Today's Taboos:

Spotlight on the Taboos of 2026

Talking Taboos.

Published February 2026

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Glossary of taboo terms.
What we mean when we say…

Taboos?

Taboos are topics that are shrouded in silence, not openly discussed and when someone does break the silence, they can be faced with penalties like social exclusion, shame or judgement.

Stigma?

Stigma is a set of negative or unfair beliefs about a topic. Taboo topics are often stigmatised, which contributes to keeping them silenced.

Difficult conversations?

Taboos make conversations about them harder because they prevent open discussion. This silencing can create a lack of language to talk about the taboo, and can contribute to feeling that you are alone in the experience, and don't fit the norm.

Authentic connection?

A sense of feeling safe to fully share experiences and thoughts and be truly understood by others. This is what we want to achieve through our work.

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Talking Taboos.

Talking Taboos: Our Charitable Mission

We are the UK's only charity dedicated to unearthing and challenging harmful taboos.

Today, we live in a culture overflowing with information and opinion. Yet there is still too little space for the human connection needed to explore taboo topics.

- Taboos create shame, inhibit people from speaking openly and make people feel less connected
- Many of us don't know how to approach or talk about taboo topics and this can perpetuate pain and stigma
- Support and resources are limited and some can unintentionally reinforce the very taboos they aim to address. More taboo-informed approaches are needed.

Talking Taboos exists to stop the harm caused by taboos and help people feel seen, understood, and better able to access the support and acceptance they deserve.

We are research-led, centre lived experience, and open up nuanced, compassionate conversations.

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Shared experiences, private pain

We believe opening up conversations ends the harm taboos cause. People agree with us, and yet don't feel able to have these conversations. That's where we come in.

We know the experience of taboos is widespread and the impact is severe.

More than half of adults in the UK have ever been affected by a taboo topic. But 37% say when taboos come up in conversations they feel uncomfortable.

Staggeringly, the impact is near universal, with 95% of people who have experienced a taboo reporting a negative effect.

The top three impacts are:

1. **Avoiding talking about experiences**
2. **Feeling uncomfortable talking about experiences**
3. **Avoiding seeking medical or emotional care**

7 in 10 people believe that if we talk more about taboos, the harm they cause will be reduced.

The charity's core mission is to hold space to help make this happen.

"It changed my whole life, I could never fit in with other people"

"Other people didn't want me to talk about it, I felt ignored"

"I became introverted and worried people would know and then judge me"

"Social isolation"

"My relationship broke down"

Source: Talking Taboos Public Opinion Poll
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, with a sample of 2,000 nationally representative adults.

Please prioritise your wellbeing when exploring this report

We believe that taboo topics need urgent attention and to be brought into conversation.

We have consulted with subject matter experts and people with lived experience of these taboos. We have done our best to write this report sensitively and with readers' wellbeing in mind.

However we are mindful that everyone has different lived experiences of the taboos in this report. Now might not be the right time for you to engage with these topics. If this is the case please come back to the report when you feel able to.

The topics covered in this report are listed opposite so that you can decide if you feel able to read about them.

At the end of the report we link to resources and support related to each topic.

You can go straight to the resources now if you need to.

Topics include:

- Addicted to porn: *pp. 14 - 21*
- Sexual assault by someone you know: *pp. 22 - 28*

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Why Today's Taboos?

We want to understand which taboo topics need urgent attention, so we know what subjects to focus on each year. Each year our topical roundup is built from groundbreaking research that identifies the most timely and urgent taboo topics.

Today's Taboos gives a voice to the hidden pains that many people experience in their lives and highlights what needs to change to reduce the isolation and suffering caused by these taboos.

Today's Taboos is our commitment to unearthing taboo subjects that require urgent public attention.

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Methodology

This project draws inspiration from a range of sources including people working in taboos, experts by experience, public opinion polling, social media and media data, and topic specialist charities.

Our detailed methodology is in the appendix.

1. Scoping taboos

Identifying taboos raised at our events, on social media, in the media, in interviews with people working across taboos.

2. Shortlisting

Looking at timeliness (taboos with particular resonance right now), importance for racialised and marginalised communities, taboos that recurred across multiple sources.

3. Prioritising

We ran a public opinion poll with 2,000 nationally representative adults, asking them three questions:

1. The most uncomfortable taboos;
2. The taboos people were most affected by;
3. The taboos that were most important to open up conversations around.

4. Exploring the 2026 taboos

Input from experts by experience, charities working on the taboos and further public opinion polling to profile the taboos.

