

## **Early Sexualisation – Are Children Pressured to Grow Up too Quickly?**

Movies and television, advertisements, music videos, song lyrics, social media and computer games. These are just a few of the places you will find sex and the 'ideal' body image being portrayed to everyone who cares to view it or who just stumbles across it unintentionally.

Sex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is everywhere, fashion ranges, reality television, music lyrics and videos, computer games, social media, advertisements selling everything from perfume to car insurance. Children and young people are exposed to a constant barrage of sexualised imagery and messages from a wide variety of sources; can you honestly say that you know what the words really are to that song that you keep hearing the children sing? Google the lyrics you might be in for a surprise!

This isn't a new thing that is confined to our generation, it has always existed, but with the recent developments in modern technology and the changes in societal attitudes, has it now become acceptable to buy padded bras for primary school children? Then allow them to watch the semi naked woman on Saturday night television, before switching over to the music channel to watch videos that are sometimes mistaken for actual pornography all this, before you listen to the actual lyrics rather than just humming and nodding along to appear 'cool'.

The Bailey Report, "Letting Children be Children", highlighted the pressure faced in today's world for children to grow up too quickly. It contained guidance and recommendations on age restrictions for music videos, limits to what children are exposed to prior to the watershed, restricting advertising and product placement in stores. It regarded children as consumers and listened to how parents and carers felt and what they wanted to happen. However many of these recommendations have not yet been accepted and the challenges of implementation addressed, who would decide what is and is not acceptable or appropriate?

In our recent Healthy Lifestyle Survey 50% of 4637 young people in Darlington agreed that they has seen something on line that worried, scared or upset them and 46% agreed the media impacts on their lives regularly.

As professionals we have the ability to counteract and unpick these messages, discuss the topics, the programmes, the songs, the computer games and TV shows and how they differ from reality, what is acceptable, what is normal and what isn't. We can look at the impact that this is having on the children and young people we work with. It's important that they can 'hear all sides' and make informed choices relevant to them based on a range of information not only what they are exposed to in the media.

Within primary schools, you can link your work with the PSHE Association Programme of Study, the duty to develop SMSC and looking at British Values. At secondary and FE level you can link in with the local resource pack on the impact of the media available through the RESH Coordinator and also the Dove resources and the PSHE Association guidance on teaching about body image.