

Understanding Sexual Violence

Young Peoples' FAQs



Introduction

We recognise that practitioners are increasingly encountering a concerning rise in misogynistic attitudes, hate-based behaviours, and derogatory language directed at women and girls within the classroom. These behaviours often reflect broader societal trends and are part of a growing national issue. Influences from the “manosphere,” including online communities that promote harmful gender stereotypes, are becoming more prominent among young people. Social media plays a significant role in this, where algorithm-driven content can expose students to extreme or damaging views that normalise misogyny, devalue consent, and promote distorted narratives around sex, relationships, and gender roles. This includes exposure to pornography, ‘incel’ ideology, and other online subcultures that contribute to harmful perceptions of women and girls.

Aim

This guidance is intended to support practitioners in confidently and effectively responding to students’ questions around issues such as sexual violence, rape myths, and harmful sexual content online. As these discussions can be challenging, the guidance also encourages educators to seek support for themselves where needed.

Background

The Sexual Violence Prevention Team from The Star Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire, have been holding workshops covering topics such as consent, how power dynamics affect relationships, pornography, what sexual violence is, its impacts, and what they can do if someone tells them they’re a survivor. However, it became apparent that some regular questions were being asked across all the schools by the young people. The team listed some of the common questions, and what the replies have been. This is aimed to be a support to you if you are asked a similar question and ensure we are all giving our children and young people similar responses.



What is misogyny?

Misogyny is a form of sexism that involves negative attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls ([Bates, 2018](#)). More than just open hatred, misogyny includes prejudice, disrespect, and contempt. Misogyny shows up in everyday ways, such as stereotyping women, dismissing their opinions, mocking them, or judging them mainly on their appearance or reproductive roles. It can also involve verbal abuse, harassment, and physical violence. Together, these behaviours reinforce the idea that women are less important or less capable than men and create conditions in which violence and abuse can be more easily justified or ignored.

Misogyny is not just about individual attitudes; it is built into our social systems, workplaces, policies, and cultural norms ([Bates, 2018](#)). Feminist philosopher, Kate Manne describes misogyny as the “enforcement arm” of patriarchy — a system in which men hold more power and influence across society, in leadership, politics, education, and employment ([Manne, 2017](#)). Patriarchal systems value traits seen as “masculine,” such as confidence, authority, and emotional restraint, over traits labelled “feminine,” like care, cooperation, and emotional expression ([Cohn & Enloe, 2003](#)). Misogyny polices women and girls who challenge these norms and rewards behaviour that conforms to patriarchal expectations (and in doing so, also intersects with hierarchies that underpin other forms of inequality, including racism, homophobia, and classism ([UN Women, 2025](#))). It helps keep women in lower-status roles and maintains power imbalances between men and women. When misogynistic behaviours go unchallenged, they reinforce these hierarchies and contribute to cultures in which harassment, exclusion, and abuse are more likely to occur.

These systemic patterns are learned and reinforced from a young age, shaping young people’s experiences, choices, and expectations. Girls may be discouraged from taking on leadership roles, entering STEM careers, or participating in activities seen as male-dominated ([UNESCO, 2025](#); [Ruderman et al., 2022](#)). Those who speak confidently may be labelled as difficult or “bossy,” while girls participating in online spaces such as gaming or coding are more likely to face harassment ([Tannen, 2014](#); [Bryter, 2023](#)). As girls are steered away from male-dominated fields, boys are equally limited by stereotypes: careers involving care, like nursery teaching, are often off-limits, and boys showing ‘feminine’ qualities or interests may face teasing or disapproval ([Moorhouse, 2024](#); [Kane, 2006](#)). These behaviours are not isolated incidents; they reflect a wider culture in which misogyny enforces rigid gender roles, limits opportunities, and sets the stage for inequality in adulthood.

Misogyny also plays a direct role in normalising harmful behaviour towards women and girls. Phrases such as “boys will be boys” excuse inappropriate conduct and shift responsibility for safety onto girls rather than those causing harm ([Survivors Network, n.d.](#)). This can lead to victim-blaming and the minimisation of harassment and abuse. Research from the University of Glasgow in 2024 found that one in four boys believed sexual harassment “doesn’t count” if it is meant as a joke, and that a third agreed that a girl wearing revealing clothing is “asking for trouble” ([Seith, 2025](#)). These attitudes show how harmful beliefs about responsibility and consent can become normalised and can lay the groundwork for more serious forms of violence.

The consequences of these beliefs are severe. Violence against women and girls has been declared a national emergency in England and Wales, with police and Home Office data estimating that more than two million women have experienced offences such as domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, or sexual assault ([NPCC, 2024](#); [Home Office, 2025](#)). This makes clear that violence does not emerge in isolation; it is connected to everyday attitudes and assumptions that excuse harm, reinforce inequality, and discourage challenge.

For professionals working with young people across all sectors, understanding misogyny as a cultural and systemic issue, not just a problem of extreme or criminal behaviour, is essential to preventing violence against women and girls. Violence does not begin with physical abuse; it begins with the

everyday behaviours, language, and norms that define what is acceptable. Challenging sexist language, gender stereotypes, and victim-blaming that dismiss concerns as “jokes” or “misunderstandings” is not optional or symbolic work. It is a necessary part of tackling the root causes of violence: patriarchy and misogyny. When these behaviours are ignored, they are reinforced and allowed to escalate. Consistent, everyday action to challenge misogyny wherever it appears is therefore critical to creating safer, more respectful environments, reducing violence against women and girls, and disrupting the wider systems of oppression that rely on inequality and hierarchy.

What's the difference between gender-based, domestic or sexual violence?