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Talking Taboos: Our Partners and Collaborators

Talking Taboos is funded by Common Collective and their partners.

Our partners

We are so grateful to our partners on this project who, alongside our team's research, helped us identify and understand the taboos:

OnePoll who supported us with our public opinion polling on Today's Taboos, overseeing our online surveys of 2000 UK Adults (nationally representative on the basis of age, gender, region and ethnicity). OnePoll are MRS Company Partners, corporate membership of ESOMAR and Members of the British Polling Council.

discover.ai were experts in working with social data, and using new technologies to uncover and analyse social data-sets and supported us with social data analysis on this project.

Contributors

We are also grateful to the people who have generously supported the project with their experience, expertise and insightful reflections:

- Rape Crisis England and Wales
- Brook
- LMK (Let Me Know)
- Shaun Flores
- Yansie Rolston
- Amanda Morrison

Common Collective

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Addicted to porn _ Sexual assault by someone you know _ 2026

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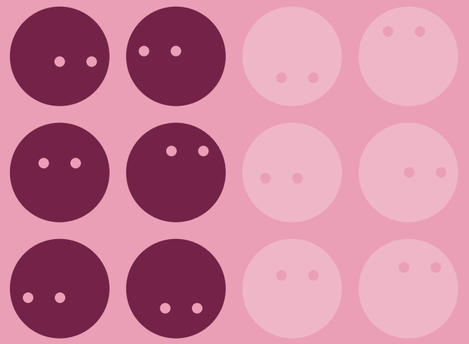
Many people are affected by these two taboos…

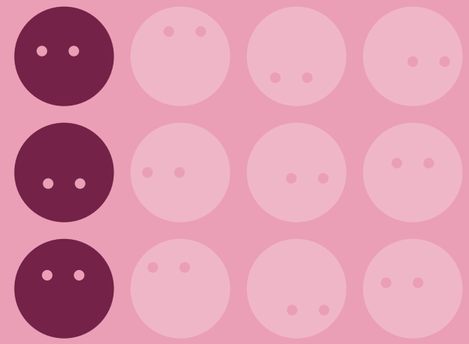
But we are not talking about them

Personal experiences of addiction to porn and sexual assault by someone you know are widespread, yet the taboos means people are left silenced and alone.

The people most affected by these taboos are those aged **18-44.**



Half of 18-44 year olds in the UK have personally experienced or know someone who has experienced these taboos.
1 in 5 have been personally affected.



But despite the prevalence of these taboos, **1 in 4** 18-44 year olds don't feel comfortable speaking to anyone at all about porn addiction or sexual assault by someone you know.

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Source: Talking Taboos Public Opinion Polls
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, with a sample of 2,000 nationally representative adults. Base: 874 adults aged 18-44

Creating a human, safe and grounded space to talk matters now more than ever.

Image credit: Pexels - Shvets Productions

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Addicted to porn

Image credit: Nappy – @RootedColours

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Porn for me was a dirty, dark and dangerous secret.

What is relegated to the underground will only grow, and as the taboo of porn grew, it became a tool of illegitimate sexual education. I saw objects, not humans.

We need to bring taboos such as porn to the light to discuss and help people understand the humans we interact with. Porn offers an easy escape from human connection, but it does not fulfil the need for it. Porn makes things frictionless, and I know the appeal of that supermarket of differing sex.

I want to change the world with the pain I went through as a result of porn and stop the shame and stigma.

— Shaun Flores
Consultant, Advocate, and Facilitator

Addict- * ed to porn

Addicted to Porn

The business of porn is booming. Its use is widespread and increasingly normalised. It's shaping expectations and norms around sex. AI opens up a new world of possibilities in porn. Yet conversations around porn remain very taboo.

It is even more taboo when people experience dependency, a loss of control or problems with their use. Speaking up and seeking help is still very hard.

Despite growing recognition among the public and policymakers of concerns around porn use, the definition of porn addiction remains debated.

When all porn use is cloaked in silence, it is hard to know when someone's use crosses the line from enjoyment to a problematic dependency.

People living with this taboo can feel isolated, experience worsening mental health and it can also affect people around them.

What change is needed?

If we're not talking about porn use at all, how can we know when it has crossed the line?

If we are not normalising the challenges people are facing, how can we expect people to seek help when use moves from pleasure into dependency and distress?

We need to open up the space to talk about porn more and support help seeking when use becomes problematic or addictive.

