

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white smartphone. The person is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is a blurred wooden wall. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# We need to talk about pornography

Children, parents  
and age verification

internet  
matters.org



---

# Contents

---

Introduction	5
Methodology	6
Specific parental concerns	8
Parental experiences of their children's exposure to online pornography	16
Adult content, for adults - responses to age verification	24
Resources: Protecting children from online pornography	31

# Introduction

---



Parents whose children have seen online pornography told us the average age they first saw it was 11.



Parents have long been concerned about children seeing sexual content online - indeed it ranks as one of their top three concerns. Recent academic reports have highlighted that by age 15, children are more likely than not to have seen online pornography.

However, of the parents we spoke to for this research, only 22% acknowledged their child has seen online pornography. Those parents told us the average age their child saw it was 11. Wherever the truth lies - young children are viewing adult content.

So, given that, Internet Matters wanted to explore what parents think and are doing to equip their children to deal with adult content. We know from this research that parents find talking to their children about online pornography really hard. Parents find it a hugely difficult subject to raise, and many are convinced that their children don't want to talk about it with them.

However, behind the headline stats, there is a more nuanced picture. Although 68% of parents are committed to doing everything they can to prevent their children seeing online pornography, a significant minority (23%) don't mind their children seeing it, as for them, pornography is an inevitable part of growing up.

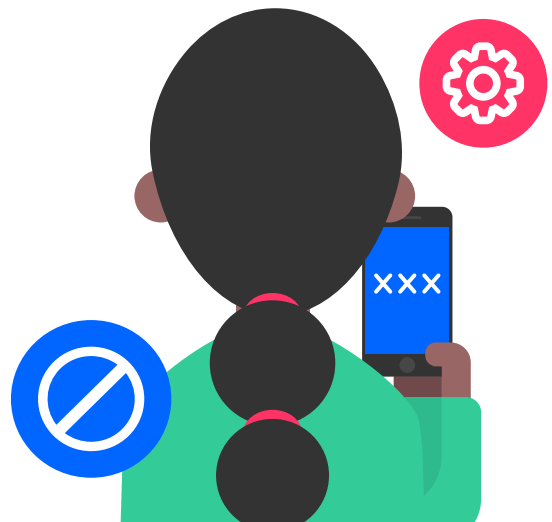
Differences also occur in opinions between mums and dads, and between parents of boys and parents of girls. Where these variations are statistically significant we have highlighted them throughout this report. However, both mums and dads are concerned about the implications of buffed bodies for the self-esteem of their children. There are also significant concerns over the portrayal of women in online pornography and the issues that raises around permission and consent.

Internet Matters commissioned this research to better understand parental views around online pornography in the light of the forthcoming introduction of age verification on commercial

pornography websites. Parents are hugely supportive of this step, although disappointed that it only covers commercial sites. Interesting too that many parents thought other sites, such as those promoting self-harm, suicide and drug taking, should also be behind an age wall.

As ever, these insights have and will continue to inform the resources we create for parents. Through this research we have heard and responded to the cry of parents to create age appropriate conversation starters. You can get a flavour of these at the end of this report and see them all on our website.

This report is based on research conducted by Trinity McQueen. They are MRS Company Partners and members of the Association of Qualitative Researchers (AQR). Fieldwork services are aligned to and follow the IQCS and ISO20252 quality standards.



# Methodology

---

All participants were carefully screened to ensure they met the required criteria to take part and were suitable for this research. An integrated approach was undertaken:



## *Quantitative survey to provide robust data*

- Nationally representative sample from a consumer access panel (conducted 31st October - 6th November 2018).
- Participants were recruited from a consumer access panel to take part in a 20 minute online survey.
- Screening questions were asked upfront to ensure we were speaking to parents with children aged 4 - 16 years old and had broadband at home.
- Quotas were applied to the survey to ensure the sample was balanced and the data was weighted to ensure it was representative of UK parents.
- In total, 2,044 parents completed the survey between 31st October - 6th November 2018, representing 502 parents from the North, 790 from the South, 455 from the Midlands and 297 from NI, Wales and Scotland.
- Differences between subgroups reported are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.



## *Qualitative online community*

- 1 week with 32 parents with a child aged 6-16 years (conducted 15th - 21st October 2018).
- To ensure eligibility for the community, as part of the recruitment process, parents were asked to complete a recruitment survey and to confirm they would be happy for their quotes and examples to be used in this report.
- Demographics:
  - Gender of parents: equal split of male and female.
  - Gender of child: equal split of male and female.
  - Social class: mix of parents across social economic grades ABC1C2D.
  - Location: recruited parents from across England: North (7), South (8) and Midlands (6), Scotland (5) and Wales (6)

## Contents

This report covers the following:

- Parental concerns regarding online pornography.
- Parental experience of their children's exposure to online pornography.
- Reactions toward age-verification tools.
- Appropriate support and advice needed to help parents combat online pornography.

The research focuses on parental understanding and attitudes towards their child accessing online pornography. The following terms are used in the research and throughout this report:

## Definitions

### Online pornography

*Images and films of people having sex or behaving sexually online. This includes semi-naked and naked images, and films of people that may be viewed or downloaded from the internet.*

### Age verification

*A system that will require visitors to the website to verify they are aged 18 or over when visiting pornography sites.*

## Research objectives

The purpose of this research is twofold. Firstly, to explore parental attitudes, concerns and experience of their children seeing online pornography. Secondly, we wanted to understand parents' reactions to age-verification requirements on commercial pornographic websites.




Trinity McQueen is a full-service market research and insight consultancy based in London and Leeds. Born out of a brand and communications agency, Trinity McQueen has quickly established a reputation for creative and award winning insight.

Members of The Market Research Society (MRS) and The Association for Qualitative Research, Trinity McQueen are proud to have been recognised constantly by the Market Research Society and marketing industry. Over the last 4 years they have been finalists for a number of MRS awards including Insight Management, Advertising & Media Research and BestNew Agency. Trinity McQueen recently won the 2017 MRS National Award for Best Application of Research for their work with Weetabix.

# Specific parental concerns

---



*"My main concern with my child stumbling across pornography is I don't want my child to get confused and think that's what relationships are about. Yes I do think it is inevitable that he will stumble upon it eventually if not done so already, but I think that what is going around now is much worse and there is so much more about, more devices for it to be seen on and more weird things that are allowed to be shown like bondage, rough sex etc., not like when I was younger and the only thing I found were some magazines at my friend's house that we found in the toilet with pictures of naked ladies sitting on motorbikes with big boobs! Like really big boobs!"*

