



## Youth Work Ireland

Press Release  
Monday 23rd April 2018

### **Young people turn away from teachers and parents and towards the internet for sex education**

**Report shows 20% of young people find pornography “useful” with boys almost 5 times more likely (14%) to be influenced by pornography than girls (3%) Only 1% of young people report that teachers influence their sexual behaviour.**

A new report published today to mark the beginning of Youth Work Ireland Week, by Youth Work Ireland, the largest youth organisation in Ireland working with over 116,000 young people every week, examines the opinions and attitudes of young people across the country towards healthy sexual relationships, consent and inappropriate sexual behaviour. The Positive Sexual Relationships Report had 1,056 respondents between the ages of 14 - 24 from March and April 2018.

The timely report finds young people are not turning to their parents or teachers for information about positive and healthy sexual relationships. Instead they are turning to social media, the internet and worryingly, pornography.

The hugely important report also finds that 42% of respondents said that they do not feel confident that good help and supports are available in their locality for someone who experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Youth workers are proving to be a critical missing link for providing advice and support on healthy sexual relationships between young people and more formal authorities like teacher and even parents.

#### **Generational Divide**

Worryingly, 47% of respondents say their generation experiences more inappropriate sexual behaviour than their parents. However, 45% say they are more empowered than their parents' generation to say no to this behaviour. 50% of all respondents attribute that empowerment to global movements like #MeToo. And encouragingly boys are more likely (27%) to reflect on their own behaviour because of these movements compared to girls (16%)

When asked about confidence in their own ability to support a friend who has experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour boys reported feeling much more confident in providing support (67%) than girls (52%).

#### **Talking about sex**

Despite 73% reporting that they are more comfortable talking about sex than their parents' generation, it seems young people still find talking about sex with parents and teachers awkward. However, this varies between girls and boys. Boys are significantly less likely to feel awkward about talking about sex with their parents (22%) than girls (29%). And boys are much more comfortable talking to teachers (23%) about sex than girls are (15%).

Interestingly girls are much more likely to be completely comfortable talking to their friends (71%) about sex compared to boys (63%). However, 74% of all respondents are comfortable talking about sex on social media and the internet.

**Deborah, 17, Youth Work Ireland, National Youth Action Group said:** *“There is such a distinct lack of resources for us to learn sex ed, it seems like most people are going about their education their own way, and that includes using porn as a basis for learning. I think there is a number of ways this could be improved, and I think it starts by taking the onus off teachers. Being perfectly honest, sex ed is an awkward topic for everyone involved. I don’t want to cringe or feel embarrassed every time I walk into Business class because just yesterday we were talking about the birds and the bees”*

**Meaghan, 21, Youth Work Ireland National Youth Action Group said:** *“In my experience there were so many holes in this so-called Relationship Sexual Education I received in school. There was nothing on the LGBT+ community, nothing about consent, nothing on what a healthy relationship is let alone a healthy sexual relationship and nothing on body positivity. I only started to learn about sex and relationships when I started to look things up on the internet, even then my education had many holes until I started to study youth work in college and while I was on a placement I was sent on a sexual health training course.”*

**Dr Patrick Burke, CEO Youth Work Ireland said:** *“This report clearly demonstrates that the Government urgently needs to deliver a comprehensive overhaul of relationship and sexual health education in Irish Schools, building on best practice with no opt outs. Increasingly we see the critical role of quality education for young people on relationships and healthy approaches to sexuality. Young people and others see key shortcomings in the school’s system. Youth workers and volunteers often have to fill this gap. We now need a guarantee of universal quality education in this area and the youth work sector can play an important part.”*

**Katherine Zappone TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs said:** *“A watershed moment has been reached. As an Independent Minister I am actively engaged with young people, parents and frontline agencies on how we can do better in combating sexual abuse and harassment. The involvement and voices of young people is crucial to raise awareness about issues such as consent. This is key. We must also listen to the concerns, fears and experiences of children and teenagers - they are crucial if we are to find solutions which work. TUSLA the child and family agency is also working with Rape Crisis Centers to pilot healthy relationship and sexual health education in transition year. I look forward to building this partnership and progressing that work further.”*

## FULL DATA

How useful to you find sources of information about healthy sexual relationship?

- Young people are not finding parents or teachers useful source of information about HSR
- Over 20% of young people think internet pornography is a “useful” source of information about healthy sexual relationships
- Over 90% of YP say the internet is their most trusted source of info on healthy sexual relationships
- 89% trust friends to inform them
- 60% trust doctors or nurses
- 60% also trust youth workers
- Girls are much more likely to find information from teachers ‘not at all useful’ than boys
- Girls turn to the internet more than boys

## Generational divide

- 73% say they are more comfortable talking about sex than their parents
- 59% say they are less embarrassed about sex
- 39% say they have more control over their sex they want to have
- 45% say they are more empowered than their parents’ generation to say no to sexual behaviour they do not want
- 67% say they are more informed about HSR than their parents
- Worryingly, 47% say their generation experiences more inappropriate sexual behaviour than their parents

## #MeToo

- 50% said movements like #MeToo have made them feel more empowered to say no to unwanted sexual attention
- 30% reported that the movements made them realise that incidents that occurred in their past that they thought were innocent at the time, were in fact inappropriate
- 18% have said they made them more aware of their own behaviour
- Girls are more likely than boys to have heard about these movements
- Boys are more likely (27%) to reflect on their own behaviour because of these movements compared to girls (16%)

## Help

- 61% reported that they would be confident that they have the knowledge to fully support and help their friend if they experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour
- 36% said they would want to help their friend but wouldn't feel confident about how to
- Boys feel much more confident in providing support (67%) than girls (52%)

## Preparedness for offering help

- 66% said that conversations with friends is the best way to prepare themselves for helping others who have experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour
- 26% said teachers in school
- 45% said youth workers in a youth work setting

## Local support

- Shockingly, 42% of respondents said that they do not feel confident that good help and supports are available in their locality for someone who experienced inappropriate sexual behaviour

## Who are they talking to about sex?

- Only 26% are comfortable talking about sex with their parents
- Even less, 23% are comfortable talking about sex with their teachers
- This jumps to 55% for youth workers
- And to 60% for doctors and nurses
- And a huge 92% are comfortable talking about sex with their friends
- 74% are comfortable talking about sex on social media and the internet
- Boys are significantly less likely to feel awkward about talking about sex with their parents (22%) than girls (29%)
- And boys are much more comfortable talking to teachers (23%) about sex than girls are (15%)
- And girls are much more likely to be completely comfortable talking to their friends (71%) about sex compared to boys (63%)

## Biggest sex influencers

- 21% say the internet has the biggest influence on their sex lives
- 35% report that friends have the biggest influence
- 16% say their partners have the biggest influence
- Only 1% say teachers have the biggest influencer and
- 4% say family has the biggest influence
- Boys are almost 5 times more likely (14%) to be influenced by pornography than girls (3%)

#ends

#For further information, interviews with Dr Patrick Burke, or a young person, photography or broadcast opportunities please contact Michael McLoughlin 087 667 7499 or Niall Cowley 083-835-4976  
niallcowley@wethepeoplecomms.ie