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Addiction to porn is widespread, as is the discomfort in talking about it

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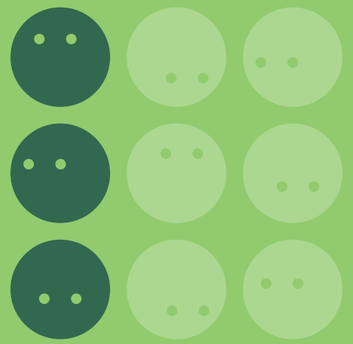
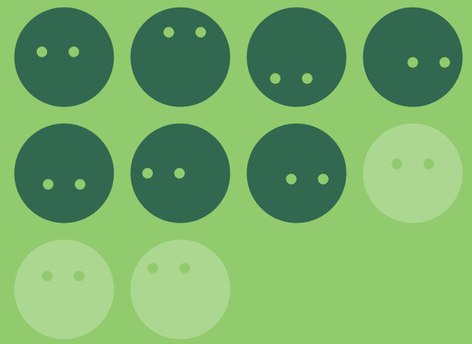


1 in 3

18-44 year olds have experienced or know someone who has experienced porn addiction. This rises to 1 in 2 for men age 18-44.

1 in 4

18-44 year olds do not feel comfortable talking to anyone about porn addiction – levels of comfort with these conversations remain low.



7 in 10

18-44 year olds thankfully, believe it's important to open up conversations around porn addiction. Which is what we will be doing, alongside our partners, this year.

Source:Talking Taboos public opinion polls.
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, with a sample of 2,000 nationally representative adults. Base: 874 adults aged 18-44.
OnePoll, 22nd to 28th August 2025, with a sample of 2,000 nationally representative adults. Base: 860 adults aged 18-44.

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Ashamed and avoiding help

Of those of any age with personal experience of addiction to porn, 47% felt shame about what they were experiencing, 35% felt uncomfortable talking about it and 38% avoided seeking any medical or emotional advice or treatment.

“It negatively affected real world intimacy, I now experience premature ejaculation whenever I get intimate”

“It gives me flashbacks of what I’ve done”

“It wasn’t my addiction, but someone else’s, that had an enormous impact on my life”

Source Talking Taboos Public Opinion Poll
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, Base: 107 people who have personally experienced porn addiction.

“Pornography has become so normalised that many young people feel they’re expected to understand and accept it.

Yet, very few are given the space to talk honestly about how it makes them feel, where it sets unrealistic expectations, or when it starts to cause harm.

Silence around porn doesn’t protect young people; it isolates them. Giving people language, agency and space to reflect is key to preventing harm and supporting help-seeking.”

— LMK (Let Me Know)

LMK (Let Me Know) is an education charity working with young people to prevent relationship abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault.

“There remains a huge amount of stigma associated with porn, even though more people are watching it than ever before.

The shame and anxiety that stems from this makes it much more difficult for people to speak up and seek support when they feel their use of porn has become harmful or unhealthy.”

— Brook

Brook is a Sexual Health and Wellbeing Charity

Talking Taboos.

In our sessions on pornography, young people often ask things like:

“Is it okay to watch porn?”

“How much porn is too much porn?”

“Will watching it ruin sex for me?”

These can be difficult questions, but it’s important we don’t shy away from them. Ignoring the issue only creates more shame and confusion, leaving people vulnerable.

Creating safe spaces to have open and honest conversations about porn will build greater awareness of what is and isn’t healthy, and make people feel less afraid to seek support if they need it.

— Brook

Brook is a Sexual Health and Wellbeing Charity

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Sexual assault by someone you know

Image credit: Nappy – @pixabay

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Sexual assault by someone you know

Sexual assault by someone you know

When someone close to you is the perpetrator of a sexual assault, fear of judgement, shame and stigma within your social circle makes speaking up especially hard. Further trauma and distress can be caused by having to see and interact with the person in social contexts.

In speaking up there is a risk of not being believed or others downplaying the experience. Tender relationships with friends or family might feel too precious to lose, creating risk in sharing experiences or reporting the assault.

The silence around this taboo means that people don't know how to talk about a sexual assault that happens within a friendship group.

It also makes it hard to know how to navigate this as friends or loved ones supporting someone living through the impact of sexual assault by someone they know.

What change is needed?

We need better understanding and awareness around this taboo and how to support someone affected so that we can improve reporting and prevention.