Mum, son aged 10

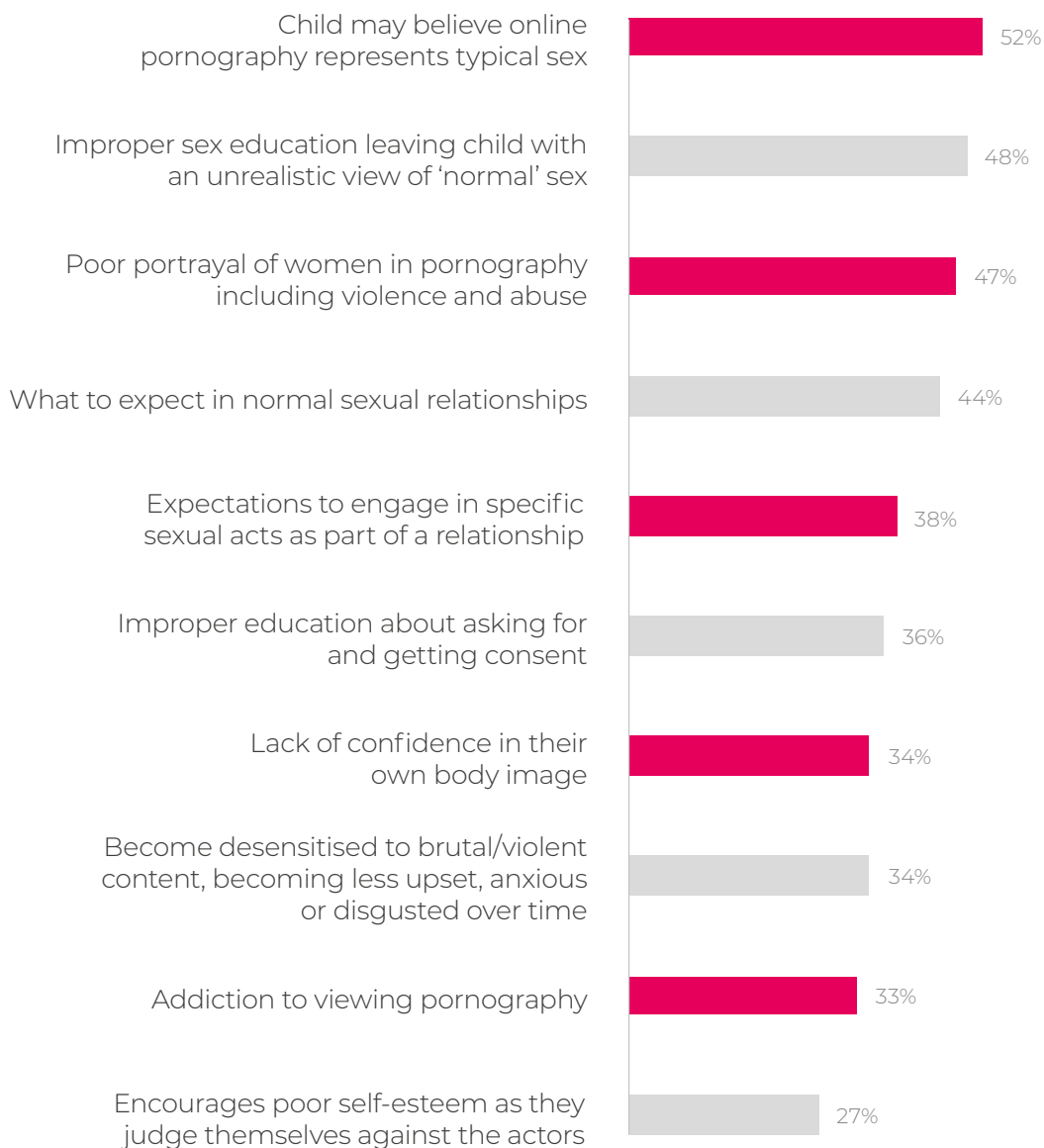


*“I said to my son ‘if that’s what you think sex is going to be like then you’re going to be disappointed.’”*

Mum, son aged 12

Parents have a range of concerns about how viewing pornography might impact their children.

Q. Which of the following things concern you in terms of how seeing pornography might impact your child/children?

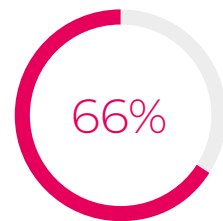


In the Community - the week-long qualitative research element - we talked to parents in more detail about specific concerns and four key areas were uncovered:

## 1. Fake Sex

Parents understand that online pornography is not a true representation of real-life sex and relationships. However, they are concerned that this is not always obvious to children, which leads to a range of issues:

- Parents think **online pornography is more extreme and explicit** than other forms of media and are afraid it would lead to unrealistic expectations of what sex involves.
- **Online pornography is seen as glorifying sex** when the reality for parents that we spoke to in the community is that everyday sex can be relatively “mundane”.
- Parents also fear the **potential implications on sexual behaviours** if their children have been watching pornographic content, over a prolonged period.



Of parents think that pornography online seems much more extreme and explicit than in other media

---

## 2. Fake Education

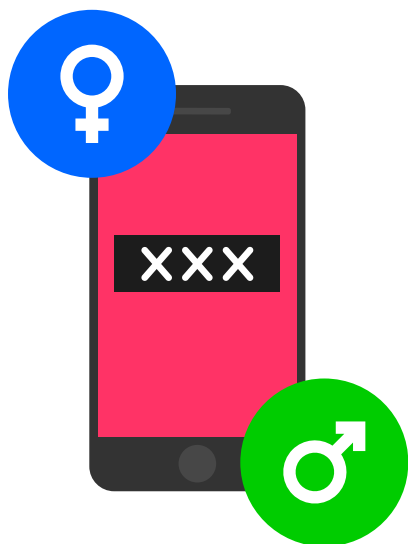
Parents are also afraid that teenagers use pornography as a way of learning about sex. Parents worry that rather than learning about sex in a relationship setting - or at least safe sex - pornography might teach their child that certain sexual acts are acceptable or normal, which in turn could affect the child's safety if they were to attempt these acts (e.g. strangling).

*“We care about our daughter and want to make sure she has the knowledge and information to formulate evidenced opinions about pornography as it’s not as simple as people having sex - it has many other effects - i.e. the role of women, what type of sex is ‘normal’ i.e. anal with the man holding a woman’s arms or her throat - when these are NOT normal, deep throating - is acceptable/expected etc.”*

Dad, daughter aged 14

*“I worry about the graphic nature of some of the videos they could see and would be concerned that it would desensitise them to weird and extreme practices and warp their idea of what is normal.”*

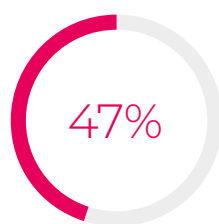
Mum, son aged 16



### 3. Portrayal of Women

Linked to the implication of pornography used as a way of learning about sex in relationships, parents are also concerned about how women are treated in online and the issues that arise around permission and consent. More specifically, parents are concerned that online pornography:

- encourages the objectification of women and portrays women as submissive sex objects.
- promotes behaviour which children will **begin to mirror** in their own relationships.
- will **desensitise their children to extreme practices**, shaping what children perceive as normal in terms of sexual acts.



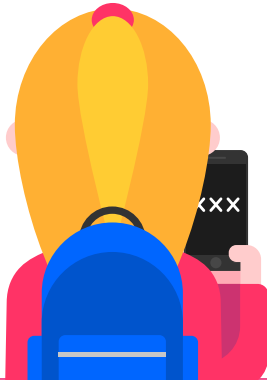
Of parents are concerned that pornography is a poor portrayal of women, including violence and abuse

### 4. Fake Bodies

Parents are worried that pornography could skew children's idea of ideal body image which can lead to self-esteem issues as they compare themselves against the actors. In addition, they are worried about the detrimental effects it can have on their children's physical health if they were to go to extremes in an attempt to reach their body goal.

*“I worry about the size and look of the models (penises/ bald vaginas/ skinny / unhealthy/ unrealistic sized breasts for example) and the self-image that gives to our youngsters.”*

