

Book Review: Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn Proofing Today's Young Kids

When it comes to resources for parents to help their children address online pornography, there are very few options. Really, for many years there were none. The organization Porn Proof Kids (www.pornproofkids.org) sought to remedy this by publishing the illustrated book Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn Proofing Today's Young Kids. The target age of the book is not completely clear, but based on the introduction, I would say that it is targeted at an 8-10 year old child. A child much older than this may be too sophisticated for the picture book, though it is a good starting ground for discussion.

There are some really great things about this little book. It is the story of a young boy talking throughout his day with his mother and father about “bad pictures.” The book does a brilliant job of describing in understandable language the concept of addiction, the thinking brain and the feeling brain. Introducing these concepts to children at an early age can be very helpful in teaching them to use their thinking brain to overrule things like impulsivity. The book also does a great job in teaching what it calls the CAN DO plan, a behavioral plan to manage exposure to pornography, which includes telling a trusted adult.

As with anything in print, there are both good things about a book and some things of which I am not a fan. My issue arises because I am acutely aware of the impact of shame on addiction, particularly sex addiction. The authors of the book do devote a small paragraph to this in the introduction, stating that a parent needs to stay calm because “shame and secrecy only increase the power of porn.” Because of my awareness of the impact of shame, I have become incredibly careful in the language I use when working in the sex addiction field. Words, even if unintended, can be shaming. It is my insistence on non-shaming language that causes me to have an issue with Good Pictures, Bad Pictures. It is right there in the title. “Bad” pictures. I understand that the authors had to write in a way that young children would understand. However, if I am a young child and see a pornographic picture and it has been labeled “bad”, what happens to me emotionally if I am excited by that picture? Am I then bad too?

The book likens pornography to rat poison, calling it dangerous. Research studies show us that incidental exposure to pornography is not necessarily dangerous to children. Those children who have problems with online pornography are frequent users. From a sex positive therapeutic stance, pornography is not “bad”. Pornography simply is the depiction of nudity or sexual acts between adults that a child is not prepared to see or process appropriately. Pornography is inappropriate for children. I personally dislike the use of scare tactics that involve shaming language that may make a child feel bad about themselves for having a physiological response to sexual imagery.

Another issue I have with the book is how it talks about the dopamine system in the brain. The book states that pornography “tricks” the brain into turning on powerful feelings. This statement is entirely untrue, the use of the word “trick” here is misleading. Dopamine is released by pleasurable activities (they use ice cream), drugs, or sex. This is not trickery but a biological process. The book also calls the reward center the “attraction center” which is not accurate. Attraction is a multifaceted concept that involves more than brain centers and neurochemistry. I do wish that they were more accurate in their description of these processes.

I feel like I just spent three paragraphs talking about what I don't like about the book. I will own

that these issues come from my background in neuropsychology and an obsessive desire to never shame anyone about sex and sexuality. That being said, the book is really the best resource of its kind that I have seen. It provides a short, readable story for a parent and child to go through together. It provides a clear behavioral plan for a child to follow if they are accidentally exposed to pornography.

The book is best for younger children who perhaps have not been exposed to online pornography yet. The average age of first exposure to online pornography is about ten years old, though this data is old and the age is likely younger. Therefore, the earlier you start talking to your child about sex, pornography and sexuality the better.