

A LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

In this classroom Scripture study, children will read from Genesis and will hear about Adam and Eve being naked. John Paul II labels “original nakedness” as one of the three original experiences. Original solitude pointed us to the relationship between man and God and original unity pointed us to the relationship between man and woman. Because the body reveals the person, original nakedness refers to something much deeper than the fact that Adam and Eve were created without clothing. The Hebrew word for naked refers to the fact that there was nothing covering the person and therefore nothing hidden between the two. Stated positively, it refers to Adam and Eve being fully transparent and able to see the world as God sees. Adam and Eve are completely open to each other, the world around them and to God. In looking at each other, Adam and Eve immediately see another person made in the image and likeness of God. The experience of original nakedness is about seeing as God sees because we are created in his image and likeness. The world, and everything in it, is a gift and is good.

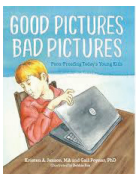
Though we are focusing on these broad, positive themes in class, this topic does bring up the need to address other connotations of “nakedness.” As you know, we live in a sex-saturated culture in which the human body is routinely objectified and commodified, treated as a tool, a toy, an object of pleasure and profit. A prime example of this is the **multibillion** dollar pornography industry. This industry aggressively targets new users—including children and adolescents—with tantalizing, addiction-inducing content for the sake of profit. Even though your children may not be searching for porn online, the porn industry is most definitely searching for your children. Indeed, research has shown that first exposure to pornography is often in the middle school years (especially for boys) and younger for some. By the time they reach college, the majority of females and nearly all males have been exposed to pornography. Pornography in turn negatively affects young people’s attitudes about sexuality, marriage and the body. It encourages males to objectify females, and it encourages females to see themselves as objects to be used. Furthermore, because pornography is so stimulating to the brain, many young people become addicted to it. This situation creates an urgent need to protect and prepare our children for the cultural onslaught that is coming for them. The lessons they have been receiving at school on Theology of the Body will help, but these cannot replace the essential role that you have as parents, the primary educators of your children.

We believe that education in matters of sexual desire and sexual intimacy is best handled in the home where you as parents can exercise your God-given role in educating your children. Your unique relationship with your children and knowledge of their developmental stage empowers you to best address these delicate, personal issues. Here are some strategies to help you in this sacred task:

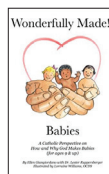
- Learn about Theology of the Body and take steps to put the Catholic Church’s beautiful vision of sexuality into practice in your own life.
- Approach sexual education as an ongoing process, comprising many conversations over many years, each adapted to your child’s developmental level and needs.
- Emphasize to your children the dignity of the human body, both their own and others’. Explain that the body reveals the person. What you do to someone’s body, you do to *them*. Teach them to treat the body with dignity and respect as it is a sacred gift from God. Ask them to point out with you when they see behavior that does not respect the human body and therefore does not respect the person.
- Look for natural opportunities to address topics such as the origin of human life. Give honest explanations that fit the child’s level of maturity and capacity to understand. **Always refer back to God’s beautiful design for making us male and female and calling us to communion through our bodies in marriage.**
- Warn your children that there are many ways the human body and therefore the person can be disrespected. These include mocking someone’s body, deliberately harming the body, inappropriate forms of touching of oneself or others, dressing immodestly, using or objectifying someone’s body and taking immodest videos or photos of the body. These activities do not fit with God’s beautiful design for us and harm everyone involved (even though we might initially like them).

- Explain that pornography or porn is the word used to describe immodest photos and videos of the human body. Companies that produce porn want to make money by getting people addicted to these materials. In fact, pornography affects the brain a lot like many illegal drugs do (e.g. cocaine, heroin). Tell them that while it is natural to be curious about the human body, pornography depicts the body in ways that are inhumane, unrealistic, unhealthy, unloving and immodest. For our own good, we must always say “no” to looking at porn. Tell them that if they ever see porn (even accidentally), to turn off the screen/device, walk away and tell you as soon as possible. A good resource to help with this conversation is *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures* by Kristen Jenson and Gail Poyner. Reading this book with your child will enable you to address this difficult subject and give your child a plan for what to do if and when they encounter pornography.
- When it comes to pornography, prevention and supervision are key. Establish clear (ideally written) rules for technology use in the home. There are many examples online of internet safety rules, contracts, or pledges to use with your children. At the very least, we recommend setting rules around what they are allowed to do online, when and how long they can go online, and where they can access the internet. For example, we encourage you to spell out what sort of online activities are off-limits, how much screen time per week or per day they are permitted, and where in the house it is OK to use the Internet (e.g., no internet in bedrooms, bathrooms, or at dinner). We, of course, have to lead by example.
- Ensure that **all** internet-capable devices to which your child has access be equipped with at least two layers of content filtering and accountability software. Examples include Qustodio, Covenant Eyes, NetNanny, OpenDNS, and many more. You need to know what your child is doing online and make it more difficult for pornographers to get their material in front of your child’s impressionable eyes. Also, never allow a child to have administrator privileges (e.g. the ability to install/uninstall programs or apps without your knowledge) on an internet-capable device.
- On the positive side, we encourage you to work on developing a culture in the home marked by respect for the body and the person, meaningful face-to-face conversation, interaction with the natural world and prayer.
- Partner with us to keep all our children safe and growing in purity, innocence and a capacity for self-giving love. Let us know how we can work together toward this end.

Recommended Resources:



Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids (ages 8–12),
Kristen Jenson and
Gail Poyner, Ph.D.



Wonderfully Made! Babies: A Catholic Perspective on How and Why God Makes Babies
(for ages 9 and up),
Ellen Giangiardano



Beyond the Birds and the Bees,
Greg and Lisa Popcak



Pandora's Box Is Open, Now What Do I Do? A Parent's Guide for Helping Children Who Have Been Exposed to Pornography
Gail Poyner, Ph.D.

- Protect Young Eyes (protectyouneyes.com): Clear guidance and tools (the best we’ve seen) to help families, schools and parishes create safer digital environments.
- Protect Young Minds (protectyoungminds.org): Great resources on how to talk to kids about pornography, protect them, and respond lovingly if they have already been exposed.
- IntegrityRestored (www.integrityrestored.com): A Catholic organization focusing on healing and preventing pornography problems.
- Pure Hope (www.purehope.net): A wonderful Protestant organization focusing on sexual integrity.
- National Center on Sexual Exploitation: endsexualexploitation.org
- Novus Project: thenovusproject.org

