

Talking to your teen about consent & pornography

While many parents have gotten better at giving their teens “the sex talk”, there are a lot of people who find it very hard to initiate such a talk. When it does happen, it tends to be more about biology and do’s and don’ts.

However, when it comes to the issue of promoting respectful mutual relationships, the topic of sexual consent and the impact of pornography are important issues to talk about. You may think your teenagers are getting the right messages from school and interaction with their friends, but for many young people, they are learning behaviours and attitudes from other adults, from the media, popular culture and from pornography.

Below are some useful points about having “the talk” with your teen – for those whose children are younger, it’s worth noting that these discussions should ideally start long before they hit the teen years!

- **Start to talk about consent and the influence of the world around them as early as possible.** You don’t need to wait until the teen years, this can be done by starting to talk in appropriate ways about healthy relationships, how to respect boundaries and how to communicate well.
- It’s really important to **communicate often** with them about sex, relationships and consent throughout their adolescent years. By repeating messages around consent, they will absorb more and more. Use what’s going on in the media or in the community to instigate these conversations. DRCC has resources about consent on its website, so check back for more information.
- **Talk positively** to your child, don’t educate on dangers all the time. You will be more effective if you talk openly about what’s good about respectful mutual relationships – this will enable them to feel good about who they are.
- **Listen** to them when they open up – **don’t take over the discussion**. Try and let them take the lead in conversations.
- **Avoid asking too many questions** or they will close up. Talk about what it means to have a boyfriend or girlfriend at their stage. By gauging where they are at first, you can prepare yourself to tailor the conversation.
- Don’t forget to tell them about **useful websites** where they can find more information. We list some good sites below – you can decide which ones suit best.
- Whether they have watched **pornography** or not, they will be influenced by their **peers** who have seen it and through social media, music etc. Research is telling us that young people cannot distinguish between pornography and real life, so you may want to educate them on this. Pornography can have problematic messages about safe sex, gender roles, consent, body image and sexuality.

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- Talk to them about **examples of healthy relationships** in their lives or in media, films highlighting features of healthy relationships such as trust, equality, and communication and being yourself. Some examples of clips on YouTube that can help you with this message.

<https://amaze.org/video/porn-fact-fiction/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-yMI6SG52s>

- You may be eager to ask your teen about what experience they have had, but this line of discussion may make them close up which defeats the purpose of communications. So you are advised to **keep the conversation general**. This will help you to communicate openly with them and they are more likely to be honest with you about in the future when talking about these issues.
- **Build your knowledge** by doing some research. We've listed some sites below that may help. Just remember to check these out yourself before you refer to them. Find out if there are resources in your community that might help as well.

- www.webwise.ie
- www.sexualwellbeing.ie
- www.schooldays.ie
- www.amaze.org
- www.spunout.ie
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk

DRCC information, support & training

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre works to prevent the harm and heal the trauma of sexual violence. We campaign for better awareness & education on important issues like sexual consent & healthy relationships. We run two programmes aimed at facilitating better understanding among young people – BodyRight and #LetsGetReal. These are aimed at professionals working with young people, such as in schools, in youth groups and in colleges. We also run consent workshops for second & third level students, as well as wider campaigns to raise awareness and create change. Information & resources are available on our website. The National Helpline 1800 77 8888 is free & open to anyone with concerns around sexual violence.

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