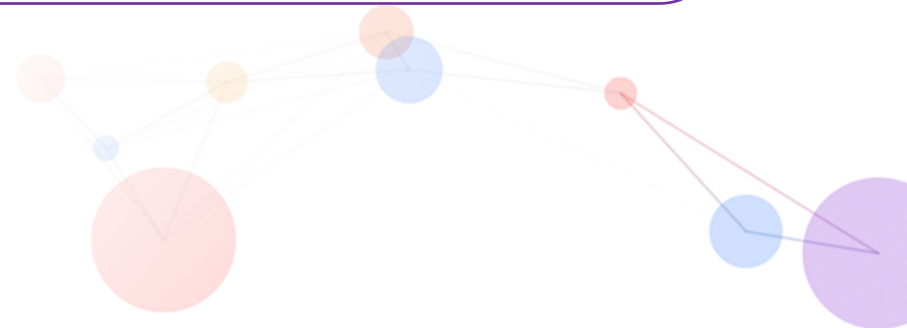
- People **check-in** with one another about their feelings and preferences
- This can be through **words or body language**

5. Honesty

- Both people know who the other person is, how they feel about them & their intentions – as well as any risks it could involve
- There is ***no deception, trickery, or withholding of relevant information – including of intentions***

6. Attention to the ***best interests of self and other***

- ***Not one above the other***
- The encounter should be a win-win (on a feelings level)



Principles for healthy relationships

Communication & listening

- Listen to your own feelings
- Reflect on how to express them helpfully
- Talk about your feelings & ask about the other person's
- Truly listen to what the other person is communicating

Trust & trustworthiness

- Start with being trustworthy yourself – keep to the expectations in the relationship (for example, don't share their stuff without their permission)
- If you have been let down in the past, try not to let it drive fears in this relationship

Respect

- Respect the other person's right to have their own thoughts, beliefs & feelings even if they are different to your own
- Also respect your own right to these things
- Treat yourself & the other as an important person whose feelings are important

Best interests of yourself & the other

- Think about and act in line with what is in both your own and the other's best interests
- Be kind to yourself and to them

Equality

- You are of equal worth
- If there is a pattern in which one person is treated as more important than the other, for example what one person wants or needs gets routinely overlooked, something is wrong