



Daniel Principe
Youth Advocate & Educator

Daniel Principe champions young boys to be their best selves and form healthy relationships.

This involves tackling the issue of pornography.

What is your role?

I work with schools and community groups all across Australia who want to help young people navigate the cultural challenges that they're facing. Young people are growing up in a world where online content sends them mixed messages and harmful ideas about sex and relationships.

What is the impact of pornography on young people?

Young people are telling me that they're being exposed to pornography at younger and younger ages, through advertising pop-ups, through an older friend, through a friend on a school bus. And it's shaping how they see their bodies, other people's bodies, and what sex, intimacy and consent looks like. They just assume everything they've seen in popular culture and porn culture is up for grabs

in a sexual scenario. They don't realise that they need to check in, ask permission, and see if this is something that their partner wants, likes, or desires.

Why is pornography such a threat to consent?

Pornography can reinforce this idea of male dominance and control over women. For boys being exposed to porn at an average age of 13, this is reinforcing to them that violence is also a part of sex, and violence is something that they enact on women¹. A lot of pornography doesn't feature consent, and violence and aggression in pornography is overwhelming directed at women (up to 97% of the time)². And so that's something that we have to equip them to understand; that their partner may not be up for everything that they have assumed is part of their sexuality.

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1. Our Watch, Pornography, young people and preventing violence against women background paper, 2020



What can we do to change this?

We have such an opportunity before us to help young people form healthy relationships and understand what true intimacy looks like. We need to engage young people to think about how a consensual, mutual, respectful, empathetic vision of relationships and sexuality is not only a good idea, but good for them. I want to help boys challenge the messages that they receive, not just from pornography, but the broader culture around them. I think there's a healthier way for them to express their masculinity and your sexuality.

Are boys capable of learning about consent when faced with this external pressure?

What I see at the end of a session is a group of boys who are softened, who are open, who are now sharing their insights and expressing their empathy. They want to show that they have concern for others, for their friends, for their partners. I'm of the opinion that we haven't given teenage boys enough opportunities to really lean in, to take ownership, to show up as their best selves. When I talk to young people about consent, they feel conflicted. They know that there should be consent, but they also recognise they're getting mixed messages.

Do boys want to talk to their parents and carers about consent?

Most young people do want to talk to mum and dad, but they're also not going to be the ones that uncork that conversation. It really is up to parents to ask those questions. Parents – think about what you wanted to know, what you had questions about when you were a teenager, what you were navigating through. That's what young people are wrestling with now, and it's our job to help them to make sense of their challenging cultural context.

What if parents and carers find these conversations challenging?

It's understandable that talking about sex and consent can be challenging. Most parents, though, know that this sits with them, that this is something that they can learn more about. And it's just about having the confidence and the tools to check your understanding and start those conversations to help us get on the same page about consent. We have to normalise these conversations to make no question off limits.

Is it helpful for parents and carers to talk to other parents?

I see in my sessions that parents want to talk to other parents. They want to know what's working for them, what's helped them, how they have approached some of these uncomfortable conversations. Parents – get together, help one another. No one's necessarily mastered this. We're all learning on the fly about how to have these conversations with each other and with young people.

“My message to all of us Australians is to have these conversations for the sake of our young people. For their safety, for their wellbeing. Have them today. Have them every day”

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2. Fritz N, Malic V, Paul B, Zhou Y. A Descriptive Analysis of the Types, Targets, and Relative Frequency of Aggression in Mainstream Pornography. Arch Sex Behav. 2020 Nov;49(8):3041-3053. Epub 2020 Jul 13

