

Frequently asked questions on pornography and sharing of sexual images in PSHE education – October 2014

Pupils are increasingly exposed to sexually explicit material, some of which they may be creating themselves. This can leave them highly vulnerable. It is therefore important that the impact of pornography and sharing of sexual images is covered in PSHE education.

Parents recognise the need for schools to address these trends but teachers need support to address them appropriately. This guidance document provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about pornography and sharing of sexual images. The document complements [the PSHE Association, Sex Education Forum and Brook's Supplementary Guidance on Sex and Relationships Education](#), which builds on [Department for Education's SRE Guidance \(2000\)](#).

The document is not guidance on drafting policy or drawing up a curriculum. We have provided separate guidance on [drafting your Sex and Relationships Education policy](#) and [creating a PSHE education policy for your school](#), as well as a [Programme of Study](#) which will help you to plan your PSHE provision.

1. How do we define pornography and sharing of sexual images?

Pornography is '*printed or visual material intended to stimulate sexual excitement.*' In this document, we focus on the sexually explicit videos and images widely available via the internet and social media.

When referring to 'shared sexual images', we are referring to both images and accompanying messages shared via the internet and mobile phones.

2. Why should we teach about pornography and sharing of sexual images?

We know from research from the [Office of the Children's Commissioner](#) that pornography and sexual images are widely available to young people. We also know that this can have an impact on the way in which they view sex, relationships and their own and others' bodies. For example, pornography often depicts a lack of communication about choices, consent, safer sex and contraception in sexual relationships; it can also depict violent or oppressive behaviours towards women in particular, which can be frightening and confusing for young people.

Watching this kind of depiction of sexual activity may affect young people's perceptions of healthy sexual relationships and may mean that they feel pressured to mimic the behaviour they have seen portrayed. Similarly, the depictions of the human body in pornography may distort young people's perceptions of their own and other's bodies. Therefore it is important that pornography should be addressed as part of the PSHE curriculum in line with pupil need.

The sharing of sexual images and messages raises additional concerns about young people's privacy and safety. Such images and messages are sometimes used as a tool to bully or harass the person featured. Again, it is right that schools teach about these trends in a way which is appropriate to the needs of pupils in order to keep them safe, and, as set out below, this is something we know Ofsted will judge against.

3. Can schools teach about pornography and sharing of sexual images?

Yes – they can and they should in order to protect pupils. As a starting point, internet safety is included in the new computing curriculum:

<p>Computing Curriculum (2014)</p> <p>Key Stage 1 Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use technology safely and respectfully, keeping personal information private; identify where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet or other online technologies <p>Key Stage 2 Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use technology safely, respectfully and responsibly; recognise acceptable/unacceptable behaviour; identify a range of ways to report concerns about content and contact <p>Key Stage 3 Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand a range of ways to use technology safely, respectfully, responsibly and securely, including protecting their online identity and privacy; recognise inappropriate content, contact and conduct, and know how to report concerns <p>Key Stage 4 Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand how changes in technology affect safety, including new ways to protect their online privacy and identity, and how to report a range of concerns
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The computing curriculum does not specifically cover the impact pornography and shared sexual images have on pupils and their relationships and these issues would form a more natural part of a planned PSHE curriculum. The PSHE Association's [Programme of Study](#) sets out the key learning at different key stages; you can see below how these issues might be addressed as part of a broader programme of learning on keeping safe and building healthy relationships.

<p>PSHE Association Programme of Study</p> <p>Key Stage 1 Pupils should have the opportunity to learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• rules for and ways of keeping physically and emotionally safe (including safety online and the responsible use of ICT)• that people's bodies and feelings can be hurt (including what makes them feel comfortable and uncomfortable) <p>Key Stage 2 Pupils should have the opportunity to learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to recognise when and how to ask for help and use basic techniques for resisting pressure
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to do something dangerous, unhealthy, that makes them uncomfortable, anxious or that they believe to be wrong

- to recognise how images in the media do not always reflect reality and can affect how people feel about themselves
- strategies for keeping physically and emotionally safe including safety online (for example social media, the responsible use of ICT and mobile phones)
- the importance of protecting personal information, including passwords, addresses and images

Key Stage 3

Pupils should have the opportunity to learn:

