

Strand 2 | Relationships and Sexuality

<p>Learning Outcome 2.7:</p>	<p>Students should be able to investigate the possible influence of pornography on relationship expectations and behaviours and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography.</p>
<p>Pre-learning:</p>	<p>Before discussing the issue of pornography, it will be important to review Junior Cycle SPHE learning about the characteristics of healthy relationships, consent and how gender stereotypes influence expectations about relationships and sexual activity - all of which form the foundations for being able to critically discuss the influence and impact of pornography. Students also need to have engaged with related Senior Cycle SPHE learning outcomes, including learning about healthy relationships (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) and gender (2.4).</p>

What is the important learning?

Learning Outcome 2.7 is asking students to investigate the influence of pornography on relationship behaviours and expectations. ‘Investigate’ implies examining a question in order to establish facts and providing evidence for conclusions. Dictionary definitions of pornography will typically describe pornography as writings or depictions of sexual acts for the purpose of creating sexual arousal. However such definitions do not reflect mainstream freely available pornography, which depicts the objectification, dehumanization, humiliation and degradation of people, mostly women. Within the SPHE classroom, it is important to distinguish between depictions of sexual activity that are *erotic* (depict sexual love and can arouse sexual desire) and those which are *pornographic* (depictions of sexual activity which portray female subordination and male dominance and within which violence and sexual assault are normalised). Therefore, discussion needs to be framed in an awareness that pornography, which is freely accessible, has evolved over the years becoming more extreme, violent and damaging.

There are two key messages to keep in mind – pornography presents violent and degrading behaviours that do not reflect healthy real-life relationships and exposure to pornography can have harmful effects.

Approaches to consider when teaching about pornography

- Avoid approaches that (even unintentionally) normalise pornography. This would include the suggestion that everyone has seen pornography. Acknowledge, without judgement, that students may/may not have viewed pornography and avoid shaming students who have viewed pornography.
- Keep in mind that even if students have not viewed pornography, they can still be impacted by its influence on peers.
- Beware of statements that reinforce negative gender norms/stereotypes, such as conveying boys/men or masculinity as problematic or ‘toxic’.
- It is important to engage young people with evidence which demonstrates that pornography can have harmful effects. Avoid approaches that are light on information and simply encourage students to discuss or draw their own conclusions about pornography without adequate information to do so. (See [NCCA Senior Cycle SPHE toolkit](#) for links to accessible research)
- A neutral approach which suggests that the research evidence on the harmful impacts of pornography is unclear or inconclusive should be avoided as this is misleading for young people. Similarly, a deterministic approach which implies that anyone who views pornography will suffer harm is also unhelpful, as this is not true and is likely to be rejected by students.
- Point to supports available for anyone who is concerned about their own use of pornography or another person’s.

Possible questions to investigate:

- How does pornography affect the brain?
- How does pornography affect people's attitudes, expectations and behaviors in relation to sex? Are the effects the same for women and men?
- Is pornography contributing to misogyny and violence against girls/women? What evidence can you point to?
- What supports are available for anyone needing help to stop their consumption of pornography or for anyone who is effected by another person's use.

NOTE: When teaching about pornography, it is inappropriate to show sexually explicit content in class, or refer to specific websites with sexually explicit content.

Possible follow-on learning outcomes:

LO 2.6 The root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and **LO 2.8** image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape

Go to the SPHE Toolkit for [classroom resources linked to LO 2.7](#)