

THE FIRST WORD

STEP-BY-STEP ADVICE FOR TALKING TO
A CHILD ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

BY PASTOR PAUL KRUEGER

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1. IDENTIFY PORNOGRAPHY

The first base to cover is to let the child know that **not all pictures in this world are good pictures**. Some pictures, called pornography, are bad. They are pictures that show people who don't have the private parts of their bodies covered. Parents will want to remind their children that God made those parts of our bodies private for a reason. He wants them to be shared only with the person who we will eventually marry. God does not want us to show our private parts to other people or to look at other people's private parts. That's why we call them private!

Parents should warn their kids that even though they know that they shouldn't look at pictures like that, they need to be very careful because **pornography tricks their brain into releasing chemicals that will make them feel good even though what they're doing is wrong**. Parents can also share with their children that most kids don't go looking for pictures like that on their own, sometimes they come across them on accident or one of their friends might show them some, and it is extremely important that they let their parents know about any time they are exposed to pornography.

Parents will not want to go into too much detail about all the dangers of pornography. They should explain that **pornography lies** about what are normal and acceptable ways to treat other people. Pornography tries to convince us that it's alright to hurt people and to disrespect them but we know that God wants us to do just the opposite.

2. EXPLAIN ADDICTION

Pornography also hurts us through something called **addiction**. An addiction is when chemicals in the brain cause someone to keep wanting to do something over and over again. Addictions can be so strong that even though the person wants to stop doing that thing they can't seem to stop no matter how hard they try.

Understanding how an addiction works might seem a little advanced for a six-year-old, but Kristen A. Jenson, author of the best-selling children's book *Good Pictures Bad Pictures, Protect Young Minds™* does an excellent job of describing it in concepts they will understand. She suggests that parents explain to their child that **their brain is made up of two different parts**: the thinking brain and the feeling brain.

Jenson continues, explaining that the feeling brain is a very important part of the brain. It's the part that makes us sweat on a hot day so we don't overheat. It makes us shiver on a cold day to help keep us warm and it even makes us feel hungry so we remember to keep eating. **The problem with the feeling brain is that it doesn't know the difference between what is right and what is wrong.** When we're hungry, for example, the feeling brain just tells us that we need to eat. It doesn't know whether we should eat bread, or a rock, or even poison. That's where the thinking brain comes in.

2. EXPLAIN ADDICTION (continued)

The thinking brain is the part of the brain that makes decisions. Some of those decisions are easy, like whether to eat a piece of bread or a rock. Our thinking brain can learn from mistakes, too. If we ever did try to eat a rock, we would find out that it hurts our teeth and it doesn't taste good so the next time our feeling brain tells us we're hungry, our thinking brain tells us not to eat a rock. **Every time our feeling brain tells us to do something and our thinking brain decides not to do it, our thinking brain gets a little stronger.**

Parents can also explain that part of what our feeling brain does is create feelings that make people want to be together and see each other again and again. That's part of what happens when people fall in love. But **the feeling brain can't necessarily tell between real people and pictures.** So even looking at pictures can make our feeling brain want to see those pictures again and again. Once that starts happening it can be very hard to make it stop, so the best way to avoid it is not to look at those pictures at all.

3. MAKE A PLAN

When a child views pornography it only takes three-tenths of a second before the brain starts chemically reacting to the image it is processing. Because of this, **it is important for kids to be prepared and to know how they will react to pornography before they even encounter it.** Parents can develop a plan with their kids and practice it just like they would practice what to do when faced with other dangers like a fire or a predator.

Editor's Note: The next page contains all six steps on one page, so parents can print it out and share it with children and keep it on hand as a reminder for themselves.

STEPS FOR WHEN YOU ARE EXPOSED TO PORNOGRAPHY

Step One: *Close your eyes.* Pornography affects our brain like a drug—the longer the image is seen, the greater the dose. The sooner you can close your eyes and if necessary, plug your ears, the more clearly you will be able to think and react. You may need to take additional steps to stop the flow of pornography. You might have to turn off the device it appeared on, or change to a different channel. If it isn't something you can control you may have to leave the room. Whatever it takes, do your best to get away from the pornography and to keep your eyes covered or turned away until there is no chance of seeing more.

Step Two: *Identify the pornography.* Just as soon as you see pornography and close your eyes, name it. Say the words, "That's pornography." Saying these words out loud every time we are exposed to pornography will help condition our thinking brain, and empower it to make the right decisions. Getting our family and friends on board with naming pornography with us will help make this easier.

Step Three: *Break the spell.* Remember what God has told us about our bodies and about sex and how pornography is lying about that and the good things God has given us. Then we can make a conscious decision not to look at pictures like that again which will help strengthen our thinking brain and make it even easier the next time.

Step Four: *Tell an adult.* One of the biggest powers of pornography is secrecy. We destroy that power when we tell someone every time we see it. Children should be encouraged to tell a trusted adult like a parent or a teacher any time they are exposed to pornography. It might not be a very comfortable thing to tell somebody you saw a pornographic image but it can help release the image from your mind before it becomes a bigger problem that would be even harder to talk about. Another blessing that comes when children tell their parent what they saw is that parents can revisit step three with their child, reinforcing why those images are dangerous and what lies they are trying to sell. The parent can then help their child walk through the final steps of the plan.

Step Five: *Identify the circumstances.* Along with your parent identify the circumstances which led to the exposure and determine if there is anything that can be done to avoid it in the future. This might mean not visiting certain websites or not watching certain TV channels. It could mean being particularly careful around certain friends and avoiding situations where we are alone with them.

Step Six: *Move on to something better.* Say a prayer with your parents asking God for his continued help in avoiding pornography and its traps. Then find something wholesome and fun to do that will take your mind off of what you saw and wrestle the thought of the picture out of your brain. It will help to have some ideas ahead of time for what you can do when you find yourself in that situation.

4. SORT THE GOOD FROM THE BAD

Finally, the most important thing Parents can do as they talk to their kids about pornography is to **help them sort what is right from what is wrong.** God has written his law on our hearts and given us a conscience that helps alert us when something is sinful. As we've seen above, he has even given us an amazing brain that has the power to make the decision to do what is right based on what our conscience tells us and what we know is true from his word.

We can help our children strengthen that decision making capability by **reviewing the principles God has given us.** Remember that positive messages are always stronger than negative messages. It will help to show children that whenever God says "no" to something it is because he is saying "yes" to something even better.

When Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, he did it to set us free from the slavery of sin. Paul talks about that in his letter to Galatia: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). **Because of the addictive power it has on our brains, pornography has the ability to make us slaves.** This can make it harder to say no to other kinds of sin in our lives, too. When God says no to pornography it is because he wants us to be able to live in the freedom that Jesus won for us on the cross. He wants us to live, not in the shame of a life of slavery, but in the joy and peace of forgiveness.