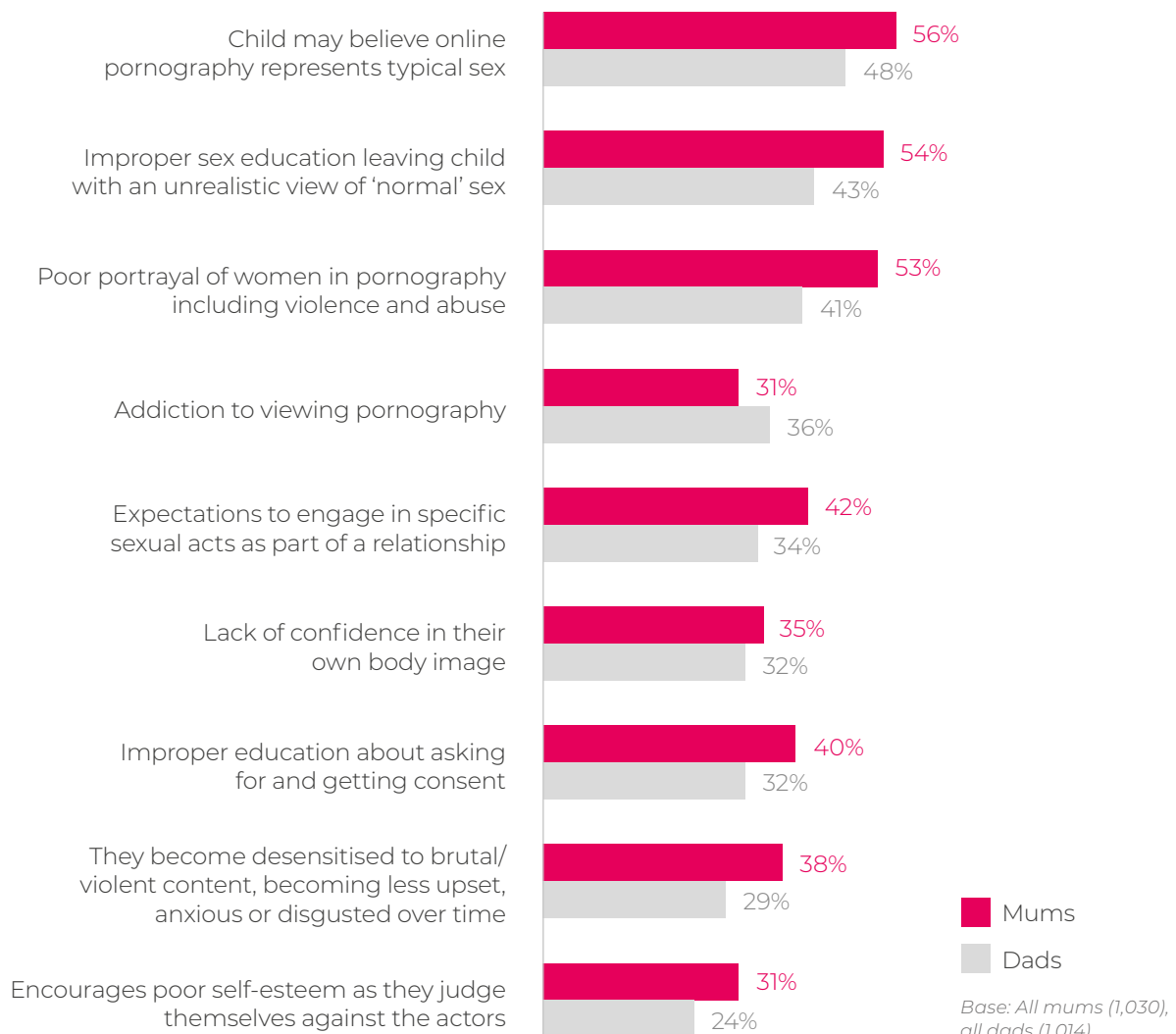
Mum, son aged 12



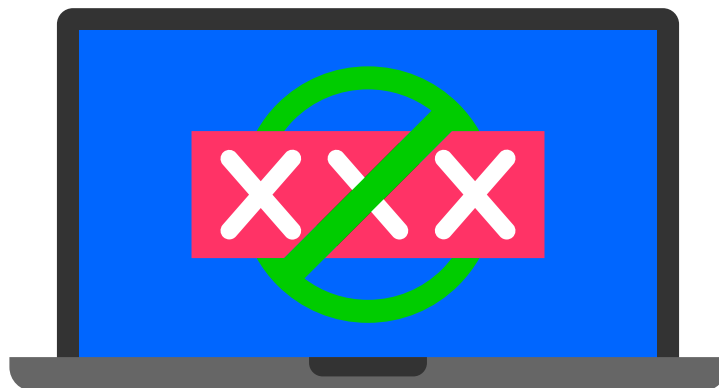
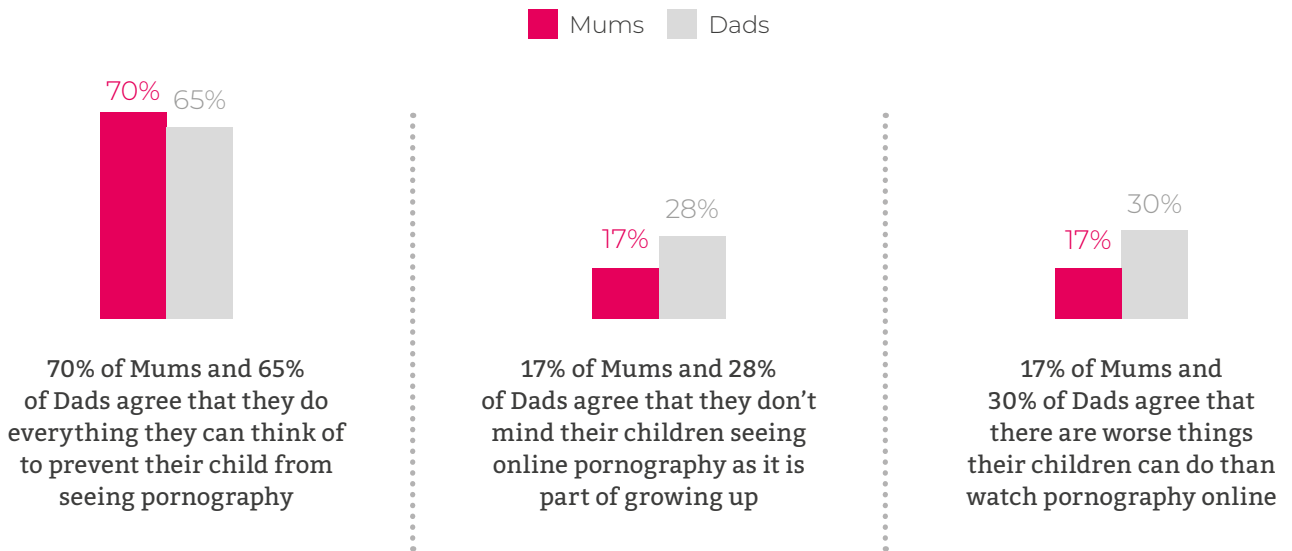
## Mums and Dads – Different views

Mums are more inclined to hold a negative view toward online pornography than parents overall, so it is unsurprising that they are more likely to be concerned about the ways in which online pornography can endanger their children’s wellbeing. They are particularly concerned about how pornography may teach them the wrong way to treat their partners and distort their concept of sex and healthy relationships. However, lack of confidence in body image - which in turn poses a threat to a child’s physical health – is much more of a shared concern for both mums and dads.

*Q. Which of the following things concern you in terms of how seeing pornography might impact your child/children?*



Although online pornography has a negative connotation for most parents overall this is especially true for mums. They are more protective of their children when it comes to online pornography compared to dads and they are less tolerant to the concept of their child watching pornography altogether.



*“He is 13 now and it’s normal for a boy of his age to be inquisitive. So, I do remind him that the movies aren’t real, but I struggle to get in depth as it makes us both so uncomfortable.”*

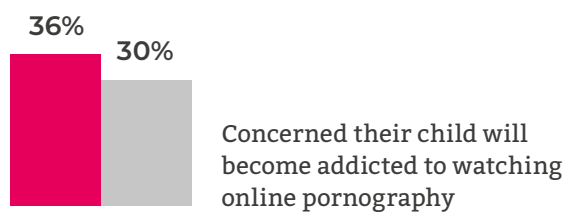
Mum, son aged 13

## Sons and Daughters – Different concerns

Parents have different concerns, and different levels of concern for their sons and daughters. Parents of boys generally accept that their child will watch pornography at some point. Parents recognise boys are more likely to be secretive about this behaviour and are reluctant to discuss it. They are also more likely to be worried that their children will become addicted to watching pornography than parents of girls. However 30% of parents of girls are concerned about this too.

Q. Which of the following things concern you in terms of how seeing pornography might impact your child/children?

- Parents of sons
- Parents of daughters

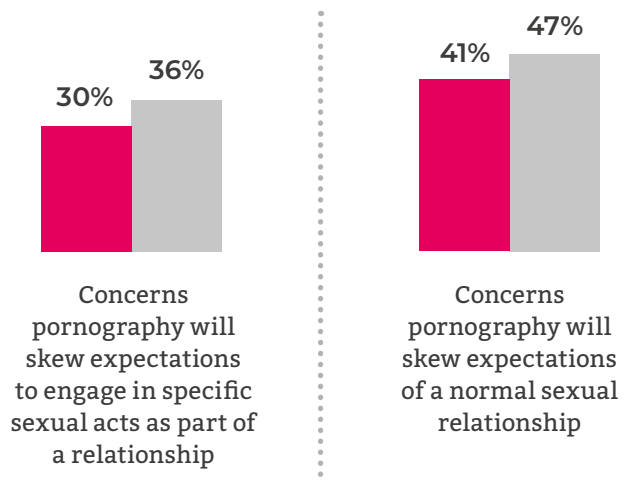


Base: Parents whose eldest child is a boy (1,162), parents whose eldest child is a girl (882)

Parents of girls perceive their daughters as being more mature when it comes to online pornography. These parents felt their children are more likely to engage in conversations about this topic objectively. However, parents are concerned that the exposure of online pornography will foster a negative opinion of what is to be expected in a normal relationship and pressurise their daughters into engaging in certain sexual acts and sending sexual videos/photos of themselves to their significant other.

Q. Which of the following things concern you in terms of how seeing pornography might impact your child/children?

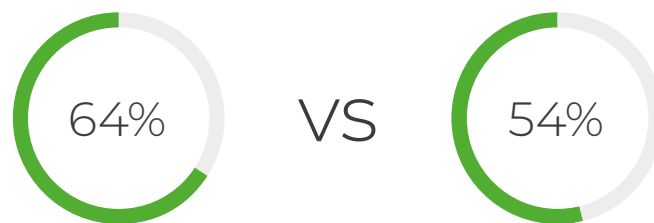
- Parents of sons
- Parents of daughters



Base: Parents whose eldest child is a boy (1,162), parents whose eldest child is a girl (882)

## Fear of sharing nudes despite warnings

Although not perceived as 'pornography', almost three in five parents say they are concerned about their children sharing sexual images of themselves, because of the reputational risk. Even though parents believe they have educated their children on the dangers of sharing naked images of themselves, they recognise warnings can only go so far and other social pressures and influences may be more compelling. Married with the speed at which this content can be distributed, parents are worried that they would not be able to mitigate the damage done after the image is sent, leaving a permanent scar on their child's well-being.



Of parents of children who have seen pornography are more likely to be concerned about their child potentially sharing inappropriate sexual images than those parents whose children were not exposed

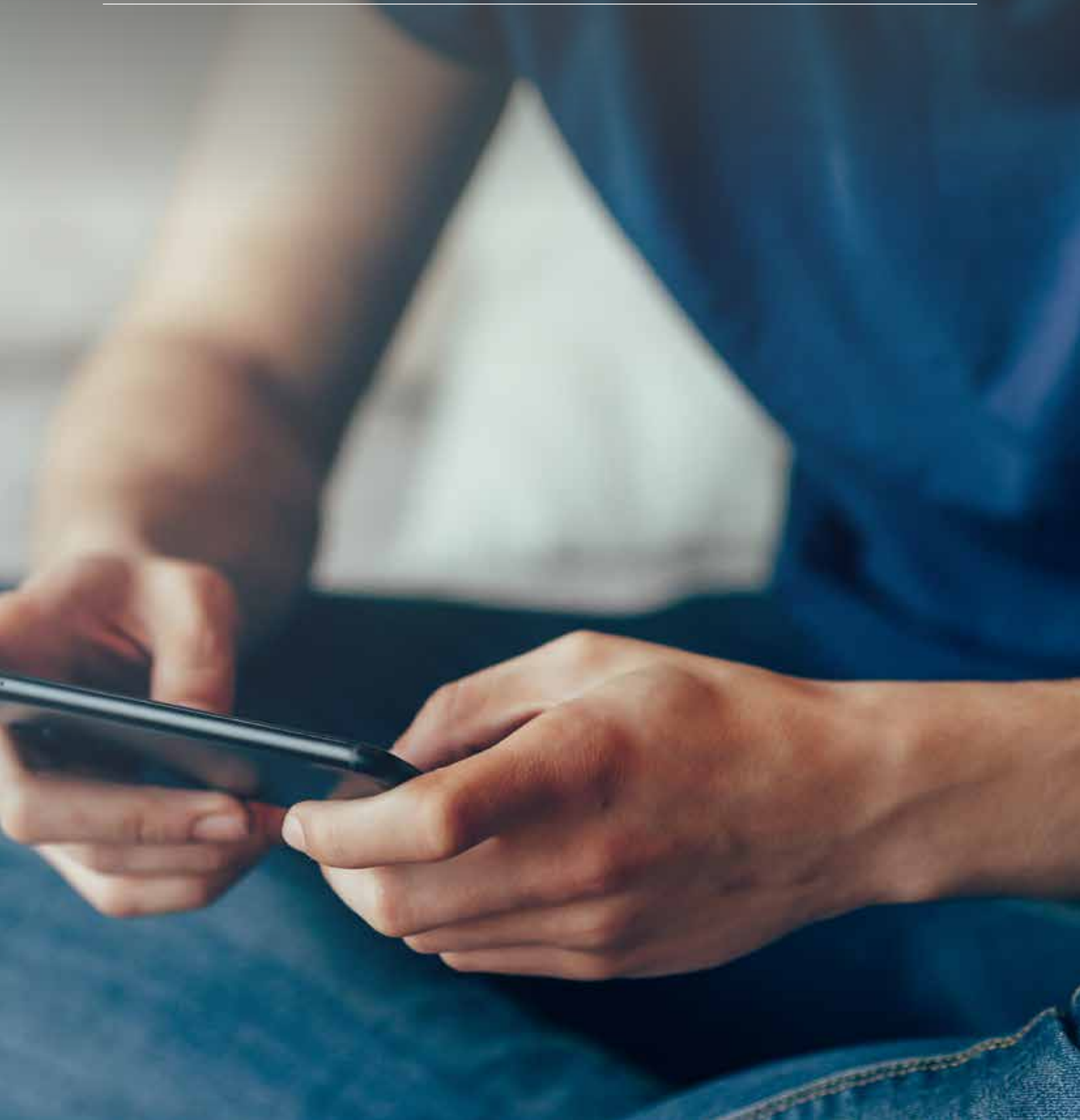
*“There was an incident a year ago where my daughter’s friend shared a photo of her bare breasts to her boyfriend she had been seeing for months. He showed his friend and he showed his friend...the poor girl’s naked breasts were shared through high school and the girl still suffers from depression and is on anti-depressants.”*

Mum, daughter aged 15



# Parental experiences of their children's exposure to online pornography

---



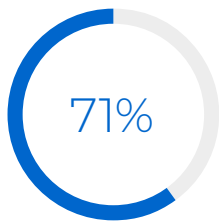


*“It is ridiculous to think you can stop your children accessing it because, even if you manage to control it at home, they will find a way to view it elsewhere if they want to.”*

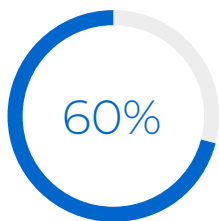
Dad, son aged 16

## Inevitable Exposure

Despite their best efforts, many parents realise that exposure to online pornography is inevitable, this is especially so for parents of older children. Parents also recognise a clear material difference between a child stumbling across it and actively seeking it out.



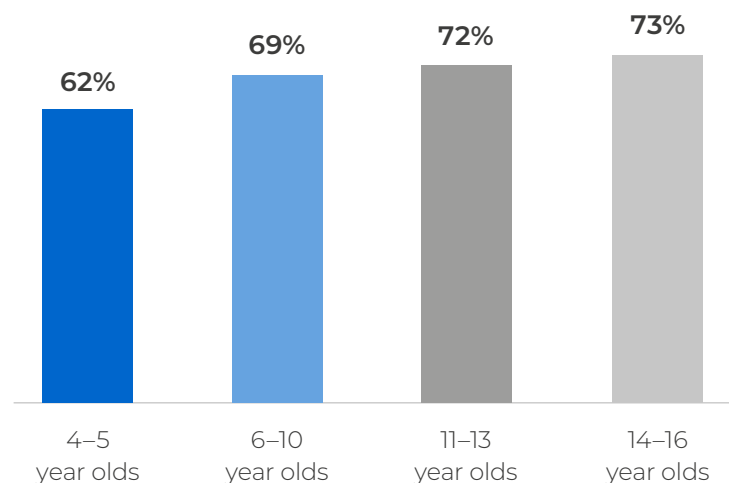
Of parents agree that it is too easy for their children to access pornography online today



Of parents agree that it is very difficult for parents to make sure their children don't get to see pornography.

*Q. We are now going to show you some things that parents have said about their attitudes towards online pornography. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement?*

**% Parents who agree that it is too easy for their children to access pornography online today**



Parents also believe that access to online pornography is potentially easier for older children since the devices (particularly smartphones) tend to be personal rather than shared.

*“He has independent use of the Xbox in the front room, and his computer in his bedroom... also an iPad and mobile phone.”*

Mum, son aged 13

Q. And which device are you concerned that your child might be able to view pornography on?

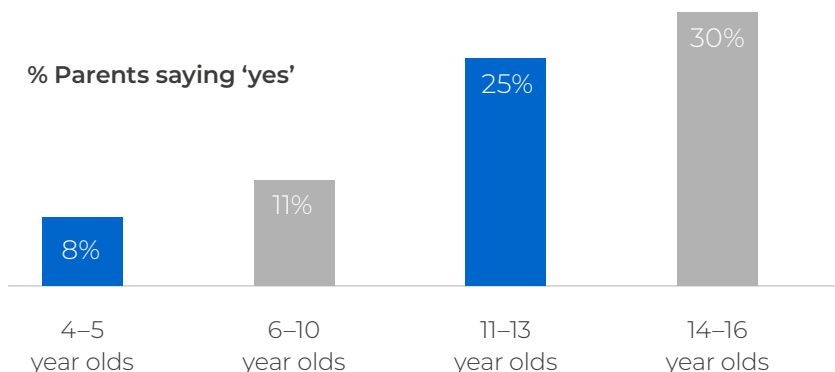
	Smartphone	Tablet	Laptop	Desktop	Game console
All parents	55%	40%	33%	19%	11%
Parents of 4-5 year olds	43%	41%	27%	18%	10%
Parents of 6-10 year olds	49%	44%	33%	19%	12%
Parents of 11-13 year olds	63%	41%	34%	19%	12%
Parents 14-16 year olds	66%	33%	34%	20%	11%

Base: All UK parents (2,044), parents whose eldest child is 4 – 5 years old (147), 6 – 10 years old (597), 11-13 years old (572), 14 – 16 years old (728)

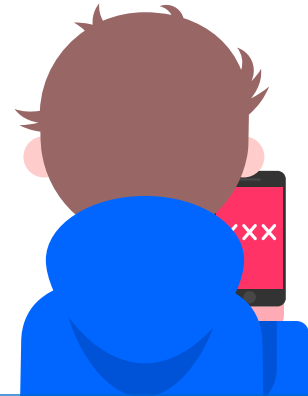
## Children are exposed to online pornography at a young age mainly by accident

Just over a fifth (22%) of parents are aware that their child has ever seen online pornography (either intentionally or unintentionally). This rises to three in ten among parents of 14 - 16 year olds.

