

## APPENDIX 19: THE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON CHILDREN

In January 2023 the Government's Children's Commissioner published a report entitled, "[A lot of it is actually just abuse](#)", set out findings from a survey of over a thousand 16-21-year-olds and focus groups with teenagers. A further report was published in May 2023 entitled "[Evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children](#)." Both reports make very disturbing reading.

The normalisation of sexual violence in online pornography, and the role that this plays in shaping children's understanding of sex and relationships.

- The average age at which children first view pornography is now 13 years old.
- Substantial proportions of young people surveyed who had seen pornography viewed it at a much younger age than 13 – 27% by age 11 and 10% by the age of 9.
- The age of first exposure and frequency of exposure were shown to be closely linked to the likelihood of a young person viewing violent content online.
- There is a significant link between an early age of first exposure to pornography and frequency of exposure in later years.
- Early exposure to pornography impacts upon young people's self-esteem. Young people who had viewed pornography aged 11 or younger were significantly more likely to present lower self-esteem scores than the average young person.
- 38% of 16–21 year-olds said they had accidentally come across pornography online.
- Half of all survey respondents, 58% of boys and 42% of girls, aged 16-21 said that they had intentionally sought out online pornography themselves.
- 43% of children aged 16-21 agreed with the statement 'Young people mainly view online pornography due to peer pressure or to fit in.'
- 51% of girls aged 16-21 had been sent or shown explicit content involving someone they know in real-life, in comparison to 33% of boys.
- Young people are frequently exposed to violent pornography, depicting coercive, degrading or pain-inducing sex acts; 79% had encountered violent pornography before the age of 18.
- Frequent users of pornography were also more likely to have real-life experience of an aggressive or degrading sex act.
- 47% of respondents aged 18-21 had experienced a violent sex act. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to have experienced a violent sex act.
- Pornography is not confined to dedicated adult sites. We found that Twitter was the online platform where young people were most likely to have seen pornography. Fellow mainstream social networking platforms Instagram and Snapchat rank closely after dedicated pornography sites.

### What Can Parents and Educators Do?

Parents and teachers should talk to their children in an age-appropriate way about harmful content they or their friends might see online. For age-appropriate tips on starting this conversation, see the CEOP Education resource "[Having a conversation with your child](#)".

Parents should have proactive conversations about pornography before their child gets their own phone. For young people's advice on starting these conversations, see the Children's Commissioner's guide "[The things I wish my parents had known](#)".

Parents should understand how to use parental controls using, for example, the [Set Up Safe checklist](#).

Schools should be encouraged to embed pornography education in the RSE curriculum which challenges peer pressure to view pornography and addresses its harms. Excellent ideas and pornography lesson plans can be found from various organisations including [National Crime Agency Child Exploitation and Online Protection \(CEOP\)](#), [NSPCC](#) & [PSHE Association](#), [Childnet](#) and [Barnardo's](#).

Parents and schools should use the [Report Remove](#) tool in cases of non-consensual image-sharing.

### **What Can Churches Do?**

The growth of post-modern values regarding sexual freedom of expression and the declining influence of Christian values has weakened societal efforts to oppose pornographic content in the media, especially where consent is implied. This has been coupled with greater and wider availability and access via digital and electronic formats.

Churches can:

- educate congregations about the issue of pornography, especially Internet pornography, and enact strict policies that provide oversight of church-owned computers and sexual ethics education and training; (see [Appendix 12: Online and Digital Safety](#)).
- promote the use of quality sex education materials that help children and youth gain an understanding of and respect for mutually affirming sexuality
- seek strategies to reduce the proliferation of pornography
- work to break the link between sex and violence by encouraging healthy human relationships
- monitor and prevent access by children and youth to pornography and sexually explicit material
- participate in efforts to ban child pornography and protect child victims
- provide educational sessions for parents on minimizing the risk to children from Internet usage. Encourage parents to establish rules for teenagers and children; encourage parents to utilize screening technology