



Helping your child after exposure to pornography

The internet is largely unregulated, and most children will come across adult or explicit content at some point – often by accident. This guide is designed to help parents respond calmly and supportively if that happens. It offers practical steps, conversation starters, and reassurance to help you support your child in understanding what they've seen, while promoting safety, respect, and healthy views of relationships.

1. STAY CALM AND SUPPORTIVE

It is understandable to feel upset or worried, but your child needs reassurance, not anger. Take a breath and notice how you're feeling before responding.

Keep in mind to:

- Avoid yelling, blaming, or shaming.
- Notice your child's emotions – they may feel scared, embarrassed, or confused.
- Stay calm and curious to help keep communication open.
- Remember that some children laugh when they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. It doesn't mean they think it's funny – it's often a sign of nervousness.

Remember: The internet is largely unregulated, and children may unintentionally see explicit material. Your calm response helps them feel safe.

2. CHOOSE THE RIGHT MOMENT

Choose a relaxed, low-pressure time – such as during a car ride, a walk, or while playing together.

You might say: *"I heard (or noticed) you saw some pictures or videos of people without clothes on. That is called pornography. Have you heard that word before? You're not in trouble. I want to help you understand and talk about what you saw."*

Invite your child to share: *"Can you tell me what happened? How did it make you feel?"*

Remember: Your child needs to know that you understand how this can happen, it's not their fault, and you're there to help them process it.

3. EXPLAIN WHAT PORNOGRAPHY IS – AGE APPROPRIATELY

Keep explanations simple and matter of fact.

You might say: *"Pornography shows people's private parts, but it's not real life. The people are acting like in movies. It doesn't show love, respect, or care – which are important in real relationships. In real life, people who care about each other treat one another kindly and make sure everyone feels comfortable."*

Remember: The goal is not to scare or shame your child, but to teach them that pornography is unrealistic and unhealthy – it does not reflect caring, consensual, and respectful relationships.

4. NORMALIZE CURIOSITY

Curiosity about bodies and relationships is natural – shame is not helpful.

You might say: *"It's completely okay to be curious about bodies and relationships. You can always ask me and I will find healthy and safe ways for you to learn."*

Remember: Encourage open, ongoing communication. Reassure them that no question is bad or weird.



5. TEACH ONLINE SAFETY

Help your child learn what to do if they see inappropriate content again.

You might say: *"If you see something online that makes you feel uncomfortable or confused, just close it or turn it off and come tell me (or another safe adult). You won't get in trouble – we'll handle it together."*

Consider:

- Using parental controls and safe search tools.
- Keeping devices in shared spaces.
- Regularly reviewing apps, websites, and games together.
- Unplugging at night – set a family rule that devices are turned off or left in a shared area before bedtime. This helps protect sleep, limits late-night exposure, and encourages healthy tech habits.

Remember: Creating healthy routines around device use – including unplugging at night – helps children feel safe, supported, and balanced online.

6. TEACH RESPECT, CONSENT, PRIVACY, AND SAFE BOUNDARIES

Reinforce respect, consent, privacy, and safe boundaries by talking about how:

- Private parts are private.
- Everyone deserves privacy when changing or in the bathroom.
- There isn't privacy online – never take or send naked pictures.
- Consent means respecting limits and caring about how others feel.

You might say: *"Your body belongs to you. No one should ask to see your private parts or show you theirs – online or offline."*

Remember: Reinforce respect, consent, and bodily autonomy.

7. KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Make this an ongoing dialogue and not a one-time talk. Use *what if* scenarios to help your child practice making safe choices in real life situations.

Remember: Frequent, open conversations help children develop clear standards for safe and healthy relationships.

8. SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED

Consider professional help if your child:

- Shows distress, anxiety, or withdrawal.
- Has trouble sleeping or recurring worries.
- Displays new or concerning sexualized behaviour.

Remember: Mental health professionals can help your child process their experience and learn healthy coping skills.

PARENT RESOURCES:



ProtectKidsOnline.ca

Online safety information for parents from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.



KidsInTheKnow.ca

Personal safety education for teachers, parents and children.



ProtectChildren.ca

Resources for parents.