Q. To your knowledge, has your child aged [age of eldest child], ever seen online pornographic content either intentionally or unintentionally? (e.g. through a pop-up, through a friend, stumbled across it by mistake)

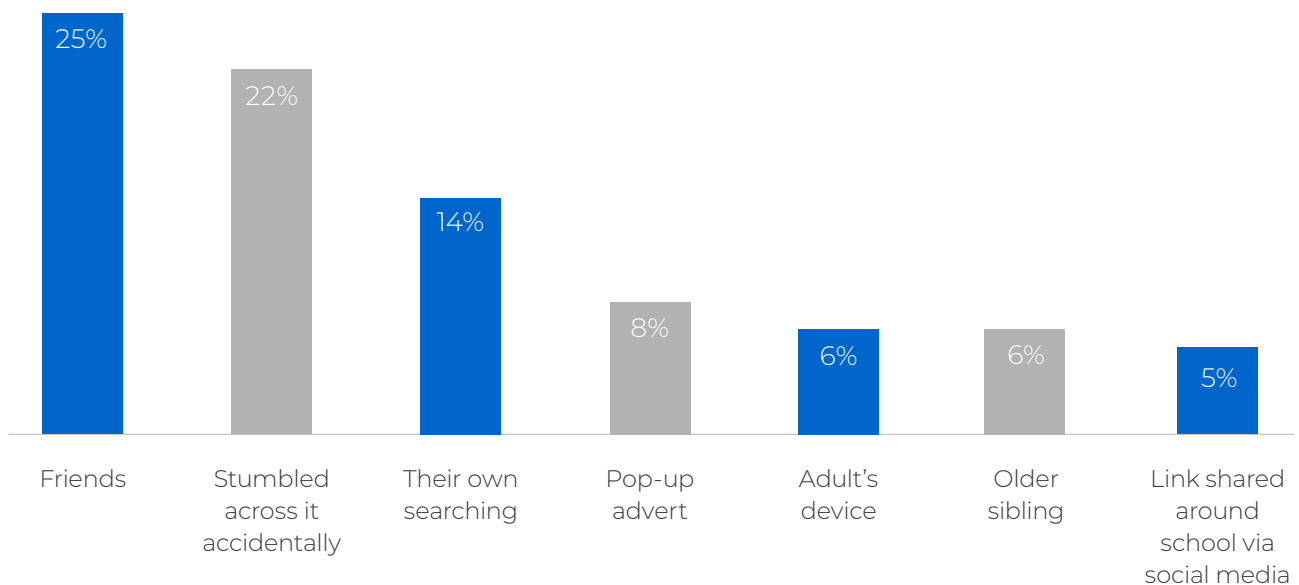


Base: All UK parents (2,044), parents whose eldest child is 4 – 5 years old (147), 6 – 10 years old (597), 11-13 years old (572), 14 – 16 years old (728)

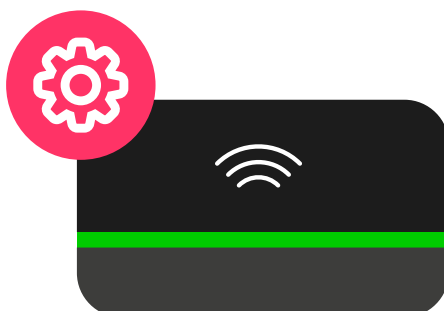


Parents whose children have seen online pornography, tell us that 11 is the average age at which children are first exposed to online pornography. This happens primarily through the child's friends or accidentally stumbling across it or by seeing pop up advertisements. Even though parents agree that online pornography is too easy to access, they are still unprepared for the moment when this happens; both emotionally and practically.

*Q. Do you know how they found it/saw it?*



*Base: All parents who said their child has seen online pornography either intentionally or unintentionally (445)*



*"My son bypassed the parental controls and was searching 'killer clowns', but ended up finding hardcore rape and S&M videos. I was mortified. I took his phone off him for 6 months."*

**Mum, son aged 10**

*“I’m worried about when they are late teens and young adults, after having spent a few years in their bedrooms viewing this material and their expectations of themselves and of others.”*

Dad, with daughter aged 13

---

## Pornography with friends

Parents acknowledge they cannot shelter their children forever, particularly outside the home, with 4 in 10 saying they are most worried about their child seeing online pornography when their child is out and about with friends. Parents are worried about the influence their child's friends can have and how peer pressure can lead to them to seeing pornography indirectly. This could be on a friend's device or a friend leading them astray by convincing them to search for content that is inappropriate for their age.

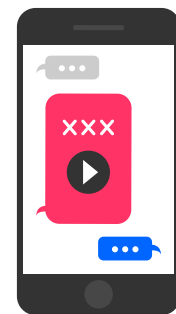
In addition to this child-led exploration some parents are concerned about the risks of seeing inappropriate content due to different parenting approaches and levels of strictness. This can lead to a clash when a child's friend oversteps the boundaries or rules set by another family which makes parents feel unable to regulate what their child sees.



*4 in 10 parents say they are most worried about their child seeing online pornography when their child is out and about with friends*

## Pornography in the bedroom

Children watching pornography in their bedroom is also a concern. Unlike other areas of the home, such as the living room where parents feel they have some form of control, they are less confident about the 'hidden spaces' or parent free zones. As such, a quarter of parents are most worried about their child watching pornography in their bedroom where they cannot keep a close eye on exactly what is going on. This is particularly a concern when the child reaches their teen years.



*“It is very difficult as I’m a single working parent; even when I am at home, we are all in different rooms using different devices i.e. tablets, laptops, smart phones and we have two smart tv’s. They won’t tell me so unless I’m with them watching or searching together and I don’t know how I can control it.”*

Mum, with son aged 16





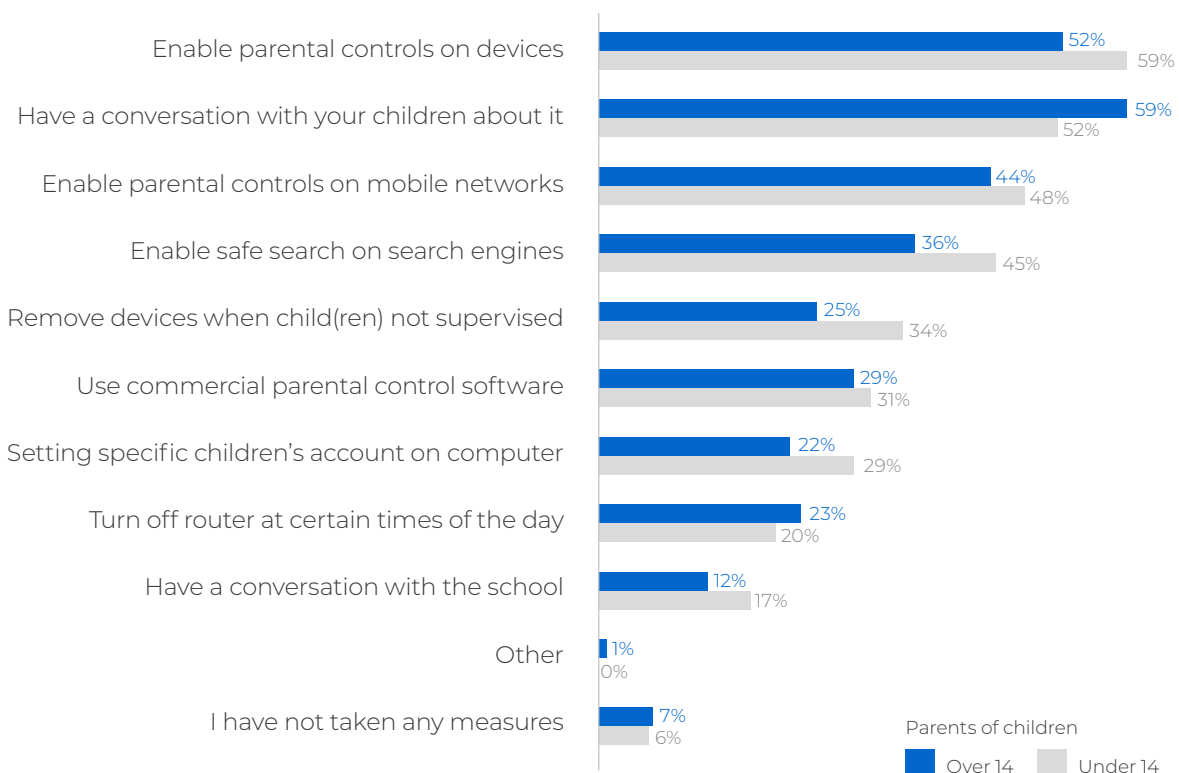
## Curiously Searching

Almost a third of parents whose children have been exposed to online pornography say it was unintentional, but 1 in 8 recall their first parental experience with pornography being as a result of their child actively searching for this content. Children will hear about sex through friends and school and are motivated to learn about this mysterious, “grown up” subject.

