



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Vanessa Hamilton

Respectful Relationships - what do you need to teach your children?

At a time when children have so many external influences and 24/7 access to technology, it's easy for parents, carers and teachers to feel helpless. However it's more important than ever to facilitate a culture of respectful relationships and provide young people with the toolkit they need for healthy relationships and sexuality.

▶ **Pornography is the most prominent sex educator for our young people: it is widely believed that at least 90% of young boys and around 60% of young girls having viewed it, some say 100% of young teens have viewed it.**

▶ **The most popular pornography seen is: violent, degrading, humiliating, intimidating, psychologically abusive, coercive and shocking.**

▶ **Parents can support their children by:**

- **Providing the opposite environment and alternative views of the world, so when they experience these images, they can decode the almost comical/fake version of reality being depicted**
- **Modeling respectful/appropriate/real relationships**
- **Demonstrating the value of privacy**
- **And creating a positive, enthusiastic culture around consent.**

Mid-late Primary and early Secondary age is a critical time for our children's development and learning skills around friendships, partnerships and relationships. The popular culture and online world they are immersed in is providing them with inaccurate and adverse messages and images about what respectful human relationships look like.

Media, advertising, fashion, music, and popular culture are infiltrated with pornography concepts and gender inequality. Themes of power over another person, sexualisation of young women and men, aggression, violence and force in intimate encounters is so mainstream now it is seen as legitimate amongst many males, as well as females, in our society. Young impressionable people soak up this popular culture, and many have 24-hour access to it. Unfortunately this exposure coincides with their approach to and journey through puberty.

It is important for parents to acknowledge childhood sexuality. Every human is a sexual being; this begins at birth and

continues throughout their lifetime.

Adolescents begin their transformation into adulthood with their sexuality changing from simple awareness of gender, body parts, conception, birth and pregnancy into experiencing some of the following normal adolescent development:

- Increased interest in and curiousness about: relationships, pleasure, secrecy, privacy and the mechanics of intimate partnerships
- Experience feelings of attraction and desire
- Spending more time away from family
- Influenced by peers
- Many commence body and pleasure exploration 'alone time' (masturbation)
- Eventually they will have intimate experiences with others.

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... Respectful Relationships – what do you need to teach your children? ...

Here's the toolkit young people need for respectful relationships and intimate partnerships:

- An adequate vocabulary and communication skills
- Good decision making strategies
- Understanding of human sexual function and pleasure – for example: brain and skin are the two most important body parts, not just genital focus.
- Knowledge of how to prevent pregnancy and be free of STIs and how to take responsibility for this.
- A constructed view of self – their identity, sexuality, self-belief, self-esteem, a view of 'who am I?'

What can parents do?

Parents/carers and teachers may feel powerless against these prominent influences, when in fact, there is a lot we can do to facilitate a culture of respectful relationships for our young people. We need to provide them with alternative versions of relationships and sexuality.

We can start with:

- Providing the opposite environment and alternative views of the world, so when they experience these images, they can decode the almost comical/fake version of reality being depicted
- Modeling respectful/appropriate relationships

- Demonstrating the value of privacy
- And creating a positive, enthusiastic culture around consent.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Model respectful relationships to one another as well as good communication.
- Promote consent; explain that pressuring someone into something they are not into is not 'sexy', intimate encounters should always involve shared enthusiasm & motivation.
- Explain that real intimate encounters are so much better than what is depicted in porn and media; giving pleasure is as awesome as receiving it, especially when it is mutual.
- Take time to think about your vision for your child's sexual journey throughout their adult life: what role will you play in guiding this outcome? Hopefully words like these come to mind: fun, safe, happy, joyful, healthy, resilient, empowered, fulfilling, respectful, informed, able to experience shared intimacy and pleasure.
- Explain that porn is not how couples really have sex. Here is an analogy:
 - Just as car scenes in movies have explosions, crashes and speeding, that is not really how you drive a car. But normal/usual/fun/safe driving of a car is boring to watch on camera, so they fake it to look exciting.

- So too, intimacy and sex between two people is normal/usual/fun/safe but only enjoyable for the two people doing it, quite boring to watch on camera.
- Porn is 'made up' depictions of sex, the people are actors, the bodies and positions are altered and enhanced and most importantly that is not how two people relate to each other in real life.
- Lose your embarrassment and fears by stripping back (excuse the pun!) your layers of your own thoughts related to sex; your journey/fears/pleasures/regrets/behaviours/experiences are not part of the discussion. You need to give them accurate information and simple answers to their questions.
- Do not view sex as dirty or negative.
- Talk in the car, where you don't have to face each other.
- Give them reliable websites such as those found here: <http://www.talkingthetalksexed.com.au/young-people---sexual-health.html>

Vanessa Hamilton

Vanessa Hamilton has worked as a Sexual and Reproductive Health Nurse for more than 20 years, provided Sexual Health Education to a variety of groups and individuals for 15 years, and is also mother of 3 children. Vanessa is passionate about empowering the current generation of children with essential information for safe and positive relationship experiences over their lifetime. www.talkingthetalksexed.com.au



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