- how the media portrays body image
- the features of positive and stable relationships and those of unhealthy relationships
- that the media portrayal of relationships may not reflect real life
- to recognise the portrayal and impact of sex in the media and social media (which might include music videos, advertising and shared sexual images)
- the safe and responsible use of information communication technology (including safe management of their own and others' personal data including images)
- that consent is freely given and that being pressurised, manipulated or coerced to agree to something is not 'consent'; that the seeker of consent is responsible for ensuring that consent has been given and if not given or withdrawn, that decision should always be respected
- to recognise peer pressure and have strategies to manage it
- to understand the feelings and pressure that the need for peer approval can generate

Key Stage 4

Pupils should have the opportunity to learn:

- to develop an awareness of exploitation, bullying and harassment in relationships (including the unique challenges posed by online bullying) and how to respond
- To understand the role of sex in the media and its impact on sexuality (including pornography and related sexual ethics such as consent, negotiation, boundaries, respect, gender norms, sexual 'norms', trust, communication, pleasure, orgasms, rights, empowerment, sexism and feminism)
- to recognise when others are using manipulation, persuasion or coercion and how to respond
- to understand the pernicious influence of gender double standards and victim-blaming

Under its [whole school \(section 5\) inspection framework](#), Ofsted evaluates the effectiveness of schools' procedures for safeguarding and assesses how well pupils are taught to keep themselves safe. Ofsted has previously reported being concerned by the failure of some schools to address pornography in SRE lessons so we would expect them to look at this issue during section 5 inspections.

"In secondary schools ... too much emphasis was placed on 'the mechanics' of reproduction and too little on relationships, sexuality, the influence of pornography on pupils' understanding of healthy sexual relationships, dealing with emotions and staying safe." ([Ofsted, 2013](#))

4. What will parents think/say?

The overwhelming majority of parents will support lessons which help keep their children safe, and will accept that it is better for young people to explore these issues in the safety of a classroom with a trained educator than elsewhere. According to a recent survey ([NAHT, 2013](#)) 87% of parents want SRE lessons to address pornography, with the overwhelming majority supporting a partnership between schools and parents to deliver that provision.

Involving parents and carers in the development and review of SRE, including issues such as pornography and sharing of sexual images, is essential. It is important to emphasise how teaching pupils about these issues helps to keep pupils safe. Some parents may also want support with addressing these issues themselves.

Some parents may wish to withdraw their child from lessons covering pornography or sharing of sexual images due to misconceptions that their children will be shown inappropriate images as part of the lesson. It is important to reassure parents that pornographic images will not be shown in lessons (see question 6, below) and to invite parents to see the lesson plans and resources which will be used. Running parent sessions on online safety and SRE can further enhance parent partnerships and provide parents with the skills and knowledge they need to confidently address these issues with their children.

5. At what age should we start covering these topics?

Specific work about pornography or sharing of sexual images should be addressed before it becomes an issue rather than reacting to an incident after it has occurred. Overall the key is that the lesson be age and stage appropriate to the pupils' learning and level of development.

6. Does teaching about this subject mean looking at sexually explicit images?

No. Pornographic images must never be shown to pupils, and there is no need for teachers to look at pornography to plan their teaching.

7. What are the key principles to follow when teaching about these issues?

Pornography and sharing of sexual images should be taught within the context of a PSHE curriculum which provides pupils with the skills, language, knowledge and understanding they need to develop healthy relationships, give and receive informed consent and keep themselves safe both offline and online. This means following best practice principles as set out below.

1. Address the pupils' concerns by undertaking a needs analysis: anonymous question boxes and anonymous surveys can be used to identify what currently concerns pupils about sex and relationships, and what they think they need to know about. In some cases you may choose to ask the class what concerns them about pornography and sharing of sexual images specifically and then tailor your teaching to address these concerns. It is also important to liaise with the pastoral team and any other relevant staff about any issues that have been identified or that are anticipated. Establishing a safe learning environment by agreeing and reinforcing ground rules is therefore crucial.
2. Adopt a non-judgemental approach: as set out above, there are serious legal and ethical issues relating to pornography and sharing of sexual images which pupils should be aware of. However, it is important to recognise that a judgemental approach will not

support all pupils, some of whom may be using pornography or sharing sexual images. You should explain that pornography creates myths about sex and how people should look which can affect pupils' relationships, body image and self-esteem, and that sharing of sexual issues raises serious legal and moral issues, which is why these issues are being taught about.

