

INSIGHTS

A topic you can't ignore



Respectful relationships is currently a topic of conversation in schools across Australia and New Zealand. Encouraging children and young people to develop relationships with each other based on mutual respect and equality is at the heart of gender quality.

In a recent wide-ranging interview I asked prominent Australian psychologist Collett Smart to identify the impediments parents face when teaching kids about respectful relationships. Collett identified pornography as the biggest challenge parents had to overcome when developing respectful attitudes to gender and sexuality.

Smart says, “Children as young as nine have been exposed to pornography, even when they did not intend to access it. It’s safe to assume that most kids already know what it is. The flood of porn, so easily available online, has become our children’s primary source of sexual education.”

Talking to children and young people about sexuality is often challenging particularly when they don’t wish to engage in such conversations. But Smarts warns, “If pornography is not specifically addressed, it is likely to erode young people’s healthy development.”

Smart points out that many parents discover that their upper primary school or secondary school aged child has accessed porn, so the topic can’t be ignored. She provides this advice for parents who discover their child or young person has accessed porn:

Be ready

Be armed with knowledge. Take your time, but don’t avoid talking about it.

Expect denials

Most kids are very embarrassed or fear adverse parental reaction so don’t be surprised if they deny accessing porn.

Reassure

Let your child or young person know that you are not angry. Explain calmly what you found and tell them that you are there for them and you will now work through this together.

Check the tech

Check that you’ve set up blocking software and parental controls on children and teens’ devices. Although difficult, keep internet connected devices out of bedrooms.

Create a plan

Sit with your child or young person and draw up a plan for what they can do when future exposure occurs.

Smart believes that no matter how well prepared parents may be, they never feel ready when they realise that porn infiltrates their own family. She advises, "It's okay to feel confronted by the fact that this 'statistic' is now a reality in your house. Take a little time before responding. Don't jump straight in and blurt out your fears. Go for a walk if necessary, to think about what you might say next. If you messed up, clammed up or even yelled – apologise and start again!"

Smart is correct. Your kids won't remember that you fumbled the parenting ball. They will remember the overarching atmosphere of your relationship – that you cared and that you were prepared to talk to them about anything, including the hard stuff!

Related webinar recording

Our school has a membership with Parenting Ideas. As part of this membership, you can access the below webinar recording 'Teaching young people about healthy relationships' at no cost.

About

In this webinar Collett Smart gives parents the tools to build a strong relationship with their child where no topic is off-limits and they can come to them with any questions.

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Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.