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A topic people want discussed, but few are comfortable to talk about

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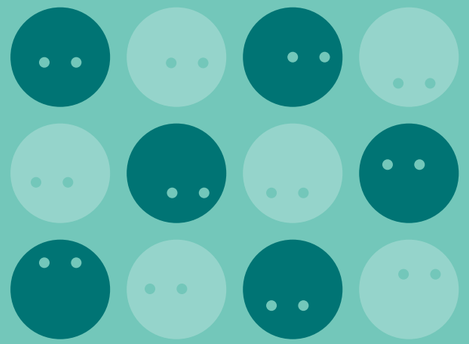
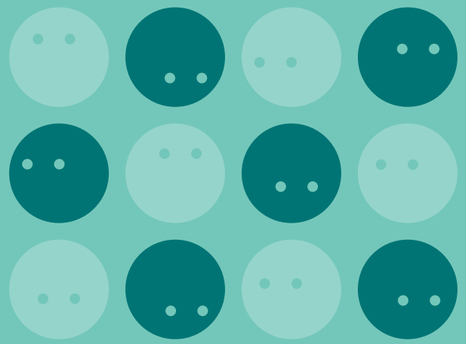


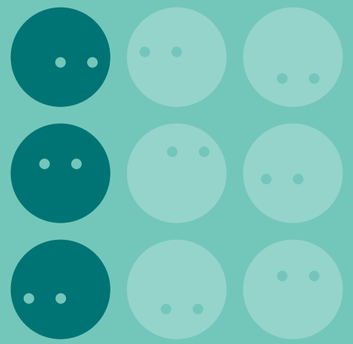
1 in 2

18 to 34 year olds have been affected by, or know someone who has been affected by, sexual assault by someone they know. 18-34 year olds are the most affected age group of all adults.



1 in 2

18-34 year olds do not feel comfortable being part of a conversation about a sexual assault by someone you know.



1 in 3

18-34 year olds would even feel uncomfortable talking to a friend or partner. People are struggling to share their experiences — especially with their close friends, families and partners.

Source: Talking Taboos Public Opinion Polls
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, with a sample of 2,000 nationally representative adults. Base: 532 people aged 18-34.

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Feelings of shame are [silencing] us

Of all those with personal experience of the sexual assault by someone you know taboo, 38% avoided talking about the issue, 42% felt shame about their experience and 31% avoided seeking emotional support.

“I pretended like it didn’t happen and moved on. It made me drink more”

“I lost all my self confidence, and got judged and bullied for being withdrawn”

“I was young, and felt I would be blamed”

Source Talking Taboos Public Opinion Poll
OnePoll, 14th to 21st January 2026, Base: 156 people who had had personally experienced sexual assault by someone they knew.

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“Societal attitudes around sexual violence and abuse can be really dangerous. They can cause victims and survivors to feel shame about what happened to them, or to blame themselves. It can make it harder for them to get the help they need. And it can feel isolating when it seems like nobody understands.”

Rape Crisis England & Wales

“We also know that talking about sexual assault is incredibly difficult, for fear of ‘saying the wrong thing’, and because it draws on our deep emotions and ingrained ethics. This is amplified tenfold when that sexual assault involves someone we know.”

Brook, Sexual health and wellbeing charity

Getting comfortable with the un-comfortable

"The approach we take at Brook is getting comfortable with the uncomfortable, and we do this by creating safe spaces where people can share their thoughts and questions in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

We are reassured that it's okay to get it wrong, especially around topics we don't engage with all the time, and that we are all learning together. We also talk about the importance of friendships when discussing healthy relationships, reminding people that one way to support a friend is to listen to them without judgement, especially if a friend is disclosing sexual assault.

These are great foundations for building skills in how to have difficult conversations, and it is this approach that helps us talk about things like sexual assault by someone you know."

What's in store for 2026?

We've got plans to delve deeper into conversations around the taboos. We'll bring our trademark Talking Taboos' frank yet safe approach to each of these topics in partnership with organisations and individuals who are tackling them.

We'd love you to join us.

How can you get involved and support our work?

Follow along as we launch our activities and resources

Join us in digging into the two taboo topics on Instagram **@talkingtaboosfoundation**
We'll be holding space for conversations and working closely with our partners to create better understanding of the taboo experiences

You can also sign up for our newsletter and being the first to hear about our activities, you can do this by visiting our website **talkingtaboos.com**

Connect with us on LinkedIn **@TalkingTaboosFoundation** as we share more about our research methodology there

Join us in speaking up and out and challenge taboos every day. If you'd like a little guidance for this, check How To Talk About Taboos resource. Whenever we speak about these taboos, their power reduces and we become closer to each other.

