

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Netflix's
Big Mouth

***Big Mouth* = Big Topics**

The first season of Netflix's animated show *Big Mouth* debuted on September 29, 2017 boasting an all-star cast and a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. It's about middle schoolers going through puberty in the most explicit, perverse, and, at times, depraved way possible. Puberty is indeed a difficult time for all of us, and while the show does bring some good to the discussion, it's also fraught with problems. *Disclaimer: In an attempt to give an accurate picture of the show, the explicit content is discussed in this Guide. Proceed carefully.*

— What do I need to know about *Big Mouth*?

It's an adult cartoon based on the real-life experiences that comic writers [Nick Kroll](#) and [Andrew Goldberg](#) had as kids growing up in New York. They share, in graphic detail, what it was like growing up and going through puberty. As most young men do, Nick and Andrew struggled through lust, sexuality, relationships with girls, and the ups and downs of friendship. The show features some of the most popular comedians of our time as the voices, including: [John Mulaney](#), [Fred Armisen](#), [Kristen Wiig](#), and [Jordan Peele](#).

Although the show is about pre-teens, it is intended for an adult audience. However, Netflix does not effectively limit younger viewers' access, and undoubtedly, there will be many teens and pre-teens who watch the show. Many of them have lots of questions about sex, and they will be drawn to the show in hopes of finding answers. Unfortunately, due to the content, they are likely to develop some severely warped ideas from watching it.

— How does it talk about going through puberty?

Many young children are scared of monsters under their beds or in the closet. When kids get older, they develop fear of a new monster: the monster of sexuality. *Big Mouth* embodies this concept through "The Hormone Monster" that first appears to Andrew at various unwelcome times at school or at his friend's house, telling him that he should masturbate. Andrew, being a good-natured kid, doesn't want to sexualize girls and masturbate to the thought of having sex with them, but the Hormone Monster keeps pressuring him to do it, and he always gives in.

Nick is a late bloomer who feels a lot of anxiety when he notices everyone else going through puberty before him. He sees other boys in the shower at school and feels inadequate due to his lack of development, so he doesn't feel comfortable having sleepovers with his more well-developed friend, Andrew. Despite the anxiety he feels, he is confident, socially competent, and able to develop good friendships and even some relationships with girls, about whom he understands almost nothing.

Many shows have dealt with concepts of male puberty in the past, including *American Pie*, *Freaks and Geeks*, and *Family Guy*, but rarely, if ever, has a show so specifically analyzed the struggles of female puberty. The entirety of Episode 2 is centered around Jessi having her first period and being introduced to her own Hormone Monster. At one point, there is a scene that features Jessi talking to her own vagina (voiced by Kristen Wiig), and, although horribly explicit, does serve to effectively encapsulate the often-ignored concept of female puberty and discovering one's self as a sexual being.

— What does it teach about dating?

Most of us have an awkward first-date story at some point in our lives, but it can be especially awkward when you're 12 years old and know nothing about the opposite sex, let alone yourself. This concept is captured perfectly in both Nick's and Andrew's attempts at relationships.

Nick kisses Jessi at the dance, and later on they decide to go on a date. The date, however, is horribly awkward, so they decide it's better to just be friends. Nick is worried that he will be ridiculed at school for being dumped, so he makes up a rumor that he was the one who broke up with Jessi. Jessi doesn't take kindly to it, to say the least, and her Hormone Monster encourages her to freak out at everyone.

Andrew likes a girl named Missy, and evidently she likes him too, as evidenced by their extreme awkwardness and proclivity for vomiting in their own mouths when talking to each other. This captures the anxiety that young people can experience when dating. After Andrew asks Missy to be his girlfriend, they begin getting sexual way too quickly, which leads to them eventually breaking up. Afterward, Andrew falls into a severe depression that is only alleviated when he looks at pornography.

This is the first redeeming quality of the show: It demonstrates that many 12- and 13-year-olds aren't ready to date. They often haven't developed mentally enough to understand it, and it has the potential to lead to a lot of unnecessary stress, sexual experiences, and even depression. It's important to educate your kids about dating and set appropriate limits. Dating will always be a little scary, but it doesn't have to be a terrible experience. Kids need to understand their worth as people apart from their romantic experiences and sexuality. It's also extremely important to learn to be confident in who they are before entering into the dating world, which often doesn't happen at such young ages. Of course, every child is different, and only you know what yours is ready to handle, but we appreciated the show's honest look at how pre-teens and teens are affected by dating.

