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# Common Sense on Sex and Media

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## Too sexy for your kids?

We all know there's no way to completely shield children from sexual images or messages. They seem to be in every commercial, magazine, song, game — everything. But what we can do is talk to kids about those images and try to challenge the exaggerated notions of sex they see every day. We can help our kids develop a normal, healthy perspective about sex. After all, you don't want to let media teach your child about sex, do you?

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## Some facts

Listening to degrading sexual lyrics has been shown to speed sexual activity (*Pediatrics, 2006*).

Girls with a heavy sexual media diet engage in sexual activity younger than their peers (*Harris Interactive, 2007*).

68% of TV shows have explicit sexual content, but only 15% of that 68% discuss risk and responsibility (*Harris Interactive, 2007*).

More than 40% of teens and preteens said they'd recently come across nudity and pornography on the internet (*ForbesLife, 2007*).

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## What is sex in media?

Our kids are growing up surrounded by sexual images and messages. Kids and teens are exposed to sexual imagery in advertisements, on TV, in movies, in books, in video games, and on the Internet. Many of these images are played for shock value, so they often contain graphic or violent sex. Even mild shows use sexual situations for humor. Sexual humor is a mainstay of adolescent entertainment.

## Why it matters

The more prevalent sexual situations are, the more normal they seem. Sexuality is increasingly reaching younger and younger children. Highly sexual images inform kids' view of sex long before they have experienced it. And yes, studies have shown links between seeing lots of sex in the media and earlier onset of sexual activity.

## Parent tips for elementary school kids

- » **Keep sexual content out of their media.** We often think it's harmless, but young kids imitate what they see and repeat what they hear, even if they don't understand it.
- » **Use safe-search filters on search engines.** Kids look for images on Google and Yahoo! Even the most benign search terms can surface something you don't want them seeing.

## Parent tips for middle school kids

- » **Be aware and share your values.** By middle school, most kids know the facts. They're also surrounded by sexual humor that is especially appealing because of how embarrassed and curious kids are by the whole topic. This humor makes kids see sex as a laughing matter. Make sure you explain your values and balance the sexual examples kids see everywhere with your family's values.
- » **Don't let kids use TVs and computers behind closed doors.** Seeing what your children are watching will make it easier for you to enforce your own rules. When possible, watch and listen with your kids so you can answer — and ask — questions that might come up.
- » **Look for teachable moments.** A TV show in which a teen considers having sex with her boyfriend, or a song featuring sexy lyrics, can be the perfect opening for you to talk. Ask your kids about what they are seeing, hearing, and thinking about. They would rather talk about a movie than their own sexual thoughts.

## Parent tips for high school kids

- » **Talk about the difference between scripted sex and reality.** At this age, your children are moving into the sexually active zone. Discuss consequences, risky behaviors, and repeat your values. Point out that sex gets everyone's attention, so in the media, sex is often used to sell something.