## Enabling parental controls is the most common way of shielding children from pornography

Parents are keen to keep their children away from pornography for as long as possible and are reluctant to talk about this topic until they feel they are mature enough. Parental controls are the top tools of choice for parents who worry about their children seeing online pornography, particularly for parents of younger children.

*Q. If you were concerned about your children watching porn online, what precautions would you take?*

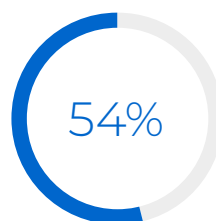


*“My son was at a sleepover, aged 7/8, and searched the term ‘boobies’. He still seemed so young and I didn’t want to have ‘that’ conversation yet. I think it was just them being silly boys – I had a word with him, but didn’t need to make a big deal of it.”*

**Mum, son aged 10**

## The Pornography Talk

Alongside parental controls, more than half of parents believe they would have a conversation with their child if they were worried about them watching online pornography. This is especially so amongst parents that have older children. However, where parents have had conversations with their children, results are mixed, and parents are unsure if messages were communicated effectively. It’s clear that parents are struggling to get the point across.



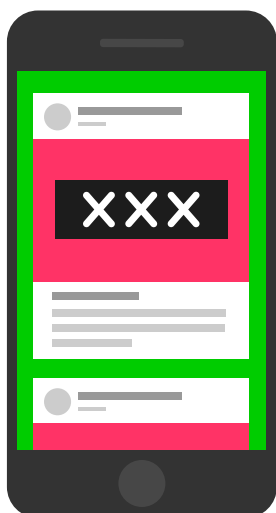
Of parents would have a conversation with their child about online pornography if they were worried their children were watching it.

*“On any site we would see a little pornography video playing in the corner. We had an argument about it – because if you search for Lee Jeans on eBay you would get those ads on Facebook. He was adamant he hadn’t been searching pornography.”*

**Dad, son aged 15**

*“On Gavin and Stacy, James’s character goes outside to shag Nessa and when they return James has mud on his knees. My wife and I laughed but my daughter didn’t get it. This led to a conversation about sex and how not everyone does it the same.”*

**Dad, daughter aged 16**



## Awareness and concern of online pornography through social media platforms

In the survey, parents were presented with a list of different online platforms and sites where on some people could potentially find pornography. For each online platform or site, parents were asked how concerned they were about their child being able to see online pornography on these places. Overall, parents are most concerned their child would see pornography through search engines and YouTube. This finding perhaps suggests parents’ lack of knowledge about the content their children might find on those platforms and reflects more about their concern that their child may use them to search for or stumble across online pornography.

*“I would assume there are laws or something on Facebook and Instagram so that they can’t show this stuff.”*

Mum, son aged 13

Indeed, many parents interviewed as part of the community were unaware that pornography content may be accessed through social media and this was met with shock and surprise when revealed to them. Since the minimum age is 13 for the most used social media platforms, parents assume they are child friendly. Parents also assume that these big companies have algorithms in place to prevent pornographic content from appearing on feeds and expect companies to have checks in place.

Clearly, many of the brands listed here have community standards which define what is and isn’t acceptable on their platforms. There is however a perception gap between what parents have told us and what those standards say. The comments from parents around the use of algorithms also points to parents seeking technological solutions and having ever higher expectations of these companies.

*Q. Firstly, thinking generally about where children may be able to view pornography online, how concerned are you about your child/children seeing pornography from the following places?*



Search engine  
**64%**



Whatsapp  
**52%**



YouTube  
**62%**



Facebook  
**50%**



Pornography website  
**59%**



Twitter  
**44%**



Snapchat  
**53%**



Tumblr  
**44%**



Instagram  
**52%**

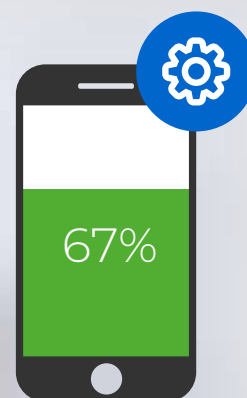


Periscope  
**42%**

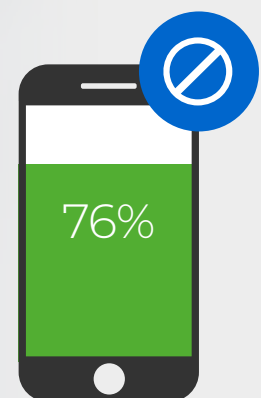
# Adult content, for adults - responses to age verification

A need for further protection as parental controls are not enough for some parents

Although 67% of parents think parental controls are helpful in preventing their child from seeing online pornography, 76% think there should be greater restrictions online.



Of parents think parental controls do a good job of hiding pornography content from children



Of parents say there should be greater restrictions online to make sure children don't see adult content.



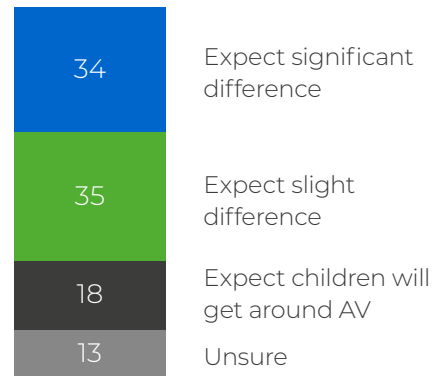
*“I use gambling sites and it is very hard (nigh impossible) for you to join a gambling site without real adult aged ID proof.”*

Dad, daughter aged 12

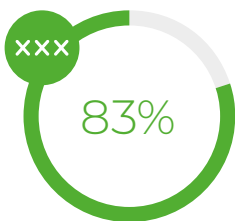
### Age verification tools for commercial online pornography sites are welcomed by most parents

Almost 7 in 10 parents think that age-verification tools will be effective and therefore are receptive to having age verification on commercial pornography sites, especially amongst those with children over the age of 13. Parents have already seen how effective age verification can potentially be for other websites, such as gambling, and think it would be a good deterrent in the case of commercial pornography websites. In fact, more parents are likely to think that age-verification tools should be put in place for pornography than for other sites that promote harmful behaviours such as suicide and drugs.

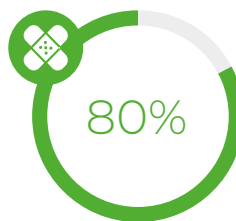
*Q. Do you think age verification on pornographic websites will reduce the number of children seeing pornography online?*



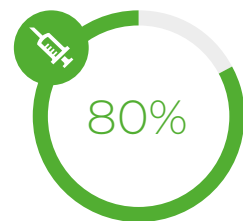
Base: All UK parents (2,044)



Of parents agree that commercial pornography sites should be required to verify the age of users before they can access content



Of parents agree that sites that promote self-harm/suicide should be required to verify the age of users before they can access content



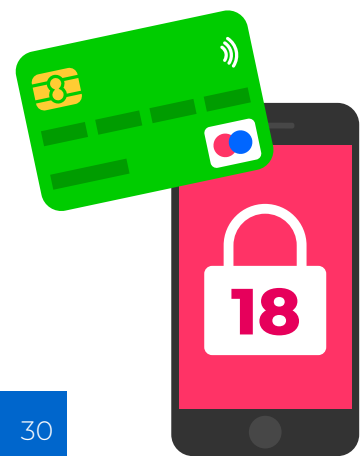
Of parents agree that sites that promote drugs should be required to verify the age of users before they can access content

*“I have mixed feelings about verifying your age to watch commercial pornography. I’m usually against putting personal information online as you’re never sure what happens to your data, but for the protection of kids it would be a good idea.”*

