



My Child's Friend Has a Problem with Porn! What Should I Do?

By Rachel Pitts / Oct., 2018 [Helping Kids Heal, Proactive Parenting Tips](#)

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You're probably taking great steps to safeguard your kids against pornography. **Have you thought about how pornography may be affecting their friends?** The odds of exposure may be even higher for kids who may not have had as much preparation as your kids.

Since 88% of boys and 76% of girls see pornography before they are 18, your children will definitely have friends who have seen pornography.

How could this affect our own kids? And what can we do to help if they find out that a friend has been looking at pornography?

Why other kids often share pornography

There are many reasons why kids' peers might share pornography with them. Even from a young age, we are social creatures and love sharing new or interesting things with each other – that is why social media is so popular!

At the younger ages it might be a bit innocent. Perhaps they're not even quite sure why something like this exists and **they find it weird or amusing**. They may not even realize it's wrong.

Kids may be disturbed by it and need a friend to help them figure it out and feel better. Many kids probably feel that it would be safer to share it with other kids, rather than adults who will probably get upset.

As they get older, sharing pornography with their peers is way to get validation for their choice to explore this material. If their friends also look at it, it must be ok. They may be looking for their friends to mirror their sense of desire and intrigue, a subconscious effort to deal with their deeper feelings of shame and uncertainty.

Why your kids' friends might tell about their porn use

With older kids, a friend may turn to your child for help because pornography has become a problem for **them**. It may be taking a toll on their social life, school work or family relationships. Or perhaps they've bumped into some of the more violent and disturbing material and that has really raised a red flag for them. Your child may be the only person their friend feels comfortable talking to. (This reflects well on your kid!)

Are there warning signs that a child has a problem with pornography?

Is there a way to recognize if your child's friends are involved with pornography in some way?

This is so important: There are no fail-proof signs that indicate a child is viewing pornography! Every child is different, and some of these behaviors could also be normal for growing kids, tweens and teens. And the absence of these signs does not indicate there is no problem with pornography going on – that's why it is so often a big surprise. Kids may be so afraid of being found out that they hide it well.



At the same time, if some of these signs come to your attention, it would be wise to consider if pornography is involved.

- *A child has unrestricted access to the internet.
- *A child talks about seeing movies, playing games or other entertainment that has sexual content.
- *A child shows a change in mood and seems sad, depressed or worried.

- *A child shows less interest in friends or favorite activities.
- *A child starts to seek more isolation and privacy.
- *A child is using sexually explicit language.
- *A child is suggesting or engaging in sexual behavior.



You might find out from your own kids – or you might not. Your kids can find themselves in a challenging place – the layer of privacy and trust between friends might lead kids to avoid “telling on” their friend.

What can you do?

The best strategy is to talk about it before it happens! Once you have taught your own kids what pornography is, how it can hurt them and what to do when they see it, help your kids think through the best responses to their friends in these situations:

- 1) A friend shows them pornography
- 2) A friend tells them they are seeking out pornography
- 3) They see signs that a friend might be having problems with pornography



Here are some ideas for talking to kids before an issue like this ever arises.

If you ever find yourself in a situation where a friend has shared their pornography use with you, please talk to me about it. It would be best if we could work through it together.

Confiding about pornography use can feel scary if you're worried that you or your friend are going to get in big trouble. Just know that my first goal is always just to keep you safe and healthy, not to punish you. I can help you.

You may be worried that I would separate you from your friend if you admitted to something like this happening, but my first priority is simply to help. We all make choices we're not proud of sometimes, and we need help to get back on the right track.

If you've noticed any warning signs that a child might be impacted by pornography, use your judgment about how to address this tricky situation. You could gently ask your child if they have had any concerns about their friend, **without** coming across as critical. You may decide to give a gentle nudge with something like, “Sueanne looks a little distracted lately. Do you think there’s anything we can do to help?”

Once you know a friend has been exposed to pornography

1) Give your child space to set the tone. Your child might come to you feeling scarred or confused. Or they may simply bring it up casually in the course of an everyday conversation. Some kids might find this news incredibly upsetting or disappointing, others may seem somewhat indifferent, while still others could find it humorous or even intriguing. Depending on their age, personality and the depth of your previous conversations about this subject, there will be a wide range of responses and motivations for mentioning this information to you. As you listen, adjust your response to their needs. Be sure to leave plenty of space for their natural emotions.

2) **Praise them for coming to you.** It feels like a true parenting success when our children come to us for help and advice. Start by thanking them for speaking up about this confusing situation. “I’m proud of you – you did the right thing to talk to me!” can go a long way to reassuring a child. Let them know you see them as wise and courageous.

3) **Ask for your child’s ideas** Here is a great teaching opportunity! Thank them for being a good friend who cares. As your child considers the reality of a world where pornography exists and is affecting their friends, **ask them what they think would help.** Every situation with a friend will look incredibly different, so collaborate with your child about the unique needs of their friend.

4) **Create a few go-to scripts.** Or should we say, co-create! Work together to come up with responses that he or she will feel confident using now or in the future. Here are some ideas to start with:

I’m sorry that happened to you! Together we can stay away from unsafe things like pornography. I’m in this with you.

I choose to stay away from things like that online. They can really mess with your head and your heart. I don’t want that!

We should tell an adult if we bump into anything weird online so they can help us stay safe. I feel comfortable telling my mom/dad/teacher; do you want me to help you by taking the lead?

I think this is an important time to tell your mom/dad/trusted adult what you’ve seen. Even though you might be worried about getting in trouble, I think they’ll appreciate honesty more than anything else! What can I do to help you?

I know it took a lot of courage to share that you need help. Thank you telling me! What do you think would help you? If you’re not sure, I have a few ideas!

Help your child realize that for the rest of their lives, friends and peers will have to make their own decisions about many difficult issues. Kids can continue to grow in their ability to decide what’s right for them, no matter what their **friends are doing.** They can learn to trust their own inner voice while still supporting their friends all along the way!

What About the Other Parents?

Learning that another child is being impacted by pornography is especially tricky because there may be a different set of standards in their family.

Of course, the ideal scenario would be that the lines of communication are open with the other family. Use your own judgment about how to bring up the subject, keeping the best interest of the children in mind at all times. You may have a relationship with their parents that would make a conversation about it appropriate. In other cases, approaching the parents may not seem like a good idea.

The other parents may have some shock and distress to deal with. They may not be prepared to respond in the best way, so interact with respect for the emotions of everyone involved. Even when it is hard, remember that the other child’s best chance for safety is to have people who care about them understand what they are going through. You can offer to circle back later or invite the parents to call you if they would like. If the family would like a great resource to help teach their child, you could share the best-selling book **Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today’s Young Kids.** (www.protectyoungminds.org)

