



Too sexy, Too soon: The sexualisation of children in the media

Our environment is full of sexualised images and messages from all types of media, including media produced for children and involving child models. Children can be influenced from a very young age. Adults may not realise the effects that these images are having on children.

It is important for children to learn about sex. The problem is that they are learning about it in a way that undermines the firm foundation needed for later sexual behaviour and relationships.

Why should you worry?

Self esteem

The period of middle childhood in particular is crucial for the development of a healthy sense of self and self-esteem. If children see their appearance and “looking sexy” as all important at this time, many aspects of development can be seriously affected.

Eating disorders

Girls, and some boys too, may adopt restrictive diets as they try to fit the media’s standards for appearance.

Messages that boys are getting about girls and themselves

Sexualised media give boys a distorted and shallow view of girls and women and of their own masculinity.

Early sexual behaviour

Children exposed to sexualised media may adopt sexual behaviours before they have the maturity to deal with the consequences.

Internet dangers

Children are in danger of finding inappropriate material, meeting predatory adults, or posting private information and photos of themselves.

Messages that adults are being given about children

The sexualisation of children in advertising may suggest to some adults that children are interested in, and ready for, sex.

What can you do?

Review what children are seeing

- Try to minimise exposure to sexualised images: on TV and in magazines, movies and music videos.
- Monitor children’s Internet use closely and keep computers in family areas.

Expand what they are seeing and doing

- Expose both girls and boys to a wide range of competent female and male role models in books, movies and television programs.
- Promote media literacy - teach your children to question media messages.
- Encourage your children and their friends to be interested in a wide variety of activities which encourage competence and creativity.

Acknowledge them

- Acknowledge your children for their personal qualities and abilities rather than their appearance.



Answer honestly

- Answer your children's questions about sex honestly, but only give information which is appropriate for their age and development.

Lead by example

- Be open and firm about your personal values and limits and explain these to your children.
- Talk to other parents - parents who feel the same way as you do can become allies.
- Join organisations such as ACCM that are working against the sexualisation of children.
- Write to politicians, department stores, advertisers and television stations and tell them that enough is enough. Advertisers need to be convinced that there is a groundswell of community attitudes on this issue.

For more information on how to take action on this and other issues go to the *Taking Action* section of the ACCM website.

<http://childrenandmedia.org.au/taking-action/current-campaigns/sexualisation-of-children-in-and-by-the-media>