— How does it portray family?

Nick's parents, although very strange and awkward, actually do an amazing job of affirming their children. They sit at the table together as a family, and the dad opens by saying something like, "Wow! I am so thankful for all of my amazing children and my beautiful wife!" He constantly compliments them and gives them advice. Even though his advice is often strange (and sometimes completely off base), he is sincere in his love for his kids, and his kids ultimately love him as well. Sometimes, a parent's advice isn't always good, but a sincere attempt from a place of love can do wonders for relationship.

Nick's mom is also weird, awkward, and wonderful, all at the same time. She loves her husband and children, she regularly cooks meals, and she encourages her kids to do well in life. Remember before when I mentioned that Nick is confident in himself? It's easy to be confident when you have parents who constantly affirm you, and show you in their actions that they value you.

Andrew, on the other hand, does not receive that same affirmation from his parents. His dad hates everyone, but lists a few people that he doesn't hate and fails to include Andrew in that

list. His mom sometimes tries to affirm him but is not good at it and says awkward, not-very-encouraging things to him. Andrew is less confident in himself than Nick and, as a result, is devastated when his girlfriend breaks up with him.

This shows the incredible importance of affirmation in the life of a child that can only be adequately given to them by their family. The things you say to your children have an impact on their lives and how they view themselves, so find ways to affirm them rather than put them down.

Nick and Andrew have a friend named Jay, who is crude, mean, offensive, and constantly pressures them to do bad things. He really is quite repulsive. But as the series progresses, we gradually gain more insight into Jay's family life. His dad is a lawyer who makes a lot of money, but does so at the expense of personal ethics and his family. He's never once shown at home with his family, but is often quoted from his shady law commercials. Jay's mother is mentally ill, which comes as a shock to Nick and Andrew, but is the unfortunate life that Jay has become accustomed to. Jay's brothers are also awful. They bully him and his friends, do drugs, are sexually deviant, and at one point, ejaculate onto crackers and try to make the boys eat them.

As a result, Jay desperately craves affection. It's revealed at one point that he has hidden cameras all over Nick's house so that he can watch what it's like to have a real family and pretend he's part of it. They set it up in a humorous way, but after the initial laughter, we see a very sad reality. Without the love of a family, Jay feels insecure, lonely, and wants love from anywhere he can get it.

Jessi is an only child, and her parents don't get along well. Her dad smokes marijuana and watches TV all day. Her Mom works 9-5 to pay the bills and spends most of her free time at home berating her passive and apathetic husband. Jessi often makes excuses to leave the house, since going anywhere is better than staying at home with her parents.

Later in the series, Nick and Andrew find out that Jessi's mom is having an affair with a woman in downtown New York. They try to keep it a secret, but Nick accidentally tells Jessi about it at a party, and she is very troubled by the news. When her dad finds out, it's devastating to the family and shows the very real pain that having an affair can cause.

Although *Big Mouth* shows the depravity of family life, it serves to effectively highlight the very real and harsh realities that teenagers face. That teen who just punched another kid for no reason may have gotten punched by his father that morning; that teen who started drinking excessively might have just suffered the loss of a grandparent; and that teen who is addicted to porn may have been molested as a child. While their life circumstances don't excuse their behavior, they are necessary to understanding how to help children who are acting out. *The exterior is an indication of what's going on inside*, and just like Nick, Andrew, Jay, and Jessi, real teens are going through some serious issues. Ultimately, the show affirms that a loving home is one of the best gifts a child can ever receive.

— Who should watch it?

Since the content of the show is some of the worst that has ever been allowed on Netflix, Axis does not recommend anyone to watch this show. However, you are free to do as you choose, and the reality is, millions of people are going to be watching it. If you or your teen does

decide to watch it, or some of their friends have seen it, we recommend that you use it as an opportunity to have discussions about the concepts expressed in the show. There are certainly redeemable moments, and if you feel like you will not be tempted into sin or corrupted in your mind, there is potential for you to gain some value from the show. There are incredible insights into the struggles that teens are going through and how we can help them through those struggles. Obviously, if you are reading this, you have some interest in the show. Although we don't recommend watching it, reading articles and blog posts about it is certainly recommended. [This one](#) offers great advice about how we can respond when we find out our teens have watched this or other shows we wish they wouldn't have.

— Does it have any redeeming qualities?

Watching this show, we spent 10% of the time laughing, 80% being absolutely disgusted and horrified, and the other 10% standing up and cheering. The first 8 episodes are filled with the most perverted content we've ever seen (and that's saying something in this world). The worst comes when the Hormone Monster decapitates a man and proceeds to have sex with the severed head. That rightfully disgusts even the most liberal of viewers and begs the question: Is there any possible redemption from such an awful show?

In our opinion, there is. If the series had stopped at Episode 8, we would have said that this was the single worst show we had ever seen. However, the last 7 minutes of Episode 9 might be some of the greatest minutes of television. Let us explain.

After reading this Guide, you know that the majority of these kids come from terrible families. You also know that the show ultimately affirms the importance of a loving family in a child's life. In fact, redemption through depravity is found in a powerful-yet-unconventional way amidst all of their terrible circumstances.

Here's the setup: During a bat mitzvah celebration, all of the characters are going through some serious issues. Nick hasn't been showing affection to his mom, since he feels like he is getting too old for that. Andrew tells Missy he loves her, but she throws up and eventually rejects him. Jay's family life is still terrible, so he begins to latch on to Nick's family, calling them his parents and trying to spend time with them at the dance. Nick begins getting jealous that his parents love Jay more than him.

And worst of all, the woman with whom Jessi's mom has been having an affair is a cantor at the synagogue that's hosting the bat mitzvah! The two women are seen holding hands and hugging, and when Jessi realizes what's going on, she confronts her mom about it. After her mom admits to it and begins crying, it's revealed that the dad was behind them, listening to the whole thing. Jessi's parents then get called up to give a speech to talk about Jessi, but after the news, it becomes an awkward hashing out of their marital problems, which creates horrible awkwardness for everyone in attendance. The tension is thick. At this point, viewers have a horrible feeling of pain and disgust in their stomachs and are left wondering what will come of this.

Then the unaware DJ proclaims, "Now it's time to do the electric slide!" Nick, confused, asks, "Are we really doing the electric slide right now?" But what comes out of this song, although somewhat obscene, is perhaps inadvertent genius.

The characters proceed to sing a song:

*Love doesn't last forever; it will die and break your heart.
And you can't have a sexual awakening without tearing lives apart.
Take your mom for granted, and you'll lose her in due time.
The only way to dull life's pain is to get stoned out of your mind.
Life is a f***ed up mess!
Never share your feelings, or life will kick you in the face.
Sometimes everything moves so fast, you throw up all over the place.
Children grow up and abandon you to die broken and alone.
Scallops take you to paradise, but your a**hole will atone!
Life is a f***ed up mess!
People are horrible! It's all just heartbreak and misery! No one is truly happy!*

The problem with many shows today is that they fail to show the consequences of actions. For example, throughout *Family Guy*, Brian tricks women into having sex with him, and it's shown as a positive thing, like he's a cool, desirable, player kind of guy. In *American Pie*, the boys obsessively pursue unhealthy sexual desires, and "getting laid" is depicted as the greatest reward one can ever receive. *Big Mouth* has just as bad, and at times worse, content, but it takes a very different approach to making bad choices.

Every time someone pursues or engages in behavior that goes against God's good will, they suffer a consequence for it. For example, Andrew's dad is tempted by scallops and knows they are bad for him, but since he can't overcome his temptation, he keeps eating them and gets terrible diarrhea, thereby affirming the importance of self-control in resisting temptation. (Is this intentional? We think not, as none of the show's creators claims to be a Christian, but it's interesting that they nevertheless recognize this principle at work.)

Jessi's mom decides to pursue her own sexual desires outside of a marriage relationship and, when seeing the damage she's done, acknowledges the fact that it has torn lives apart. Nick realizes that holding back love from his mom is not an appropriate response to getting older and finds a new way to show love to her, despite his increasing age.