Finally, it is important to plan your lessons carefully using existing available resources, such as the [FPA's Fantasy versus Reality resource](#). You should plan according to the needs of your class, the requirements of the Computing and PSHE curriculum documents described above and the themes you feel important to address with pupils including, for example, body image, rights and responsibilities, consent, legal issues, healthy relationships, myths and peer pressure.

8. What are the myths and misconceptions young people might have about pornography compared to real life sex?

Teaching should emphasise that pornography is not the best way to learn about sex because it does not reflect real life, and can therefore be confusing and frightening for pupils. In particular:

- Pupils need to understand that although communication about boundaries and consent are not depicted in pornography, these are essential elements of healthy relationships and, in the case of consent, a legal requirement. For more support on teaching and learning about consent, please see the PSHE Association's guidance on the subject (available via info@pshe-association.org.uk), which includes a complete lesson plan to explore consent in relation to the sharing of sexual images and pornography.
- In pornography, negotiation about contraception and safer sex, and expressions of love and care are rarely depicted. Pupils need to understand that these are crucial considerations in sexual relationships for pregnancy prevention and protection against sexually transmitted infections.
- In pornography, stereotyped body presentations are depicted, which could have an impact on young people's body image and self-esteem. Pupils should learn that in reality, everyone is different.
- In pornography, exaggerated sexual prowess, submission of women and a range of sexual practices, some of which have the potential to cause harm, are frequently depicted. Pupils need to learn that pornography depicts fantasy, not reality.
- In pornography, women are often depicted as being solely objects of male entertainment and pleasure. Pupils should learn that equality lies at the heart of healthy sexual relationships.

9. What should I do if a pupil makes a disclosure?

As set out above, there are serious legal and safeguarding concerns relating to pornography and the sharing of sexual images. While it is important to set ground rules at the start of a lesson, if a teacher suspects a pupil is at risk, they are legally bound to share this information in accordance with their school's safeguarding policy. Teachers should be aware of their school's safeguarding policy before beginning any lesson on these issues and should know who the school's safeguarding lead is. Teachers should also inform pupils with exact and up to date contact details where they can get confidential help and support in school and in the wider community.

10. What does the law say about pornography and the sharing of sexual images?

Pornography

- It is legal for those aged 18 and over to buy pornography in the UK so long as it does not feature under 18s; sex with animals; scenes of rape or sexual assault; torture or violent scenes which are life threatening or likely to cause serious harm.
- It is illegal to watch pornography with someone under the age of 18 (this law is designed to protect young people).

Sharing of sexual images

Pupils should learn that it is both a gross violation and a very serious offence to take or share sexual images of another person without their consent. Depending on the circumstances, sharing such images can be an offence under various different pieces of legislation, including the Sexual Offences Act (2003), Malicious Communications Act (1988), Obscene Publications Act (1959) and Protection of Children Act (1978). Sharing sexual images without consent is a form of sexual assault – and if the victim is under 18 it could also be classed as sharing images of child sexual abuse, which could lead to the perpetrator being subject to the notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (commonly referred to as the Sex Offender Register).

Pupils should also learn that it is illegal to produce, possess or distribute an indecent image of a person under the age of 18 – even if it is a picture of themselves. These laws have been created to protect children and young people. It is therefore unlikely that the police would prosecute a young person for taking or sharing pictures of themselves, unless they were concerned that the images were being used to harass or coerce, or shared with intent to harm. For further information, see advice from the [Association of Chief Police Officers](#).

11. What other support/resources are available?

- The NSPCC has produced resources to make it easier for children and young people to get help about ‘sexting’:
<http://www.childline.org.uk/explore/onlinesafety/pages/sexting.aspx>
- CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) has developed www.thinkuknow.co.uk, which contains a number of resources exploring the risks children and young people face online, including two films that address sharing of sexual images: [Exposed](#) and [First to a Million](#).
- Brook has produced a leaflet for young people called Ask Brook about relationships, safety and risk, which addresses on and offline safety and is supported by CEOP: <http://www.brook.org.uk/shop>
- The government has also made a commitment to tackling teenage relationship abuse. The ‘This is Abuse’ website (<http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk>) contains material to support young people in recognising abuse and dealing with it.
- Media Smart have developed [a set of teacher’s notes and a lesson plan on body image](#), which introduces the connection between the media and young people’s perceptions of body image.

- Dove have also created [a range of resources on the role of media](#), as part of their self-esteem campaign.
- The FPA have developed a resource on pornography named [Fantasy versus Reality](#).