

Discussion Guide

Bridging the Gap

What young adults can do now to be ready to raise children who grow up free from problems with pornography.

Most of our parents didn't know they needed to talk to us about pornography in the past! That silence led to big problems for our generation. But we can take charge, be more open and understanding now, and prepare to become empowering parents in the future.

Why talk to young adults about raising children when that seems so far in the future?

Pornography is a hard subject to talk about! Many young adults hesitate to join in a group discussion when they feel they might be judged as someone who has a problem with it. We did a survey and found that the topic of *“how young adults can prepare to become parents who can talk openly to their children about pornography”* was the most comfortable for young adults to participate in. The more experience we have *now* participating in conversations about pornography, the more comfortable we can be in the future with our kids.

Purpose of the Discussion

The most important goal is to help your friends and family become more open about the issue of pornography. Even if you don't share all the info you planned, you will be successful if you can help them:

1. Feel more comfortable talking about pornography.
2. Start conversations about pornography with their own family and friends.
3. Feel inspired that together we can change the culture of silence and shame.
4. Have compassion for those who have been impacted by pornography in any way.
5. Decide what they want to do now to become the kind of parent they hope to be.
6. Commit to an action step.

Teaching Tips

1. Keep preparing until you are excited to teach! If you would like another resource to help you prepare, [Arm Your Kids for the Battle](#) from BYU Magazine is a good one.
2. This guide has more info than you can probably use in one discussion. Depending on how much time you have and the interests of your group, you could choose to talk about any of the options included below. You could plan to have another discussion later - or a whole series of discussions!
3. We have slides for this discussion if you would like to use them.

4. Always respect parents, teachers, and other leaders, and redirect the conversation if it starts to be critical.
5. If someone overshares in a way that makes the group uncomfortable, you can say, "I would love to talk to you about this after the discussion. Can we plan to do that?"

Discussion Guide

Part 1 - Introduction

Acknowledge that this topic can be uncomfortable, but it's important, so let's just do our best! Bringing in humor can ease the tension.

Give them a summary of what you are going to talk about.

Set expectations for what is appropriate to share:

- Reassure them that you will not be sharing anything graphic about pornography.
- Ask them to keep the conversation safe for everyone by not using graphic examples or language.
- Ask them to talk to a trusted friend, counselor or religious leader privately after the discussion about details of their own or other's experiences struggling with pornography.
- If the discussion goes off track, remind them of the expectations and tell them you would love to talk to them later. At the same time, be careful not to shame people or discourage them from being honest.

Part 2 - Learning from the past: How did our parents talk about pornography?

Options to start:

- Share your own experience with your parents - or someone else's.
- Ask for a raise of hands - who feels their parents did a great job talking to them about sex and pornography?

Slide: Having "THE TALK"

Emphasize compassion for parents - no parent shaming! Parents did the best they knew how at the time.

Ask: How did your parents teach you about sex and pornography?

Tip: Tell them ahead of time how many responses you will take - otherwise this discussion could take over the whole time!

The discussion may take off from there, but if you need to get the conversation going, here are some more questions:

- When was your first talk about pornography or sex?
- Who talked to you about it?
- Was it awkward? Why?

- Did your parents use scare tactics, shame-based messages, or silence?
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- Did your parents treat boys and girls differently?

Ask: Why do you think your parents approached it that way? What were their goals?

Some ideas:

- Wanted to protect innocence
- Wanted to respect the sacredness of sexuality
- Wanted to keep kids safe
- Didn't want to raise curiosity and cause kids to look for more info
- They actually did talk more openly than how they were raised, and they thought they were doing well
- Didn't know how big the problem would become
- Didn't think their kids would be tempted
- Uncomfortable talking about sexuality
- Thought they kept kids safe with filters
- Thought church and school were doing enough to teach about it

Ask: What do you wish your parents would have done?

Ask: How do you want to teach your own kids?

Part 3 - Bridging the Gap

Slide: Let's bridge the gap. (Talk about the gaps between our past experiences with our parents, our present, and the future with our own families.)

Despite our hopes to do better than our parents, it won't be as easy as we think.

Ask: How open are you and your friends about pornography now? How open and educated is our generation generally?

If it's hard to talk about now, we will take that with us into the future with our own kids.

We didn't create the sexually toxic environment or the silence we grew up with. That's not our fault, but now it is our responsibility. We need to start building a bridge now to get us to the future we want.

Ask: What assets, strengths, and opportunities do we have that our parents didn't have?

Some ideas:

- Our experiences lead to better awareness of the problem
- We are more open about tough issues
- We are sometimes more understanding of people with challenges or differences
- There are more resources to help now
- This discussion that we're having right now. The fact that we're here is already a great sign!