Those are the positive characters who learn from their mistakes and gain something from it. However, many of the other problems are not given a solution. Life is portrayed as a very terrible and tragic thing, with essentially no ultimate hope. The ending of the song is incredibly honest: "People are horrible! It's all just heartbreak and misery! No one is truly happy!" Not only is this true if we have no hope in Jesus, it's also true that if we try to put our faith in people, we will inevitably be disappointed. Pursuing happiness and fulfillment through other people results in nothing but pain and difficulty. It's no wonder the characters end up just throwing their arms in the air, exclaiming, "Life is a f***ed up mess!" Though this segment is meant to be humorous, it also compels a viewer to genuinely contemplate the real, intense message being portrayed.

When Christians share their testimonies, we love hearing about how Jesus took a hopeless, selfish, despicable person and gave them Himself for all of eternity. However, we sometimes forget that the precursor to being saved is having something to be saved from. It is in our own inability to find true joy—and the ensuing depravity that comes from looking for it in all the wrong places—that we find a need for something better than what the world has to offer. In

this way, the characters of *Big Mouth* actually achieve the first step of recognizing their need for Jesus: realizing that the world does not offer true hope or joy. As Christians, we have the opportunity to speak into the depravity people experience and give them hope. The show's ability to be honest about the hopelessness of our existence apart from Christ is the most redeeming aspect and serves to illuminate the depravity from which Jesus offers to save us.

The episode ends powerfully (and may or may not be tear-inducing...): As Jessi sits on a curb outside of the synagogue, she is in severe pain from her parents' marital strife. Jay sits next to her and shares about how his dad cheats on his mom all the time, even making him wait in the car while he does it. The next scene goes to Nick, being kissed goodnight by his mom, and then Nick's parents blowing a kiss to the camera that Jay hid in their house and telling Jay goodnight. It then goes to a clip of Jessi and her dad hugging, showing the pain caused by the mom's misdeeds. It then cuts to Missy and Andrew, in their separate houses, both crying over the pain of their failed relationship. It closes with Amason's remake of the song "[I Want to Know What Love Is](#)":

I want to know what love is, I want you to show me.

I want to feel what love is, I want you to show me.

These kids, through all their difficulties and depravity, ultimately want love. They want to be shown what love is, but since they haven't seen it in their lives, they don't really know what it is nor where to find it. Yet in their pursuit of love, they look for it in all the wrong places and end up destroying themselves. [Jesus demonstrated His love when He laid down His life for us](#), and in pursuing a relationship with the ultimate Source of love, we discover what love really means, which then permeates to all of our relationships.

— What can I learn from it?

Besides the things mentioned above, we don't have to watch the show to realize that there is a major need for a safe place in which teens can ask awkward questions, admit their struggles, and have open, honest discussions about everything, including family and relationships, but especially about puberty. The show's mere existence proves that. But if teens don't receive guidance and wisdom from us, then they will go elsewhere (potentially to a show like *Big Mouth*) and receive harmful advice or partial truths.

The best way to do this is by bringing up the conversations ourselves. We've heard countless stories of teens who want to talk to their parents, but are too afraid or embarrassed to bring it up themselves.

The second thing to remember is to practice your "not shocked" face. No matter what your children bring up, showing shock, disgust, anger, frustration, or disappointment can really cause harm. So even if you are shocked, react calmly and simply, thanking them for sharing with you and asking for time to think and pray about it.

Once you've had time to pray and calm down, if you aren't sure what to do next, please ask people you trust for help. As we often remind ourselves at Axis, we need to care more about our children's hearts than what others think of us. And, if the situation allows, do some research with your children, especially if it's something you don't fully understand. Going through the process together can really create unity and togetherness, reminding your kids that you're on their team. That's a win all around!

Final Thoughts

As we saw from the families on *Big Mouth*, secrecy, silence, and the pursuit of selfish desires only serve to drive families apart. We need to do our best to create homes that are safe havens and places for honesty, openness, confession, and repentance. No matter what you've done in the past or how old your kids are, it's never too late to begin cultivating these habits and setting this example.

Ultimately, we can't tell the characters of *Big Mouth* about God's love because, well, they don't exist. However, they aren't really all that fictional. Not only are they based on the true stories of the show's creators, but they are representative of millions of kids' struggles through life. When we find depravity, we can merely be disgusted by it, but if we are to be like Christ, we need to have an approach of love and restoration toward people in these situations. God is disgusted by our sin, but still chose to approach it head on in order to conquer it. We are disgusted by this show—and the depravity of life in general—as most people are, but our response should not be to run from it, but to approach it head on with love and compassion.

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