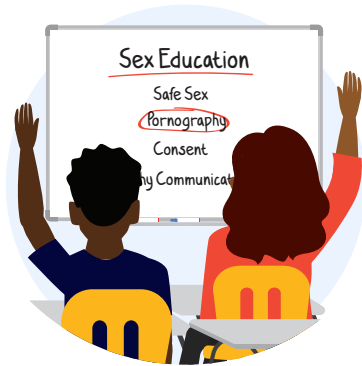




# Insights on Pornography & Sex Education

In early 2021, ETR talked with sex educators, policy experts, and researchers on how we should be addressing pornography in sex education with young people. Here are **6 insights** from our conversations.



## Pornography is an informal and common topic in sex education

Pornography is a commonly discussed topic even though it is not usually a formal component of sex education programs. Instead, pornography is often addressed through student questions. Questions relate to norms around bodies, sexual behaviors, and boundaries. These questions highlight young people's need to process what they may see in or hear about pornography.

## Restrictive policies limit educators' ability to address pornography in sex education

In school-based settings, discussion about pornography is often restricted. Some educators feel they may risk their jobs, or even the availability of sex education to students, if they attempt to include pornography as a topic in the classroom. When pornography is an allowed topic, educators must manage conflicting priorities from districts, schools, and parents, meaning youth don't always get the information they want or need.

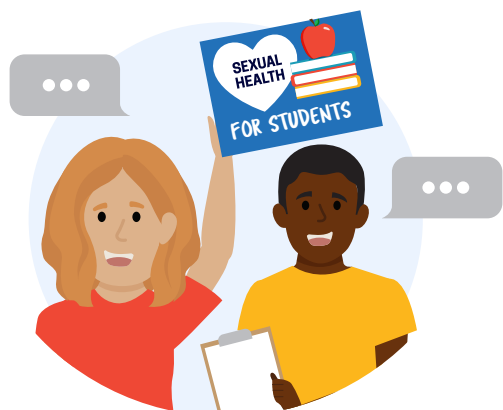
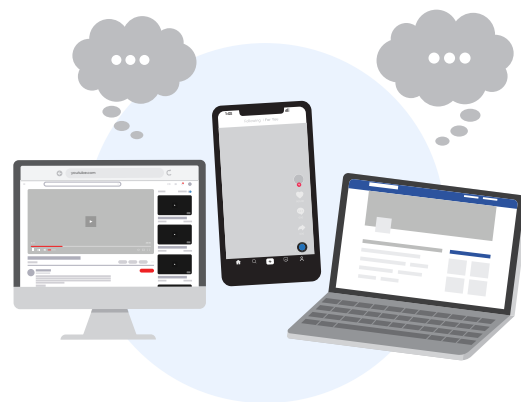


## Education should affirm young people with marginalized identities

Not all young people are the same, and not all pornography is the same. We need a range of approaches to address pornography with youth. Pornography may be one of the only places that some young people, including youth with LGBTQIA+ identities, may see themselves represented. To increase inclusion, sex education should affirm young people's sexual and cultural identities while confronting the racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, and transphobic stereotypes that can be represented in pornography.

## Literacy education is seen as a primary strategy for addressing pornography

Media literacy focuses on developing critical thinking skills to understand the messages in media, as well as how those messages shape our culture. Media literacy can be used in exploring the influence of porn and the porn industry on sexual attitudes, expectations, and consent. Media literacy can serve as an entry point and can apply to pornography even when the topic is not explicitly discussed. Not all media literacy programs are alike—we need to be cautious of approaches that use scare and shame tactics, which only reinforce the stigma around sexuality and pornography use.



## Educators need more training to effectively address pornography in sex education

Because of a lack of established guidance on pornography, educators often develop their own lessons which may be scientifically inaccurate or use shame or fear to discourage young people from accessing pornography. In addition to science-based information, educators need training on addressing pornography when youth have different levels of exposure, feel shame about viewing and talking about pornography, or have histories of sexual trauma. Educators also need support around their comfort and values, including assessing and resetting assumptions about young people's development as it relates to curiosity about sex and pornography use.

## A multi-faceted approach is required to support sex educators

In addition to training, educators need community and institutional support, including policies and resources that support comprehensive sex education and the inclusion of pornography as a required topic. Educators can support each other by networking around successful strategies and troubleshooting challenges. Youth also need to be part of conversation – youth, educators, policymakers, and communities benefit from asking young people about what they want from sex education.



Learn more about our work around young people's pornography use at: [etr.org/kirby-summit](https://etr.org/kirby-summit) 



To honor ETR scientist Dr. Douglas B. Kirby for his lifetime contributions to the field, ETR and our partners created an invited summit—known as the Kirby Summit—to foster collective dialogue on current research, promising interventions, and the role of policy to promote the sexual and reproductive health of young people. The Kirby Summit 2021 goal was to bring together a transdisciplinary group of experts to explore how to address pornography in sex education.