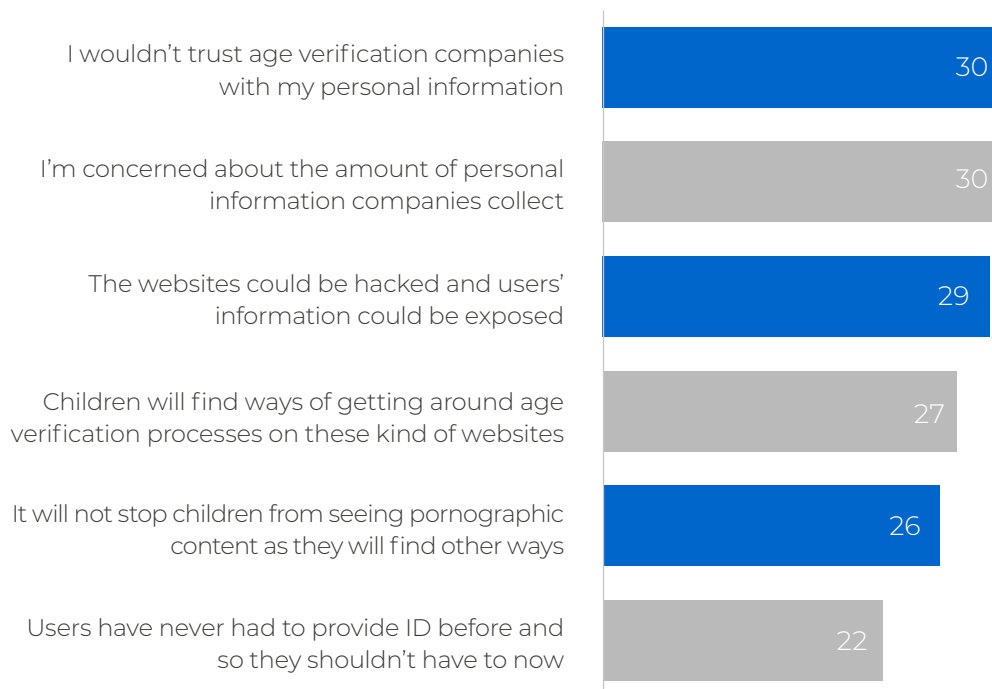
**Dad, daughter aged 12**

## Not all parents think the same

However, there are also some other views that really challenge the wisdom of this approach. Almost a fifth of parents are against age-verification tools, primarily on the perception that personal data will need to be shared with commercial pornography websites and this in turn may lead to data security issues or fraud. However, over a quarter of these parents are skeptical that these tools are enough to counter those who want to (and can) work their way around the system.



*Q. And why do you think pornography sites shouldn't need to verify the age of users?*



*Base: All parents who do not agree commercial pornography sites should be required to verify the age of users before they can access any content (204)*



*"I think it should have always been age verified, not being introduced now!!! Most - I should imagine - aren't free, so credit card should be enough. I have been on some sites that have required age verification and have used credit cards to verify my age. I wouldn't want to give over any other information, although since GDPR, we should feel safer about what information we give."*

**Dad, son aged 16**

*"Age verification is an absolute must as pornography is rated 18 for a reason - it is inappropriate for children. Childhood is short enough without being exposed to adult content that would change their view on the world. Childhood should be a time of innocence."*

**Dad, son aged 12**

*"Pornography is just one of the many areas of the world that we have to educate and protect children from until they have the capacity to make better judgements/opinions themselves as adults and individuals."*

**Dad, daughter aged 14**

*"I think less children will view it because it will be harder to 'stumble' across or access but if they have a strong desire to watch something, I think they will find a way around it."*

**Mum, son aged 10**



The dark web was mentioned by parents who were skeptical of age verification on commercial porn sites. Although parents were not completely clear about what the dark web entails, they are aware that pornographic content can be viewed undetected and unregulated. With some parents feeling that their child knows more about the internet and technology than they do themselves, they are less likely to know whether their child is accessing online pornography this way as the child would be able to hide their online searches.

*"From what I have read, the dark web has to be a place where pornography may be accessed unregulated."*

**Dad, son aged 14**

*“A young person could easily get hold of a parent’s credit card or other non-picture documents and send it through.”*

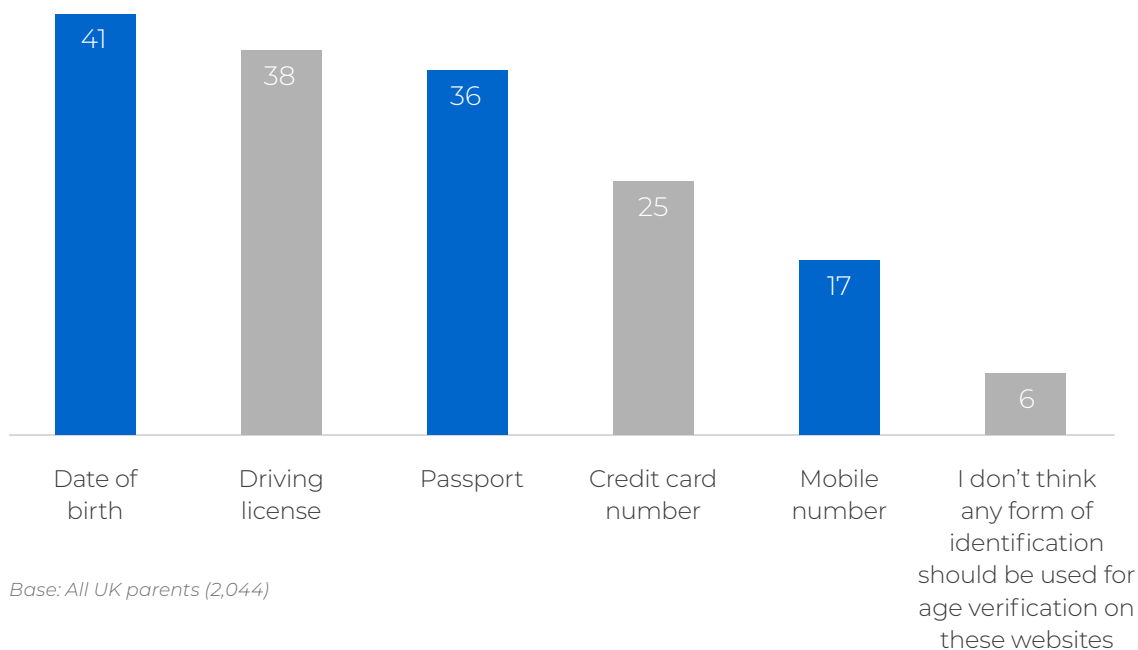
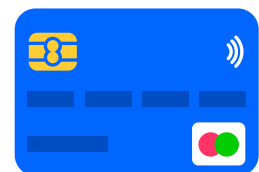
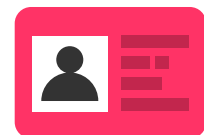
**Dad, son aged 9**

## ID please!

In the survey, parents were asked to select from a prompted list which forms of personal ID should be asked for age verification purposes in order to access commercial pornography websites. The top response, selected by just over two in five parents, was providing date of birth. This is despite the approach not being the most robust or suitable way of verifying age, but reflects concerns that parents have with sharing personal information and data security.

Over a third of parents suggested a passport or a driving license could be used for age verification purposes. However, some parents do perceive that some forms of proof could be borrowed by a minor and used undetected (for example, a child could use the parent’s credit card but as no payment is taken then there would be no evidence to trace).

*Q. What forms of personal identification do you believe should be asked for age verification purposes on pornographic sites?*



*“At the end of school they had sex education. My daughter was very taken back by this but I played it down. She was very concerned that people watch other people have sex (pornography). This actually took me off guard so I brushed it under the carpet. I feel at 10 years old it is too young to know, see or worry about that subject.”*

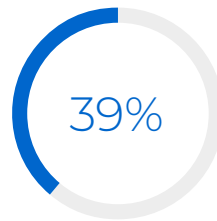
Mum, daughter aged 10

## Parents need help

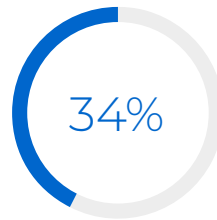
Pornography is a challenging topic for families, causing awkwardness for both parents and children. Although over half of parents say they would have a chat with their children about it if necessary, many are unsure how best to go about it, and often have the conversation in response to an issue. Some parents avoid the conversation altogether for religious reasons and others fear that it would ignite rather than quell curiosity. A significant minority of parents are not comfortable having this conversation.

Not only is it a difficult subject to talk about to children, it is hard to discuss this around friends and family. Over a third say they don't know what could be done to prevent their children from watching pornography but only 1 in 8 would seek advice or support from other parents less than a third would turn to their friends and family due to the stigma and fear of judgement.