Quick answer

Gender-based violence is when someone is hurt or abused because of their gender; this kind of violence mostly affects women and girls because of gender inequality in society, usually because of unfair beliefs that women and girls are weaker or less important.

Sexual violence is sexual things that have happened to a person without their consent (like groping, catcalling, or sharing private photos without permission) and **domestic violence** (also known as ‘intimate partner violence’, or ‘coercive control’) is when someone hurts or abuses someone they have, or used to have, some type of relationship with (like physical harm, emotional abuse, or being controlling). They are both types of **gender-based violence**.

Longer answer

Sexual violence and domestic violence are **types** of gender-based violence. Gender based violence is violence that targets or impacts a person or group of people **because** of their gender or perceived gender. It is rooted in gender inequality where women have less power, or access to power in society because of their gender. Societally, women are often perceived as weaker or more vulnerable; this harmful stereotype contributes to their increased risk of different kinds of gender-based violence.

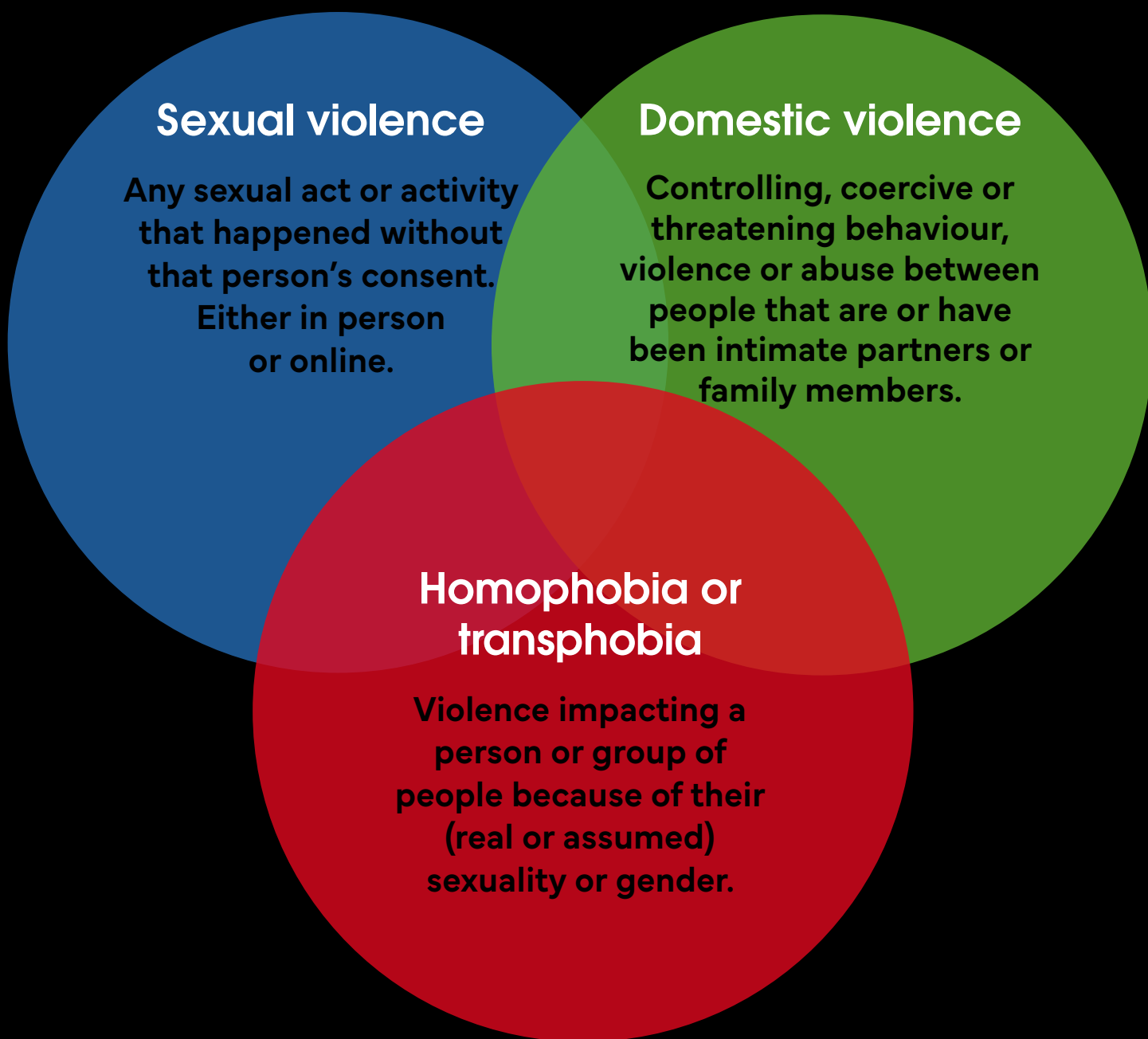
Sexual violence is any sexual activity or act that happened without the person's consent. This definition covers a broad range of things that happen both in-person (examples include rape, sexual assault, groping, or catcalling) and online (cyberflashing, leaking intimate images, or pestering someone for them). This means that sexual violence can happen between people who already have a relationship (like spouses, boyfriends & girlfriends, exes, and family members), but it can also happen between acquaintances and even strangers. For example, things like catcalling or sextortion often happen between people who don't know each other. **The key factor is that the person did not consent to the sexual activity.**

Whereas domestic violence, (also as known as intimate partner violence, or coercive control) happens between people who already have or had a relationship (like spouses, boyfriends & girlfriends, exes, or family members). It can involve physical, emotional, financial, or sexual abuse or a combination of them.

Gender based violence

Violence that targets or impacts a person or group of people because of their sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Gender based violence can take a lot of different forms and a lot of these can overlap with each other. This is because all forms of gender based violence are supported by patterns of discrimination and disadvantage (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, classism) that are built into the fabric of society, impacting people through laws, policies and cultural norms.