Part 4 - The Top 5 Ways to Teach Kids to Reject Pornography

There are 5 main areas that help kids be resilient to pornography.

Tip: You can do just part of this, or all of it if you have time. Each of these 5 ways could be a great discussion by itself!

1. Redefine success (it's about love)

Success for parents does not mean that kids will never see or even never choose to seek out pornography. What is success then?

Ask: When you are a parent, how do you want to define success regarding preparing your kids to reject pornography?

Ideas for what success could be:

1. Parents do their part - they regularly, calmly, and compassionately talk to their kids about sex and pornography starting when they are young.
2. Parents set clear boundaries and consequences. They regularly monitor kids and follow through.
3. Parents accept that kids have free agency and will make their own choices.
4. Children feel loved, even when they make mistakes.

2. Teach emotional management skills

Things like pornography, alcohol and even eating or shopping can become ways to escape from painful feelings. Parents can help kids be resilient by teaching and modeling healthy emotional management. Some people call this emotion coaching.

One dad who is in recovery from pornography addiction uses these questions for himself, his kids, and friends who he sponsors in their recovery.

1. What am I feeling?
2. Why do I feel that way?
3. What are the next steps I can take to feel better?

Slide – Emotion coaching and the emotion wheel

Help kids name and recognize their emotions. Listen to how they feel instead of shutting them down. This takes time, patience, and planning, but the results will be worth it! Unresolved emotions can lead kids to turn to destructive behaviors to deal with them.

Other important emotional management skills:

- **Handling stress** - Help kids develop productive ways to deal with stress (exercise, music, creating things) instead of just consuming things and escaping (watching movies, playing video games, binge eating) Don't use screens to pacify kids.

- **Problem solving** - Be open with kids about mistakes you make and talk through how you are solving them. Show that being human means making mistakes and fixing them! Use a growth mindset instead of perfectionism. This will help kids be able to admit their mistakes and get help to fix them instead of hiding them.
- **Love and acceptance** - Help kids feel appreciated for who they are, build deep relationships in the family and with real friends, and show empathy for self and others. Kids need to feel like they belong. Connection is the opposite of addiction.

Ask: How well prepared are you now to model and teach these skills? What do you want to improve in your own life?

Do you struggle with handling stress? Perfectionism? Being vulnerable in relationships? Accepting people when they make mistakes?

3. Clearly prepare kids to reject pornography.

Slide – Clearly prepare kids to reject pornography

Parents need to be very open and clear when teaching kids to be safe from pornography. Kids cannot protect themselves if they haven't been trained. Don't let your kids be ambushed. Sooner is safer!

5 Steps to prepare young people to reject pornography:

1. I will teach my children what pornography is in age-appropriate ways.
2. I will help my children understand what the harmful effects of pornography are.
3. I will practice with my family what to do if they see pornography.
4. I will set parental controls on every device.
5. I will follow up:
 - a. Check in regularly. "Have you seen pornography since the last time we talked?"
 - b. Take opportunities to praise kids for good decisions.
 - c. Commit to helping them get back on track when they have seen it.

Example of how to explain pornography to a young child:

"If you ever see pictures or videos of people without their clothes on, come and tell mom or dad right away! That isn't safe."

Explaining pornography to older kids:

Pornography is media that openly shows or describes nudity or sexual activities and is intended to create sexual feelings. It can be on websites or in video games, apps, movies, photos, music, magazines, ads, and books - even in text messages or on social media.

Both boys and girls can be attracted to pornography. Teach *all* kids to be safe!

Resource - [Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids](#) and [Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.: A Simple Plan to Protect Young Minds](#) are picture books for parents to read with kids. They explain why pornography is harmful and have steps for kids to take when they see pornography. Protectyoungminds.org has more info.

Ask: Am I able to talk openly about pornography now with friends and family? How can I start practicing this now so that I will be comfortable talking to my spouse and my children about it? How can I get more educated on this issue?

4. Teach the importance of healthy sexuality.

When kids don't get the answers they need about sexuality at home, they will look for the answers online. Scary! Parents need to be the first source of info so they can teach their values.

But if we find it hard to talk about now, we will still find it hard later!

Slide: Show charts of Comparing Healthy and Toxic Relationships and Contrasting Healthy Sexuality and Pornographic Portrayals of Sexuality by Jill Manning, Ph.D. in the SA Lifeline *Understanding Pornography Addiction and Betrayal Trauma* manual.

Ask: How do these comparisons help you understand what healthy sexual relationships are?

Resource - Recommended book for young adults to learn about healthy sexuality (from the perspective of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). You can decide when is the best time for you to learn more about this.

Sexual Wholeness in Marriage: An LDS Perspective on Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality in our Marriages by Dean M. Busby, Jason S. Carroll, Chelom Leavitt (BYU professors).

