

What you need to know about sex, media, and children/teens



Center on Media
and Child Health
ASK THE MEDIATRICIAN

How children and teens think about and understand sex is important to developing healthy attitudes and behaviors related to sex, now and into the future. This tip sheet will help you understand how sexual media can positively and negatively affect children's beliefs about sex, and sexual behavior. Use this information as a guide to help you choose media that are best for your child.

What do we mean by media?

TV	Internet	Music
Movies	Social Media	Books
Videos	Video Games	Apps

Media use facts

- Media are the #1 source of information that children and teens turn to when it comes to sex. Unfortunately, media often do not represent sex, sexual behaviors, and risk factors accurately, which can lead children and teens to believing false information.
- Sexual media can be scary or confusing for children and teens, and they may feel pressure to become sexually active before they are ready.
- Media can influence children and teens so that they have unrealistic expectations when it comes to sex, gender roles, bodies (their own body and their partner's body), and relationships.
- Unsafe and risky sex is often glamorized in media, which can lead children and teens to believe that these practices are normal and free of consequences.

What you can do for your children and teens

- Provide them with factual information about safe sex, such as pamphlets from a doctor, school nurse, or trustworthy website.
- Know what they are watching, listening to, creating, and sharing, and talk to them about what they see and hear when it comes to sex.
- Teach children and teens to compare the sexual material they see and hear to what they know to be true about sex in real life. This way, they will be better able to recognize when information is untrue or unrealistic.
- Keep the lines of communication open, so that your child knows that she can come to you with any questions or concerns about puberty, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, sexually infected transmissions (STIs), contraception, or sexual assault.

Remember

Media are not the problem—it is how we use them that results in help or harm. Mindful and focused media use can be healthy for children and teens.