What's the difference between rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse and sexual harassment?

Quick answer

They are all types of sexual violence, and they're all serious and harmful.

- **Rape** is when someone uses their penis to force sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) on someone who didn't agree to it, including when the person is asleep, unconscious, drunk or high.
- **Sexual assault** by penetration is similar, but it involves using any other body part or object instead of a penis.
- **Sexual assault** can include any unwanted sexual touching or activity, including over clothes, or things like ejaculating, spitting, or peeing on someone for sexual reasons without their consent.
- **Sexual abuse** is when this kind of behaviour happens repeatedly, often as part of a pattern of control, force, or taking advantage of someone, for example, someone who is much younger, older, or in a vulnerable situation such as someone is struggling to afford their rent and doesn't want to be homeless.
- **Sexual harassment** is unwanted sexual behaviour, like rude jokes, catcalling, or creepy messages, which makes someone feel uncomfortable, ashamed, or unsafe.

It's important to know that all of these are crimes. None are "not that bad" or "the worst" type of sexual violence compared to others, they are all serious, violent, and wrong.

If someone tells you they've experienced any type of sexual violence, they deserve support and kindness. They can get help from the school guidance team or places like **The STAR Centre**.

Longer answer

Under Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 someone commits rape if they -

- Intentionally penetrate the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with their penis
- The other person does not consent to the penetration.
- They do not reasonably believe that the other person consents.

There is also sexual assault by penetration which involves -

- Any object or any body part other than a penis
- Penetrating someone's vagina or anus.
- Without their consent

It's important to point out though that these are just legal definitions there is no hierarchy of abuse, they are both criminal offences, they both carry the same maximum sentence in the UK: life imprisonment. They are equally violent, traumatic, and wrong.

The crime of '**sexual assault**' includes things like sexual touching, any form of sexual activity (both through clothing or not), ejaculation of semen or emission of urine/saliva onto a person for sexual purposes without the person's consent.

Sexual abuse is any behaviour that's of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, or harmful, and is part of a repeated pattern of sexual assaults. Which may include using physical force or taking advantage of someone's vulnerability e.g., their age like being elderly or a child, or in a vulnerable situation such as someone is struggling to afford their rent and doesn't want to be homeless.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes a person feel upset, scared or ashamed.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Making rude or sexual “jokes” that make you feel uncomfortable.
- Whistling, catcalling, or shouting inappropriate things at you in public.
- Sending texts, messages, or emails with sexual content or creepy comments
- Saying things about your body in a gross or offensive way
- Touching you in a sexual way when you haven’t agreed to it.
- Saying or doing sexual things that you don’t want or that make you feel uneasy.

All of these things; rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment are types of sexual violence. They all can have traumatic consequences for those who’ve experienced them. **And if someone has experienced them, they did not do anything to deserve it, full stop.** Sexual violence is the fault of the person who decided to ignore the lack of consent or chose not to ask them at all. If someone ever tells you that they have experienced any type of sexual violence they deserve kindness, empathy, and help, which they can get from places like the school guidance team or The STAR Centre.

Is getting ‘pantsexed’ sexual violence?

Quick answer

Yes, having your trousers and/or underwear pulled down, skirt lifted up, or top pulled down is sexual violence; it is a form of sexual harassment.

Longer Answer

Yes, having your trousers and/or underwear pulled down, skirt lifted up, or top pulled down is sexual violence – it’s a form of sexual harassment. Remember the definition of sexual violence is any sexual activity that happened without the person’s consent. So, because being pantsed is often done as a ‘joke’ or is seen as ‘banter’, the person being pantsed is not asked for consent before it’s done to them. Secondly, these actions are exposing parts of the body or clothing that are considered private and oftentimes sexual, like underwear or the genitals (the penis, testicles or vulva), bum, or breasts, and having them exposed, without consent, in public, is embarrassing, scary, and huge violation of that person’s bodily autonomy and their sense of safety. This is how it falls under sexual harassment; it is an unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes a person feel **upset, scared or ashamed**.

We know that pantsing is really common amongst young people in schools and is seen as pretty ‘normal’, but it’s important to let that person who’s pantsing know that the way they are behaving is inappropriate and wrong. If you don’t want to call out the person directly you can report it a teacher or another trusted adult, and if it happened to you and it you need to talk about how it made you feel, The STAR Centre is here to support you. The more people call out this unacceptable, sexually violent behaviour, the less ‘normal’ it will seem and less it will be allowed to continue.

Is getting kicked in the balls sexual violence?

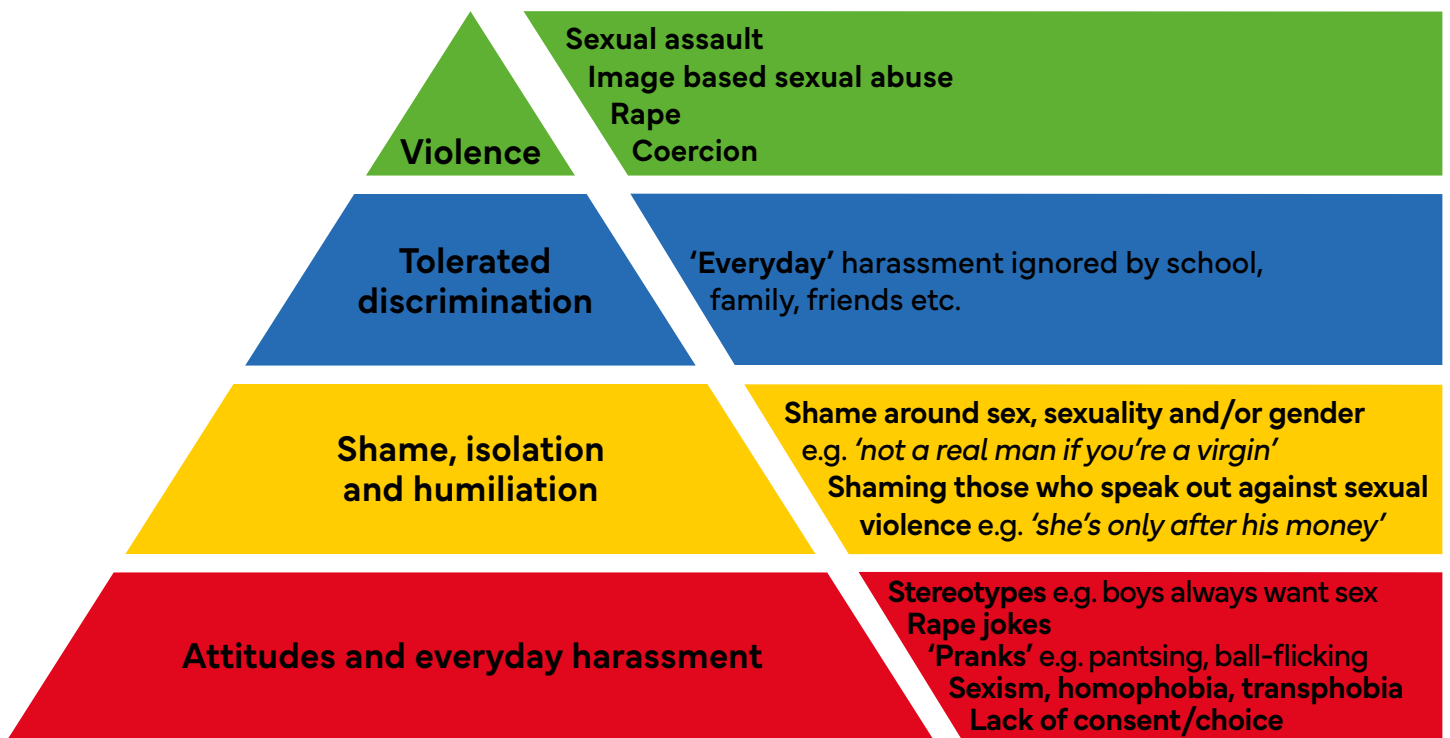
Quick answer

Yes, getting kicked or punched in the testicles or other private parts like their vulva, bum, or breasts is a form of sexual assault, it may be a common thing in school but it's not funny and can cause real, long-term physical and emotional harm.

Longer answer

Getting kicked, punched, or hit in the testicles can be considered sexual assault. Sexual assault includes any unwanted or non-consensual touching of someone's genitals or private parts, especially when it's meant to embarrass, control, or harm them. This kind of behaviour, like pantsing, is often brushed off as a joke, especially among young people in schools, but it can cause real physical damage, such as swelling, bruising, or even long-term injury like infection or rupture. Just as importantly, it can leave someone feeling humiliated, violated, and unsafe.

Sexual violence exists in a pyramid, and this kind of behaviour sits in the base level along with things like degrading jokes or "pranks." These actions are often ignored, accepted, or normalised, but they play a key role in upholding a culture in our society where more severe forms of sexual violence are allowed to happen. When we excuse or laugh off these "jokes," we send the message that violating someone's body is okay under certain circumstances. Calling out this behaviour as unacceptable helps disrupt that culture. The more we challenge and reject it, the less space there is for sexual violence to grow or be tolerated at any level.



NB The pyramid of sexual violence doesn't show a scale of what type of sexual violence is "not that bad" or "the worst". Instead, it illustrates how seemingly small or "harmless" actions at the bottom, like "jokes", or dismissing consent, create a culture where more blatant and extreme forms of sexual violence are ignored, excused or allowed to happen.

What if one person is 16 and the other is 15, but their birthday is the next day, and they have sex?

Quick answer

The law says it's not legal for a 16-year-old to have sex with a 15-year-old, even if the 15-year-old turns 16 the day after. The legal age to have sex in the UK is 16 for everyone involved. Just wait! It's only 24 hours!

Longer answer

The legal age to have sex in the UK is 16. 16-year-olds legally cannot have sex with people younger than them. The law is in place to protect young people, it's not there to penalise young people or get them in trouble! So, in the scenario it would not be legal for a 16-year-old to have sex with a 15-year-old, even if the 15-year-old turns 16 the day after; it would be similar to trying to get into a nightclub the night before your 18th birthday, the bouncer would not let you in until you've officially turned 18, the legal age to be in a club. So, the advice would be for this 15- and 16-year-old couple to wait until they are **both** legally old enough to have sex.

If the 15- and 16-year-old have **already had sex**, it's really unlikely that they would get in trouble with the law, because remember, the law is there to protect young people, not penalise them. So, adults in the couple's lives, like social workers, or the police, would want to make sure that the couple understands and had given consent, that there was no coercion or abuse of power happening, and they were using contraception. But it's very unlikely that they would be arrested or in trouble.

What if my boyfriend/girlfriend cheats on me, is cheating sexual violence?

Quick answer

No, cheating is not a form of sexual violence, but it's still a serious betrayal of trust that can cause deep emotional pain and trauma for the person who was cheated on.

Longer answer

Cheating in a relationship means one person breaks the trust by being romantic or sexual with someone else without their boyfriend or girlfriend knowing about it or agreeing to it. It's very painful to experience and causes a lot of emotional harm, like sadness, anger, confusion, and a loss of trust. It can make people question their self-worth and damage their ability to trust in future relationships. But it's important to know that cheating is not the same as sexual violence. Sexual violence is any sexual thing that's happened to you without consent. Whereas cheating is something sexual or romantic done with someone else without your consent.

No one ever deserves to be cheated on, and everyone deserves kindness, honesty, and support in their relationships. At the same time, it's also important to remember that you can't control someone else's actions. Being afraid someone might cheat, or even if they have cheated, is never a reason to control, mistreat, or harm them or anyone else. Healthy relationships are built on trust, respect, and boundaries, not fear or control.

How do I know if porn is bad for me and what do I do if I think it is?

Quick answer

Porn use is different for everyone. Some people don't watch it at all; other people might watch it regularly. When trying to figure out how much porn is "too much", it can be useful to focus more on how it's affecting your life and how you feel about it.

It might be worth asking yourself:

- How does watching porn make you feel?
 - Do you feel good, happy, confident?
 - Do you feel sad, embarrassed or ashamed?
- Is your use of porn getting in the way of things that are important?
 - E.g., is it stopping you from finishing schoolwork on time? Is it having an impact your relationships or friendships?
- Are you finding it difficult to feel aroused (turned on) without porn, or that you need to keep looking for more extreme stuff?
- Are you worried about it?

If this is something that worries you, makes you feel bad about yourself or is hurting someone it might be worth reaching out for help and support, even if you've seen something illegal – **The law is designed to protect and help young people, not to get them into trouble.**

If you don't feel like you could speak to someone you know, there are organisations that can help ([ChildLine](#), [The Mix](#), The [STAR Centre](#)).

Longer answer

Porn is created for entertainment – like TV shows or movies. Like all forms of media (books, films, music, TV shows, magazines, video games etc.,) pornography is influenced by and reinforces the power dynamics we see play out in society. It features racist caricatures (e.g., the animalistic Black man, the submissive Asian woman), fetishises disabilities (e.g., limb differences) and different sexualities or genders ('lesbian' and 'trans' are consistently some of the most frequently searched for terms on Pornhub). It also overwhelmingly features and sexualises violence (e.g. hitting, strangulation, gagging) or violation (e.g. "it just slipped" plotlines about anal sex, or content where those featured do not know it is being filmed or are pretending that they don't).

The people in porn are often actors and it's scripted and planned beforehand. Even if pornography is "amateur" or "homemade" the people in the video should be aware that there is a camera in the room and will adjust their behaviour as a result. This means that the things you might see in porn are a performance and often not true to life. It often does not show consent or equal pleasure and shows a very limited picture of what sex can look like.

Some facts about porn:

- A lot of free pornographic sites are not well moderated and host content that was taken and/or shared without the consent of the people featured. This content is a form of sexual violence (known as image-based sexual abuse), as you cannot take or share sexual images or videos of someone without their consent ([Revenge Porn Helpline, n.d.](#))
- A lot of the pornography available online (particularly that on free websites) features violence against women e.g. hitting, strangulation, degrading language.
 - 88% of scenes in top rated and downloaded porn included violence against women, 95% of the targets of violence appeared neutral or to respond with pleasure ([Fritz et al, 2020](#)).

- Almost half of all Pornhub scenes feature aggression, with women being the targets 97% of the time ([Ibid](#)).
- 1 in 8 titles shown to first time users featured sexual violence ([Vera-Gray et al, 2023](#)).
- The pornography industry online is now heavily influenced by online algorithms. These algorithms prioritise content which holds users' attention – things that are extreme, disgusting, outrageous or upsetting. Content like this is deliberately used by big companies to hold user's attention ([McGlynn, n.d.](#)).

The problem with porn isn't necessarily the people that watch it. It is normal (and healthy) to want to explore your sexuality, to masturbate, to understand what sex is or what it looks like. The problem is that porn overwhelmingly treats violence as sexy, encourages us to view people as objects, and reinforces structures of power and privilege. This is made worse by the nature of the internet and the profits to be had in sharing extreme, disgusting or violent content.

What if people like it (the attention, the dick pic, being hurt)?

Quick answer:

Some people enjoy pain as a part of sex, some people don't. What people like sexually is very personal and can change over time and in different contexts. You can only ever be sure that someone likes something if they are enthusiastically enjoying and consenting to it. You can only find this out by having a conversation with them and asking.

Longer answer

That is an interesting question, and it brings a lot of nuances into our discussion about sexual violence. Some people might enjoy pain as part of sex, getting a nude picture from their partner, or being complimented. What people like and dislike is so personal and can change depending on a lot of different variables. Your partner might like to see a picture of your penis when they ask to see it, but they might not want it sent to them randomly (e.g., if they're eating dinner with their gran or showing a teacher something on their phone!). Or someone might enjoy kissing in private, but not in public or in front of their family.

What this boils down to is whether the person enjoys what you're doing and that they're consenting to it. So, how can you tell someone enjoys what you're doing?

- If they've told you they would like you to do that
- If you ask them directly
- If they are engaged with you and what you're doing
- If you've talked about consent before (e.g., 'how will I know if you want me to stop?', 'It's okay if you want to change your mind and do something else')
- If they respond to what you're doing with pleasure (e.g., moaning, telling you they like it)
- You give them choices and chances to express what they want (e.g., 'Do you want to see me?', 'Do you like it like this, or this?', 'Can you show me what you like?')

By asking questions like these you are giving your partner the opportunity to say no and ensuring that what you're doing is consensual. It also means that you're going to have a more trusting relationship and therefore, have better sex.

If you do something that you think your partner might like, and they don't like it, don't panic. What matters is that you **stop, say sorry, and don't do it again.**

What about choking?

Quick answer

Choking during sex (also known as 'strangulation') is when pressure is put on someone's neck, which can stop them from breathing or reduce the blood going to their brain. This can be done with someone's hands or arms, or with objects like a scarf or belt.

Strangulation is **very dangerous**, and there is **no safe way to do it**. It can cause serious injuries, unconsciousness, and even death. Sometimes, people don't even realise how much damage has been done until later.

Even if someone agrees to it, most people don't fully understand the risks, so they **can't give informed consent**, because informed consent requires the person to understand what they're being asked to do and the potential risks involved. And if the brain isn't getting enough oxygen, a person might not be able to think clearly or even speak, meaning they **can't say they want to stop** even if they have to.

Because of all this, **choking should never be considered safe in any sexual situation**. If you have more questions about it, feel unsure, or are pressured into doing it, you can talk to a trusted adult, like your PSE Teacher, or you can get support from The STAR Centre.

Longer answer:

Choking during sex (also known as 'strangulation' or 'erotic asphyxiation') is when pressure is applied to someone's neck, either with their hands or arm, or something like a belt, scarf, or rope. This pressure can block the airway (making it hard or impossible to breathe) or the blood vessels, which means less oxygen reaches the brain.

Strangulation is very dangerous. There is **no safe way** to strangle someone. It only takes a small amount of pressure to cause serious harm, in fact, it can take less pressure than it takes to open a can of Coke to block a major vein in the neck ([Bichard, et al, 2020](#)).

Some of the risks of strangling include ([IFAS,2024](#)):

- Pain in your neck
- Trouble breathing or swallowing
- Seeing stars, blurred vision, or not being able to see at all
- Ringing ears or not being able to hear
- Passing out
- Wetting yourself
- Even death

Remember, even if they seem okay, serious injuries may not show up right away!

There's also a really important issue around consent. For someone to give consent, it needs to be:

- a) **Informed, meaning that they're fully aware of the risks involved, and**
- b) **Able to change their mind or withdraw consent at any time.**

Strangulation makes both of those things impossible. Most people don't fully understand how dangerous it is, so they can't give true, informed consent. And when the brain is starved of oxygen, it can't work properly. A person might not be able to speak, move, or even stay conscious, so they can't say "stop," even if they want, or need to.

In one real-life example, a researcher who strangled himself in a medical experiment found he physically couldn't press the emergency button to stop, even though he wanted to. His brain simply couldn't send the message to his hand ([Kabat & Anderson, 1943](#)).

Because of all this, **choking should never be considered safe in any sexual situation**. If you have more questions about it, feel unsure, or are pressured into doing it, you can talk to a trusted adult, like your PSE Teacher, or you can get support from The STAR Centre.

If people aren't allowed to rape, sexually assault or hurt their partner, why do they?

Quick answer

Because they choose to and have the power to do so.

Longer answer

This is a difficult question to answer because we can't climb inside the mind of someone that perpetrates sexual violence. It can be really difficult to wrap our heads around why people do bad things, especially if they're someone we love, trust, and care about. But the fact is people do harm one another.

Perpetrators of sexual violence aren't always obvious. We all have our own idea of what a "bad" person might look or act like (e.g., the creepy man in the white van waiting to abduct children). But perpetrators of sexual violence more often than not are people we know and trust. They might be really charismatic, well-liked, and attractive. They might be the person's family member, or their boyfriend.

What connects all people that perpetrate sexual violence is power. There are lots of different things that can give someone power at a structural, societal level (e.g., their race, their gender, their sexuality, their social class) as well as a personal level (e.g., how much you love them, how much you trust them, how well you know them). Power gives different people different freedoms and choices throughout their life, and it can change from one context to another. To do something sexual to someone without their consent is an abuse of power because it removes their freedom and ability to choose what happens to them.

What about male victims?

Quick answer

They exist!

Longer answer

[NB. If this is being brought up as a counterpoint to discussions about gender-based violence]

Being a victim of violence isn't a competition. The existence of women that have experienced gender-based or sexual violence does not negate the existence of the men that have, or vice versa. Nobody deserves to experience sexual violence, no matter what their gender is, and anyone that has experienced sexual violence deserves to be believed and supported.

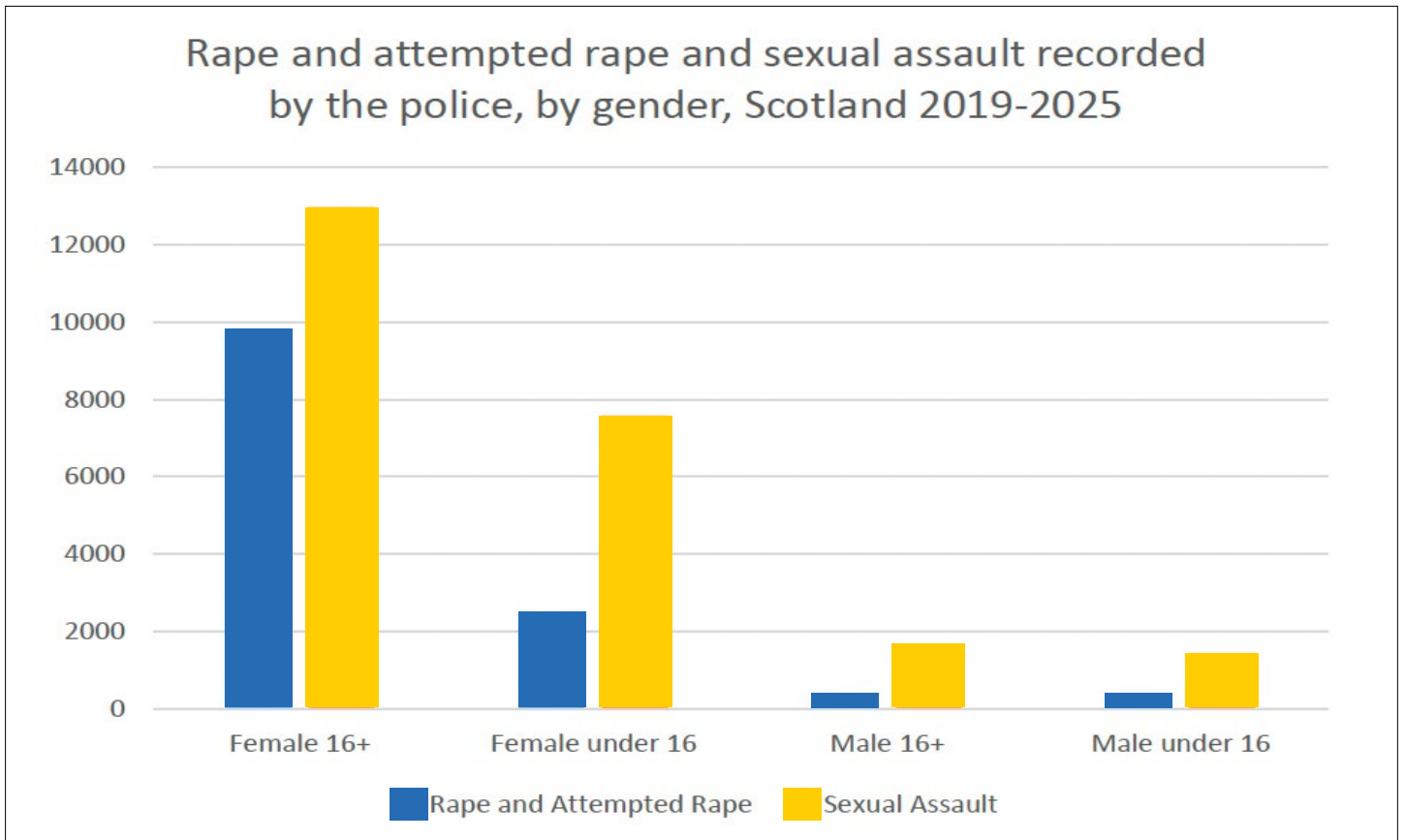
The STAR Centre supports survivors of sexual violence of any gender, this includes men. We also support friends and family. If you are worried about someone that is male and has experienced sexual violence, they can get support with us and so can you.

[N.b., We don't typically use stats like these in workshops. It typically encourages toxic debate or shuts down constructive conversations. Unless stated otherwise, the following stats are for England & Wales].

The facts:

- The majority of survivors of sexual violence (5 in 6 women, 4 in 5 men ([Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)) do not speak out about what happens, meaning that the figures we have are limited
- 1 in 4 women have been raped or sexually assaulted since the age of 16 ([ONS, 2021](#))
- 1 in 6 children have been sexually abused ([NSPCC, 2021](#))

- 1 in 18 men have been raped or sexually assaulted since the age of 16 ([ONS, 2023](#))
 - On average it takes men who were sexually abused in childhood 20-30 years to talk about what happened ([Easton, 2013](#)).
- 70% of all rapes recorded in Scotland between 2019-2025 were committed against females over the age of 16 years ([Scot Gov, 2024](#)).



Source: [Recorded crime in Scotland 2025-25, TABLE A5](#)

False allegations, what if they're lying?

Quick answer

False reports of sexual violence are very rare; they are less than 3% ([CPF, n.d.](#))! So, ask yourself this; what's worse? To believe someone who might be lying, or to turn your back on someone who was hurt and needs your help.

Longer answer

False allegations of rape or sexual assault are **extremely rare**. Cases reported to the police are even rarer. Cases resulting in a conviction are **even rarer still**.

You are **far more likely** to know someone that has experienced sexual violence than you are to know someone that has been falsely accused. You are more likely to experience sexual violence yourself than you are to be falsely accused ([Lee, 2018](#)).

What this means is that, when you focus too much on false allegations, the survivors of sexual violence around you hear it too. They hear that you don't believe people that come forward. They hear you pick apart the stories of people that have experienced something similar to them. You mark yourself as an unsafe person to tell.

Why didn't they fight back, report or leave? Why did they do something "stupid" (e.g. sending a nude photo to someone online)? What did they expect?

Quick answer

Just because someone made a choice that didn't turn out well, like trusting the wrong person, doesn't mean they deserved to be hurt. Trusting someone is really brave; if that person chooses to hurt or take advantage of them, the blame lies with the person who did the harm, not the one who trusted them!

It can be confusing or frustrating to see someone stay in a relationship where they're being hurt, but there are often reasons we can't see. People respond to abuse and trauma in ways that feels safest to them in that moment. Staying doesn't mean they're okay with what's happening and leaving the relationship isn't always easy or safe. What they need most is understanding, kindness, support, and someone who won't judge them.

Longer answer:

You're allowed to be "stupid" or make "bad" decisions without it meaning that you deserve to be hurt or harmed. Trusting someone else isn't "stupid" it is a really brave and vulnerable thing to do. If someone decides to hurt someone else the blame lies with them. They're the one that took advantage of someone else's vulnerability, and they are the one in the wrong.

It can be difficult to understand why someone might stay with someone that hurts them physically or emotionally, and it can be frustrating to see someone you know stay with someone that hurts them. When someone has an abusive partner or has experienced sexual trauma, their brain doesn't always respond in a way that seems rational to others, but they are acting in a way which feels safe to them. This doesn't mean that they are lying or that they think what has happened was okay. Everyone's brain copes with trauma and threat differently, and it is not up to us to decide the "right" or "wrong" thing to do when faced with danger. Lastly, leaving the relationship doesn't always stop the abuse or lead to safety, for some it can increase the danger.

What should I do if I'm getting raped, how to fight back, why don't you teach self-defence?

Quick answer

Some organisations working to end gender-based violence offer self-defence or martial arts classes, like Krav Maga or Muay Thai. These can help some survivors of sexual violence feel more confident and safer after experiencing sexual violence.

But the aim of our Sexual Violence Prevention Programme is to stop sexual violence **before** it happens by challenging the harmful attitudes and systems that allow it.

As a trauma-informed service, The STAR Centre know that during an assault, the brain reacts automatically to protect us. Even if you've learned self-defence, your body might not respond the way you expect, and that's not your fault.

There are five common survival responses to danger:

- **Fight** – trying to stop the threat (the least common response to sexual violence)
- **Flight** – trying to run away or hide.
- **Freeze** – feeling stuck or unable to move (the most common response to sexual violence)
- **Flop** – going limp or shutting down.
- **Fawn** – trying to calm or please the attacker to stay safe.

All of these are normal, natural survival responses. None of them are wrong. Whatever your brain did in that moment, it was trying to keep you alive.

Longer answer

Some organisations working to fight gender-based violence teach people self-defence techniques and martial arts like Krav Maga or Muay Tai. Many people affected by sexual violence find these classes empowering and can feel safer knowing they have these skills at their disposal.

The aim of the Sexual Violence Prevention Programme is to prevent sexual violence **before** it happens. Our workshops challenge the societal structures that make sexual violence possible.

As a trauma-informed service, we also understand what happens in the brain when faced with something frightening or that threatens our safety. The reality is that even if we did teach self-defence, it would be unlikely that you would be able to use it in the moment. The last thing we would want is for someone to blame themselves for not fighting back.

Our brain has evolved to keep us safe and alive. When the brain detects a threat (e.g., an assault) it responds automatically to keep us safe. We can't choose which response our body will have, and we can't do much to stop it. The part of your brain that responds during trauma has nothing to do with your values, your personality or what you would want it to do. It's one job is keeping you alive.

When faced with danger our brains can respond in 5 different ways:

- **Fight** – fighting off something that is harming us.
 - This is the least common response to sexual violence.
 - Shouting at the attacker, confronting them, physically fighting them off
- **Flight** – run away or hide.
 - Being able to leave when faced with sexual violence isn't common and might feel riskier than the other responses.
- **Freeze** – unable to move, act or think clearly.
 - Think of a rabbit stuck in the headlights.
 - This is the most common response survivors of sexual violence have ([RCS, n.d.](#))
- **Flop** – sometimes called 'submit' or 'flow', we may go passive or compliant.
 - Our body might become limp, or we might even faint.
- **Fawn or friend** – trying to please the perpetrator to avoid conflict.

Good resources on trauma responses -

- [Trauma and the Brain](#)
- Hand model animation for kids: <https://youtu.be/XbBVCy5VpYs>

LGBTQIA+

If young people have questions about LGBTQIA+ people, or what it means to be gay, lesbian, transgender, or non-binary etc., we strongly suggest the school reach out for inclusive workshops like [TIE's](#) or [LGBT Youth Scotland's](#).



Further support

If your school would like additional teaching for young people around these topics, The STAR Centre offers free workshops as part of the **Sexual Violence Prevention Programme**. These cover key areas such as power dynamics, consent, understanding sexual violence both in person and online, and the influence of pornography. The workshops are designed to be a safe space for young people to explore these topics and support them in developing healthy, respectful attitudes and relationships.

Schools seeking support to end gender-based violence or to further their understanding of the issue are encouraged to enrol in the **Equally Safe at School (ESAS)** programme. Developed by Rape Crisis Scotland, ESAS works with the entire school community to prevent gender-based violence and foster a more supportive and inclusive environment for students affected by it. The programme offers practical tools and guidance to help schools become safer and more welcoming for all.

To find out more email: prevention@starcentreyrshire.org

How to refer to The STAR Centre: Rape Crisis Ayrshire

The STAR Centre provides specialist therapeutic and emotional support, as well as psychosocial education, to female survivors of sexual violence aged 13+ in a safe, non-judgemental space. We also support friends and family of survivors and offer confidential practical and emotional support to those reporting or considering reporting sexual violence to the police.

A survivor can refer to The STAR Centre themselves, or an agency worker (i.e., a teacher, or social worker) can refer the survivor on their behalf by:

Calling: 01563 544 686

Emailing: support.mail@starcentreyrshire.org

Filling in the form on our website: <https://www.starcentreyrshire.org/support-referral/>

Additional resources

Ayemind [Online Misogyny, the Manosphere, and Mental Health](#)

Children in Scotland [Breaking the Habit: Social Media Use Among Young People](#)

Community Justice [New Research Could Help Prevent Young Men Being Radicalised by Online Misogyny](#)

Education Scotland [New Podcast Examines the Link Between Social Media and Misogyny](#)

Glow Blog [Misogyny Resources](#)

Lewis Wedlock [Men's Work: Reimagining Masculinities](#)

MVP [The 'Challenging Online Misogyny' Resource](#)

Safeguarding Suite Learning [Understanding Manosphere Emojis - A Guide for Parents & Educators](#)

Spark Ed [Fundamentals of Asking Values-Based Questions](#)

TIE ['Digital Discourse Initiative' Launched to Counter the Effects of Online Hate in Schools](#)

Zero Tolerance ['Many Good Men' - Young Scots' Experiences of Online Misogynistic Extremism And Radicalisation Report](#)

