

Strand 3 | Relationships and Sexuality

Learning Outcome 3.10:

Students should be able to discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression.

Pre-learning:

Before addressing Learning Outcome 3.10, students need to have engaged with related learning outcomes, including learning about the **factors that influence and shape young people's self-identity (1.4)**, **the meaning and importance of empathy (1.8)**, **gender equity and gender stereotypes (1.5)**, **sharing sexual imagery online (2.9)**, **signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships (3.3)** and **the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships (3.8)**.

The focus of learning

The purpose of Learning Outcome 3.10 is to open up conversations with young people about the prevalence and influence of sexual messages and images in popular culture and online and to help them look critically at how this might be influencing their emerging understanding of sexuality, sexual norms and expectations. Begin by helping students to reflect on their own values and expectations of sexual relationships and what they consider to be the features of a healthy adult sexual experience, such as care, consent, equality, respect, trust, mutual pleasure. Then, discuss how messages and images in popular culture and online affirm, or are at odds with, their values and expectations.

Key messages to highlight through the learning activities include that we live in an increasingly sexualised world, surrounded by sexual messages and images and these need to be critically examined. While it is normal to be curious about sex, pornography is not a good place to learn about sex because it is not reflective of sex in the real world and can be disturbing and even damaging for young people. In fact, given the violent and harmful nature of the majority of freely accessible pornography, not watching pornography is a very healthy choice for a young person. It would be important to acknowledge, without judgement, that students may/may not have seen pornography.

Possible questions to explore through this learning outcome:

- What are the dominant messages and images about sex in popular culture (e.g., advertising, movies, music videos, social media)?
- Who benefits from promoting sexual messages and images (prompt: the porn industry), and who loses out (prompt: everyone in society)?
- How might the portrayal of sex in popular culture influence young people as they develop their understanding of sexuality?
- What does the [law](#) say about the sharing of intimate or sexually explicit images?
- How do you think viewing pornography might influence people's attitudes, behaviours and expectations?
- What does the research say about the impact of viewing pornography, particularly during adolescence (e.g., adolescent brain development and susceptibility to addictive behaviours)?
- How does pornography feed into harmful gender norms and stereotypes?

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

Possible follow-on learning outcome:

The **pressures to become sexually intimate** and **ways to show respect for people's choices (2.9)**

**Go to the 2023
SPHE Toolkit for
[classroom resources](#)
[linked to LO 3.10](#)**