Catch up on our past Taboos. You can learn more about taboos from the Talking Taboos taboo library, and watch our deep dive conversations from 2025 on our YouTube, where we've covered a range of topics including: Silenced Suicidal Thoughts & Surviving Child Sexual Abuse.

You can also get involved in Talking Taboos by donating Small charities in the UK like us are facing a funding crisis. If you found this report interesting or enjoyed attending our events and want to support us to continue our work - please consider donating on the Talking Taboos Wonderful donations page.

Where you can go for more support

If you are in crisis or just need someone to talk to about your thoughts, please reach out to a dedicated support service:

Samaritans
Call 116 123 (free, 24/7) or visit samaritans.org

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)
Call 0800 58 58 58 or visit thecalmzone.net

Shout
Text SHOUT to 85258 (24/7 text support)

If you've experienced or know someone who's struggling with porn addiction:

Brook has a range of free advice and information on their website, around pornography, sexual assault and sex and relationships. They also have a fantastic list of support charities signposted

The Naked Truth charity has a range of free resources for supporting with porn dependency

Pivotal Recovery, a not for profit org, has some free podcasts and resources to support people on their website and also a questionnaire to understand more about sex or porn use.

If you've experienced or know someone who's been affected by sexual assault by someone you know and needs support or to understand more:

Rape Crisis has a free 24/7 Support Line on 0808 500 2222 or you can chat online at 247sexualabusesupport.org.uk. They also have centres across England and Wales

Learn more about healthy relationships from **LMK (Let Me Know)**'s charity's website.

Talking Taboos.

How to talk about taboos

We all need to get more comfortable in uncomfortable conversations

Speak up. Taboos exist because social codes keep them under wraps. As a charity we speak openly and honestly about taboos without fear of penalties. We share personal stories of taboos, break social norms and lead by example.

Respect privacy. If someone has shared their taboo story it's still their story, it's not yours to pass on. We respect the privacy of conversations about taboos and don't 'out' others stories.

Use the right words. Taboos are often surrounded by euphemisms and language that hides the taboos. We use correct language boldly and without shame.

Never assume. While we are keen to lead on 'talking' we respect everyone's right to talk about taboos in their own time. Never assume just because someone's not 'talking' that they're not affected. Always speak respectfully as if people may have suffered because of taboos.

Consider the context. We are all starting from somewhere different when experiencing or challenging taboos; varying experiences of privilege, power or cultural norms can create barriers and blockers. Approach these differences with curiosity and understanding.

Don't laugh off discomfort. Another tactic used to keep taboos in place is to use 'humour' or 'othering' to create a barrier to being open to listening. We never use humour to perpetuate taboos.

Speak out against penalties. Taboos are policed by enforcing penalties for those affected. These may be overt discrimination or more subtle. When you see this happening, resist it through actions and words.

Listen empathetically. It takes guts to speak about taboos. When someone shares their story listen openly, create space for them to share their experiences and feel seen and heard. Don't solutionise – only offer up advice if it's asked for.

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Appendix

Detailed Methodology

This project draws inspiration from a range of sources including: experts working with taboos, social data, public opinion polling and experiences from people living with the taboos.

1. Scoping

Our starting point for mapping the landscape of taboos built on several sources:

- In 2025, at our events, we captured taboos that people would like greater focus on
- In March 2025 Discover.ai ran a social data analysis to identify a long list of taboos
- Also in March 2025 we invited people whose works focussed on a cross-section of taboos and people with lived experience to tell us about the taboos that were coming up for them via a survey.

From this scoping we had a longlist of 57 taboos.

2. Shortlisting

To reach a top 8 we prioritised taboos that were most timely, that were raised as important for racialised and marginalised communities and that came up across multiple sources in our scoping.

3. Public opinion polling

We then ran a public opinion poll, with OnePoll exploring:

- The most uncomfortable topics for conversation
- The taboos people were most affected by;
- The taboos that were most important to open up conversations around.

We reviewed the data at a nationally representative level as well as looking at differences by gender, age and ethnicity to select two taboos of focus.

4. The 2026 taboos

With our 2026 taboos confirmed by the research we explored and refined these further with charity partners, experts by experience, opinion polling and data from our initial scoping.

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Thank you for reading our report

If you want to work with us this year on these taboos, have any feedback or want to get involved in next year's report please get in touch.

Contact: hello@talkingtaboos.com

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