



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. Keep in mind that your child needs reassurance and a calm, supportive response. 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 TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

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 IN AGE-APPROPRIATE TERMS

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 healthy relationships. In real life, people who care about each other treat one another kindly and respectfully. They check in with each other to 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.

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, AND SAFE BOUNDARIES

Reinforce respect, consent, and safe boundaries in relationships by talking about:

- What healthy relationships may feel, look, and sound like (being loving, caring, respectful, etc.) in comparison to unhealthy relationships (red flag behaviours, like pressuring someone, aggressiveness, etc.).
- The right to bodily autonomy. Let your child know they have the right to make decisions about what happens to their bodies.
- The difference between care, consent, and coercion. Explain to your child that care means showing respect and checking in; consent is a legal agreement that is clear and voluntary; and coercion is a tactic that involves pressure, manipulation, and sometimes fear.

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: The internet is a public space, and children may see explicit content they shouldn't be exposed to. Remind your child that people who care about them respect their limits, and explicit content online is not a teaching tool. Not everything they see online is a true representation of real life.

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.