

27% had seen online pornography by age 11

10% of children aged 16-21 had seen online pornography by age 9

The average age at which children first see pornography is just **13 years old**.

50% of children who had seen pornography had seen it by age 13.

Twitter is the platform where the highest proportion of young people had seen pornography (41%). Just over a third (37%) had seen pornography on a dedicated adult site. A further third had seen pornography on Instagram (33%) and Snapchat (33%).

Half of young people aged 16-21 said that they seek out online pornography themselves, and 38% have stumbled across pornography accidentally

'A lot of it is actually just abuse'

– Boy, 18

Young people and pornography

This information sheet contains findings from the Children's Commissioner's survey of over 1,000 young people aged 16-21 in November 2022. The findings are nationally representative of young people in England.



DEFINITIONS

Pornography - Content, images or videos, whose primary purpose is intended to be sexual arousal in the viewer.

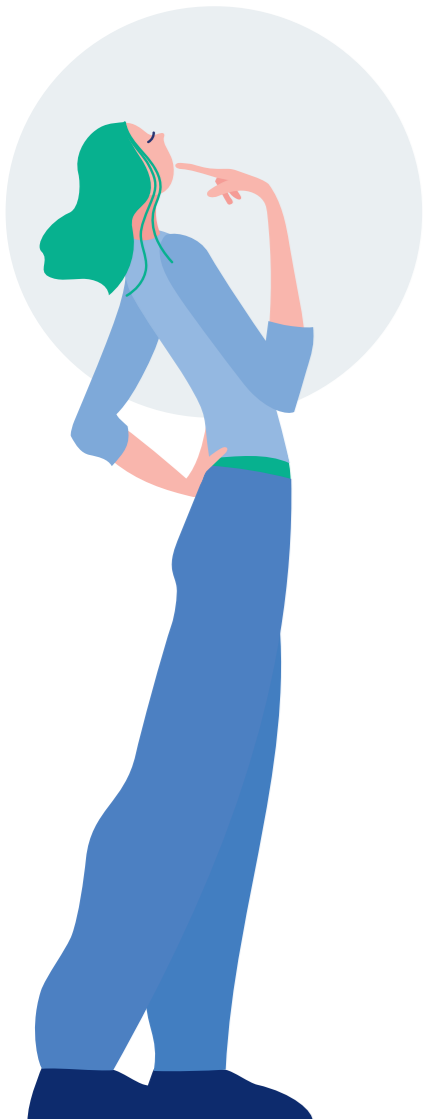
Frequent pornography use – Intentional access to pornography more than twice per week.

Early exposure to pornography - A child first exposed to pornography at age 11 or younger.

Sexual violence - Any sexual act which may be considered as degrading, physically aggressive or coercive.

Growing up and pornography

Based on CCo focus groups and research, these 5 pillars depict what the average experience can be for a girl growing up at different ages, and what she may come across online.



Girl A is 9

Girl A starts a new year at primary school. Some of her classmates have recently been given their own smartphone and start talking about 'porn'.

Girl A is confused but pretends to understand. She is scared that she will get in trouble if she asks her mum or teacher.

By age nine, **10%** had seen pornography, **27%** had seen it by age 11.

Children who see pornography for the first time at age 11 or younger are likely to have lower self-esteem as young adults.



Girl A is 11

Girl A starts her first year of secondary school and gets her first smartphone to help her stay safe and communicate with her parents.

Her parents install limited safety functions on her phone such as blocking some websites.

Pornography is messaged around the school via wireless services.

The average age at which children first see pornography is **13**.

Girls and boys are just as likely as each other to see pornography at this age.



Girl A is 13

Girl A is legally able to access most social media platforms and likely to stumble across pornography online.

According to the CCo's survey of young people, Girl A at age 13 is approximately the average age of children in England for first accessing online pornography.

Children often stumble accidentally across pornography online.

38% of 16-21 year-olds said they had accidentally come across pornography online.

Twitter is the platform where the highest percentage of children had seen pornography (**41%**),

followed by dedicated pornography sites (**37%**), Instagram (**33%**), Snapchat (**32%**) and search engines (**30%**).



Girl A is 14

Girl A may feel pressured to watch online pornography to fit in.

One of her friends says that she won't know what to do if she doesn't watch pornography before having sex.

43% of children aged 16-21 agreed with the statement 'Young people mainly view online pornography due to peer pressure or to fit in.'



Girl A is 16

Girl A is sent explicit images from one of her school friends involving a younger girl at school. A boy who she recently met on Instagram starts sending her nude pictures she didn't ask for, and requesting that she does the same.

Girls are disproportionately the target of 'self-generated' pornography.

51% of girls aged 16-21 had been sent or shown explicit content involving someone they know in real-life,

In comparison to **33%** of boys.



What can we do to help?

The CCo thinks that tech companies need to do their bit now to protect children online. The following is some guidance to what parents can also do to support.

Parents and teachers should talk to their children in an age-appropriate way about harmful content they or their friends might see online. They should make sure that their child feels comfortable coming to them if they see something upsetting.

Parents should have proactive conversations about pornography before their child gets their own phone and feel confident about use of parental controls on devices.

Our guide provides tips for this: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/talking-to-your-child-about-online-sexual-harassment-a-guide-for-parents/>

Tech firms should be responsible for protecting children from pornography.

Age verification should be mandatory on sites hosting pornography (both social media platforms and adult sites).

Schools should embed pornography education in the RSE curriculum which challenges peer pressure to view pornography and addresses its harms.

Schools should develop a comprehensive, age-appropriate pornography curriculum to increase young people's awareness of pornography's prevalence and impact, to minimise its harms, and to equip pupils to have safe and healthy relationships.

79% of young adults aged 18-21 had seen pornography involving sexual violence before turning 18.

early exposure to pornography and frequent consumption of pornography significantly increase the likelihood of encountering sexually violent content

Young people are significantly more likely to see violence perpetrated against a woman (**65%**) than against a man (**29%**) in pornography.

Young people aged 16-21 are more likely to assume that girls expect or enjoy sex involving physical aggression, such as airway restriction and slapping 'Young people assume that girls want and enjoy sexual aggression, more than not and more than boys.

47% of respondents stated that girls 'expect' sex to involve physical aggression, a further **42%** stated that most girls 'enjoy' acts of sexual aggression.

Almost half (**47%**) of respondents aged 18-21 had experienced a violent sexual act. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to have experienced sexual violence.

Early exposure to pornography impacts upon young people's self-esteem. Young people who had viewed pornography aged 11 or younger were significantly more likely to present lower self-esteem scores than the average young person.



Sources of support

If you are affected by the issues discussed, the following organisations can provide you with expert information, advice and support:

childline

Childline is a free and confidential service for under-19s living in the UK

[childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)
0800 1111

shout
85258

Shout provides 24/7 urgent mental health support

[giveusashout.org](https://www.giveusashout.org)
text SHOUT to 85258



NCA CEOP's #AskTheAwkward project gives parents and carers advice on talking to children about online relationships:

thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/ask-the-awkward/

NHS

You can also contact your local NHS urgent mental health helpline or

call 111 for 24/7 advice

nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline