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Let's talk about SEX

Sex on the first date, porn and sex in public – a new survey of the who, where and when of Australia's sex lives reveals some surprising findings, writes Mercedes Maguire

Three-quarters of us admit to having done the dirty in a public place, while 60 per cent of us wouldn't bat an eyelid at sex on the first date.

Seventy-one per cent of us watch porn, 70 per cent have sexted and 40 per cent have cheated on their partner, the 2017 BW sex survey has found.

The poll of close to 1200 respondents shows we're ditching

taboos and taking a more permissive attitude to sex. And this includes our attitude to our children dating and having sex. Of the parents who took part, 85 per cent would provide their kids with contraception and 57 per cent would allow their child's partner to stay the night.

Despite this relaxed attitude, only 41 per cent say they've had the sex talk with their child.

"Parents are a lot more liberal about sex now than they were a generation ago, and the figures reflect that," says clinical

psychologist Amanda Gordon. "I find it heartening and healthy that parents appear liberal in their attitudes to sex because it's healthy to be talking about sex, and particularly being safe in sex.

"The more we talk about sex honestly and openly with our children, the better."

However, Gordon, of Armchair Psychology, says the fact only 41 per cent of parents have had the sex talk with their child shows there is still a barrier between parents and their children when it comes to this hot topic.



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“I think a lot of parents believe they are encouraging their children to have sex if they speak to them about it, or if they allow their child to date,” she says.

“But dating at the appropriate age is important because it allows people to mix together and break down the silos between the sexes.

“If parents find it difficult to raise the topic of sex with their child, they should at least be letting them know they are available to them if they have any questions. Parents should let them know they’re not afraid to hear anything they have to say and to hear them if they’ve made a mistake. Sex education should come from parents, not the internet.”

On the topic of dating, the majority of parents (54 per cent) say they would let their child do so at 15 to 16 years of age, with a further 29 per cent preferring they wait until they’re 17 to 18.

Only 8 per cent would allow their child to head out with a partner at ages 13 to 14 and 9 per cent would not allow their child to date until they are 18 or older.

The survey revealed technology is a major factor in dating, relationships and even sex, with 70 per cent admitting they have sexted their partner, 27 per cent saying they have broken up via a text message and 46 per cent using technology — an online service or app — to find a date.

Gordon says the fact almost one-third of people have used a text message to break up is disappointing and a reflection we need to educate people more on the art of communication in relationships.

“There is a generation that are so used to using texting as a means for just about everything that they don’t distinguish any more between the emotionally

significant issues and the every day,” she says. “For them, breaking up on text could be much the same as texting someone to tell them you’re

running late.

“It’s true technology has changed the way we communicate, and nowhere is that more obvious than in relationships and dating.”

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Sex and relationship therapist Pamela Supple says many of her clients feel “burned out” by the use of dating services and apps, and believes there’s a movement of those reverting to traditional forms, or face-to-face, dating. This could be why 20 per cent of

respondents admit to having gone on a blind date.

“I would have expected the number of people using technology to date to be higher than 46 per cent,” says Supple, of Sex Therapy Australia. “I’m finding some are getting burned out by doing the swipe left or right thing and I think a lot of people are trying other avenues to find a partner too. I think the main reason people are becoming wary of technology in dating is that there seems to be a lot of disappointment because people can put such a false impression of themselves on these websites and apps. Naturally, there is a high level of disappointment then, when people eventually meet face-to-face.”

Supple says a majority of the people she works with claim they are too busy or too tired to have sex, statements that are backed up in the survey.

While the largest proportion of respondents say they have sex twice a week (31 per cent), 18 per cent say the magic happens only once a month and 11 per cent have given up on sex altogether.

“People have so many commitments these days, and sex and intimacy seems to be something that’s relegated to the end of the list of priorities,” Supple says. “Even young couples with no kids are telling me they just don’t have the time to be intimate. A lot of people leave sex to the last

thing they do in the day, when they go to bed, and by then they probably just want to go to sleep.

“But sex is an important part of a relationship, and spontaneous sex even more so.”

That may have been lost on 19 per cent of the respondents who say they schedule sex.

The anonymity of the survey allowed people to reveal riskier behaviour, with 15 per cent claiming to have used the internet to cheat while a further 18 per cent say they have paid for sex.



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Sex & parenting

41% have had the sex talk with their children

57% would let their child's partner stay the night

85% would provide their child with contraception

62% would let their child date

54% would allow them to date at the age of 15/16

Sex & technology

27% have broken up via text

46% used technology to find a date

70% have sexted

15% used the internet to cheat

Risky sex

75% have had sex in a public place

71% have watched porn

40% have cheated on a partner

20% have been on a blind date

18% have paid for sex