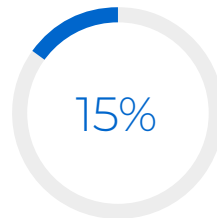
Instead, almost a half of parents would turn to a specialist organisation for such matters, as they want independent, judgment free advice.



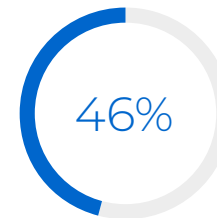
Of parents agree that they would not feel comfortable talking to their child about online pornography



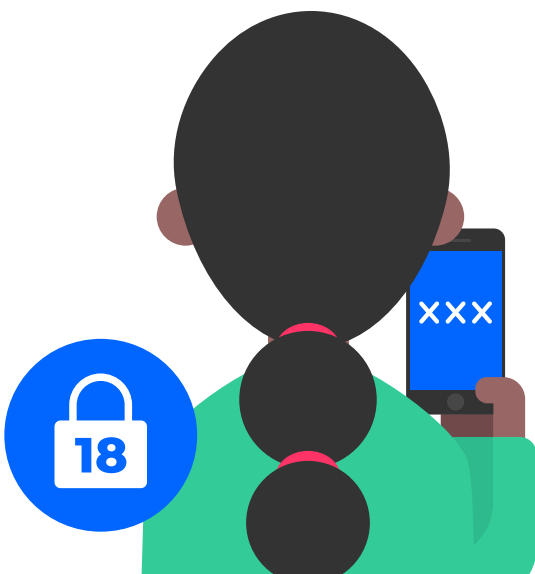
Of parents agree that they do not know what to do to make sure their children do not see pornography online



Of parents would go to other parents for support and advice if they were concerned their child was watching pornography



Of parents would go to specialist charities for support and advice if they were concerned their child was watching pornography



*“I would want schools to explain more of the dangers; e.g. revenge pornography or sharing pornographic images of others without thinking.”*

Dad, son aged 11

---

## Role for Schools

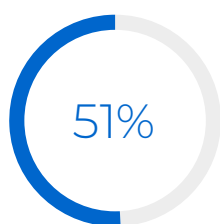
Two in three parents want schools to be involved with teaching their children about online pornography and the implications of watching it. Currently they do not think pornography is given as much time as other topics e.g. online grooming or online bullying. Parents want schools to teach children about the potential dangers of pornography especially around three key areas and would expect these to be an integral part of sex education:

- Teaching children that the bodies portrayed in pornography are not ‘normal’. The bodies are often enhanced or camera tricks may be used.
- Interactions between adults do not reflect typical relationships.

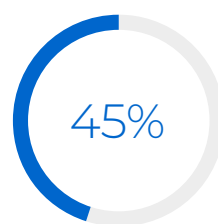
- How watching online pornography could over time impact their self-esteem or make them feel that everyone else around them is engaging with sexual activity or watching it all the time.

Parents would also welcome schools teaching children about the dangers of ‘revenge pornography’ – this includes:

- Making children aware that they might feel pressure of sending nude pictures of themselves to others and how to deal with these pressures.
- How to act when they receive nude pictures.
- The implications around receiving nude pictures or having their own pictures sent.



Of parents think that online pornography should be discussed in relationship and sex education classes



Of parents think that online pornography should be discussed in PSHE classes

As well as making children aware of the risks associated with online pornography, schools may also help to trigger conversations at home as the child might initiate conversation about it as a result of discussions held in class. It would also provide parents with peace of mind, knowing that children could go to a person of authority if they were uncomfortable to discuss a specific issue with a parent.

Besides educating their children about this topic, parents also look to schools to provide advice and support for themselves. Parents are looking for practical information about how to prevent their child from watching pornography online and accessing certain sites. They also want advice on how to talk to their children about online pornography, and to learn how to approach their child using the correct language/topics based on their age. An online space (website or hub) is ideal for parents as it allows them to access information when necessary and appropriate for them.



# Resources

Internet Matters has created a range of resources to support families. You can find our resources here: [www.internetmatters.org/issues/online-pornography/](http://www.internetmatters.org/issues/online-pornography/)


## Protecting children from online pornography

How to start a conversation and manage what your children see online

**When should you start a conversation?**

By the age of 15 children are more likely than not to have been exposed to online pornography so, talking to them early on can equip them with the right coping strategies to deal with it.

And of course the conversation about where babies come from could also be a good trigger to start an age-appropriate conversation about their bodies and what healthy relationships look like.



**How to have conversations with children about online pornography**

**Be natural and straightforward**

If you seem embarrassed to talk about sex and pornography your child will also feel uncomfortable and will be unlikely to let you know if they have seen sexual images.

Try techniques like getting them to write things down, or start conversations when they don't have to look you in the eye, for example when in the car.

**Be on the lookout for teachable moments**

Talking about issues as they come up on TV, in movies or online can help you kick start a conversation and give you the opportunity to talk about your values and beliefs on the issues.

**Find out what they already know**

Children may hear or see things at school which they have questions about. Use this as an opportunity to ask them more about what they know, dispel any myths and give them the right information.

**Give them positive messages**

Talk to them about loving sexual relationships and how to have respect for themselves and their boyfriend, girlfriend or partner.


**Talk to them about their experiences**

A deep discussion on pornography isn't recommended for younger children. However, whatever the ages of your children make sure that they know they can come and talk to you – and that you won't overreact or be shocked by whatever they tell you.

**Take a no-blame approach**

Recognise that children are naturally curious about sex and like to explore. An interest in sex is a normal part of a child's development.

If your child is young and has come across pornography by mistake, they are much more likely to need reassurance and support.



???

### What to talk to them about

Based on their age, here are some things you might like to discuss with them as they grow.

#### Young children (5 and over)

##### Puberty

- Be reassuring when talking to them about the changes they will experience, try to relate it to your own experience
- Make sure they know you are there to answer questions they have if they are concerned
- Using a good book could help illustrate the more technical parts of puberty

##### Healthy relationships

- Share your values on what a good relationship looks like, i.e. it must have trust, honesty, respect, communication, and understanding
- Talk with your child about what it means to be a good friend
- Be a good role model and give examples of these that they can recognise

#### Tweens (11 and over)

##### Puberty

- Make sure they know the basics about the changes of puberty so they know what to expect
- Be open and prepared to answer questions about physical and emotional changes
- Reassure them if they feel insecure about the changes they experience



XXX

### How to have conversations with children about online pornography

#### Be natural and straightforward

If you seem embarrassed to talk about sex and pornography your child will also feel uncomfortable and will be unlikely to let you know if they have seen sexual images.

Try techniques like getting them to write things down, or start conversations when they don't have to look you in the eye, for example when in the car.

#### Be on the lookout for teachable moments

Talking about issues as they come up on TV, in movies or online can help you kick start a conversation and give you the opportunity to talk about your values and beliefs on the issues.

#### Find out what they already know

Children may hear or see things at school which they have questions about. Use this as an opportunity to ask them more about what they know, dispel any myths and give them the right information.

#### Give them positive messages

Talk to them about loving sexual relationships and how to have respect for themselves and their boyfriend, girlfriend or partner.

#### Talk to them about their experiences

A deep discussion on pornography isn't recommended for younger children. However, whatever the ages of your children make sure that they know they can come and talk to you – and that you won't overreact or be shocked by whatever they tell you.

#### Take a no-blame approach

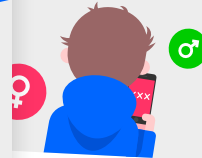
Recognise that children are naturally curious about sex and like to explore. An interest in sex is a normal part of a child's development.

If your child is young and has come across pornography by mistake, they are much more likely to need reassurance and support.



internetmatters.org

Be affirm that although it may seem like 'everyone' is doing it, it's often just talk. Children will seek out boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour so set clear boundaries for behaviour on and offline, taking the time to clearly explain why it's beneficial for them (even if they don't agree).



#### Why - Risks and concerns

A fact that porn doesn't often show sex as it is in real life and should be used as a source of 'sexual education' rather than the ways that it may pressure children to look or behave in a certain way. However, extreme porn can lead them to have unrealistic expectations of sexual relationships.

Importance of consent and how it is portrayed.

to challenge unrealistic ideals and be critical about images shared in the media.

rights on body image and any they have about themselves and their bodies of all shapes and sizes to an unrealistic standard.

accepting your body and your attitude towards food.

**internet  
matters.org**

Ambassador House,  
75 St Michael's Street,  
London, W2 1QS

[info@internetmatters.org](mailto:info@internetmatters.org)

 [InternetMatters](#)

 [internetmatters](#)

 [@im\\_org](#)