Ask: How can you be prepared to talk comfortably about healthy sexuality with your spouse and children?

5. Manage technology and media or it will manage you!

Parents can use tech tools to reduce the amount of pornography kids are exposed to. Even though filters and parental controls are not fool-proof, they *do* reduce the level of exposure, especially for younger kids. There are also tools that help older kids be more accountable by reporting their activity to a trusted partner.

It's just like we wash our hands to reduce the number of germs we are exposed to. Our immune system can deal with a certain level of germs and keep us healthy, but if we don't wash our hands, we can be overwhelmed with bad germs and get sick.

Many parental controls are better and easier to use today than they used to be.

- **Manage screen time** - Kids need to learn healthy ways to manage screen time, social media, games, etc. A recent study found that the [top source of mom guilt is the amount screen time](#) their kids are getting.
- **Set media standards** - Families do best when they have clear standards about the kind of media and entertainment they choose.

Ask: How are you managing your own tech use and screen time? Are you keeping the same media standards that you want in your future family home? Have you become desensitized to some degree to sexualized media? What do you want to improve now so you can be a good model for your kids?

Part 5 - Helping your kids recover from using pornography

Since your kids will have their God-given agency to choose, they will make mistakes! But if you have talked to them about pornography, even if they get involved with it they will find it easier to turn to you for help when they want to change.

What *is* recovery, anyway?

Ask: How would you explain to a friend what recovery from pornography is?

Optional video: [Redefine Recovery from Pornography Addiction](#)

Slides: Sobriety and recovery are not the same thing.

SOBRIETY = Not looking

RECOVERY = Not looking + healthy stress responses + connection + humility & honesty + a plan + skills + accountability + spiritual healing + healthy living for a lifetime

Sobriety is important and the first step to recovery. It is worth celebrating!

Recovery is *not* measured by how many days since someone viewed pornography. It is addressing the underlying factors leading someone to use pornography and working on them over time. Someone in recovery learns to live in a healthier way for the rest of their life.

Helping your kids recover will mean helping them discover these underlying reasons and make progress in those areas.

What about addiction? Don't assume your child is addicted! However, they could be laying the groundwork for a future addiction.

Slide: The range of pornography use.

Pornography use occurs on a range from never having any exposure at all, to extensive pornography use leading to serious consequences and possible addiction. We are all on that range somewhere.

Our bodies and brains become more and more conditioned to the experience. There is not a clear line we cross into addiction, or out of it.

Many kids and teens may not be addicted, but it is still harmful behavior and the same basic process of recovery is needed.

What about relapses?

Ask: How many times have you decided to change your eating habits? Were you able to change all at once with no slips?

Learning to overcome pornography is a process, just like everything else that we learn to do better.

Relapses, slip-ups, lost battles - whatever you call them, it does not mean someone has fallen all the way back to the beginning and failed. It is more like a detour, and you can get right back on the road. It's an opportunity to learn how to do better next time. It *is* important to be direct about what happened and use clear language rather than "I messed up again" or "I've been bad lately."

So be prepared to love your children and encourage them as they learn to make better, happier choices.

Ask: What can you be doing right now to become that kind of open, compassionate, courageous parent?

How well do you support your friends and family who are struggling with pornography now - or other challenges? How can you be more open and supportive? What can you learn from them?

Part 6 - Summary and Call to Action

Young adults today can be a bridge from the silence and shame of the past to a new future of courage, compassion, and connection!

Let's start now to become the parents, the friends, and the leaders that will change the culture for the better. We can turn the weak things of the past into strengths.

Slide: Action steps

Choose one of these actions to get started now:

1. Build a bridge to your parents

Approach your own parents for advice - what was it like for them to teach their kids about pornography and sexuality, and what do they wish they had done differently? What were their experiences with their own parents? What advice would they give you? What do they hope for their grandchildren? How could you work together to help your family now and in the future?

2. Build a bridge to your romantic interest

Ask your spouse, fiancée, or person you are dating about how they hope to raise children who are prepared to reject pornography. Use some of the ideas in this lesson to have a conversation.

3. Build a bridge to your friends

Spread the message and get change going! Share 3 things you learned in this presentation with a friend. Or get a group of friends together and use this guide to hold a discussion. Then ask them to go share with some of their friends!

Congratulations on a job well done!

Please tell us how your discussions go! Email us at hello@reach10.org.

Let your group know about [Reach 10](http://Reach10.org) – a great resource for young adults and those who love them. Reach 10 helps young adults lead a new culture of courage, compassion, and connection to end the shame, silence, and fear that keep people stuck in pornography. One person can make a difference just by reaching out to 10 people with a message of hope! Learn more at reach10.org.