

# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Made in His Image*

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created “male and female in God’s image” and that God saw this as “very good.” In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else



as persons created and loved by God.

Parents are essential in assisting children to recognize God’s love by helping them to understand that

each of us lives and moves in a Circle of Grace. You can imagine your own Circle of

Grace by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

*God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love.*

God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help children understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

## Growing in Virtue

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and His Church (CCC 1814). But a child cannot believe in a Jesus Christ whom they do not know. Kindergarten is a good time to introduce your child to Jesus through Bible stories, as well as family stories about the role of Jesus in our lives. While the biblical stories will help them learn salvation history, the story of their families faith will help them connect these events to their own lives.



Charity is the virtue of love and self-sacrifice. While most people have a natural inclination to want to spoil their children, this can often have the effect of destroying charity in your little one. Teaching children to make small sacrifices, giving a used toy to charity or sharing with a sibling, can help them begin to develop the skills that they will need to be able to make larger sacrifices when they are older. In this way they can learn the joy that only love can bring.

### Culture Alert...

“81% of the time children ages 2-7 spend watching TV is spent alone and unsupervised”

[www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org)

## Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more"). Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- Keep your answers short and simple.

### Example: Where do Babies Come From?

*Know the context of the question, i.e.: Did they see something on TV, or is a relative pregnant? This information will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to your child.*

#### Possible Response:

- "Babies are gifts from God."
- "Babies grow in a special place in a mommy's tummy."



## Practical Suggestions



- Be aware of how you express your own masculinity or femininity and how it may be interpreted by your child.

- Openly express gratitude to God for giving you such a special girl or boy
- Resist the temptation to allow the child to partake in more mature activities/ expressions because "it's cute" especially when it relates to sexuality; i.e. *Allowing your daughter to wear lip gloss or pop star clothing to school or allowing your son to watch action movies or listen to music that is too mature.*

- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situations that enter in their Circle of Grace.

*Children many times mirror their parents' behavior, good and bad. They do this because they trust their parents as all-knowing and look to them for guidance.*

## Parent Resources

- *Simple Truths with Mary Flo Ridley* Parent Resource, DVD, and study guide: A step-by-step resource for the process of establishing healthy guidelines in the home and answering tough questions young children have about

sex. <http://www.justsayyes.org/resources/display.php?cat=3>

- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

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## Church Teaching *Male and Female*



Why did God make us different? This is perhaps one of the great unanswered questions of all time. Often such questions are brushed aside with the phrase, "It's a mystery." While the Church teaches that the differences between men and women *are* a great mystery, it also helps us to understand that mystery in an ever increasing way. The Scriptures tell us, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). A part of what it is to be made in the image of God means to be made to live in a relationship with others (CCC 2331). The Catechism of the Catholic Church

(CCC 370) explains that men and women each reflect, in a unique and limited way, something of the nature of God. This reflection of the nature of God makes them equal in dignity even though they remain different in kind (CCC 2335). But these differences are not meant to divide us. They are in-

*A part of what it is to be made in the image of God means to be made to live in a relationship with others (CCC 2331).*

stead given to us as a gift from God so that we can grow in communion, so that we will, quite naturally, be drawn to others. Males and females complement each other, bringing different parts to their shared humanity (CCC 371).

## Growing in Virtue

Prudence is known as wisdom. It is also known as the prince of virtues because it governs each of the others. Aid your child in developing the ability to examine situations and help them to properly pay attention to the world around them. This may be more difficult for some children than for others.

### Culture Alert...

Number of minutes per week that parents spend in meaningful conversation with their children: 38.5

[www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org)



Justice is the virtue of right relationship. This is a skill that takes work for most children and requires a sense of proper em-

pathy for those they encounter. This skill can be developed by helping out around the house, through play with peers, or through the care of a pet.



# Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more"). Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- Keep your answers short and simple.

## Example: Why do boys have a penis ?

*Know the context of the question, i.e.: Did they hear something on TV, or are they just curious? This information will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to your child.*

### Possible Responses :

- "God gave boys a penis to show they are uniquely different from girls."
- "God created a boy's penis to help him go to the bathroom."
- "Later in life, when he is married, it will help him make babies with his wife."



# Practical Suggestions



Children have limited life experience, short attention spans and the tendency to store most information in their short-term memory. Therefore, it is quite

common for a child to misunderstand or forget what you've said.

- Ask your child to repeat back whatever you've communicated.
- Clarify any misunderstandings.
- Praise your child for using good listening skills. Notice and praise what your child did well while listening to you (i.e. "Awesome job looking at me while I was speaking! When you look at me I can tell you are listening.")
- Thank your child for coming to you to ask their question. Doing so reinforces the likelihood that your child

will come to you with future questions.

- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situations that enter in their Circle of Grace.

*Children many times mirror their parents' behavior, good and bad. They do this because they trust their parents as all-knowing and look to them for guidance.*

## Parent Resources

- *Simple Truths with Mary Flo Ridley* Parent Resource, DVD, and study guide: A step-by-step resource for the process of establishing healthy guidelines in the home and answering tough questions young children have about sex.
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## Church Teaching *Purity of Heart*

Have you ever wanted to see the face of God? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promises the pure of heart that they shall see the face of God. So what does this mean? It means quite literally that we shall see the face of God in Heaven but it also has implications for our lives here on earth. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2518-2527) explains that purity of heart is

*Purity of heart is the ability to see ourselves and others as the image of God and as temples of the Holy Spirit (CCC 2518).*

the ability to see ourselves and others as the image of God and as temples of the Holy Spirit. When Adam and Eve fell into sin (Gen 3), they immediately covered their bodies because they “realized that they were naked” and began to see themselves and each other as objects rather than as the beautiful creation of a loving God.

When Jesus came and died for us on the cross, He raised the dignity of the human body to a new place. The body was no longer just an object to be cast aside at death, but was now washed and made new, redeemed along with our souls and raised up on the last day. Through the practice of modesty, we can learn our own value as temples of the Holy Spirit and help others to see us as the image of God. As we become more practiced in patience, decency and discretion, we can grow to see the face of God in everyone that we meet (CCC 2533).



## Growing in Virtue

Prudence is known as the virtue of wisdom. It is also known as the prince of virtues because it governs each of the others. Aid your child in developing the ability to examine situations and properly pay attention to the world around them. As this virtue is developed, they may become more aware of how others react to them and the way that they speak, dress, and behave. Help them learn to seek good attention rather than bad attention in this regard.

Justice is the virtue of right relationship. The Church teaches that by the age of seven most children have developed, at least to a limited degree, a sense of right and wrong and the ability to practice

right reason. At this point your child should be able to have simple conversations about hypothetical situations. Asking them questions about what they should do in a given situation, gives them the practice that they need so that they can act correctly when a real situation arises.

### Culture Alert...

High heels are sexualizing children. Gregor McCoshim, a podiatrist, warned that young children should not wear heels. "The fact children can wear these is worrying. Any heel above 2cm increases the risk of twisting an ankle. Wearing them can cause strains in the back which is a potential problem for their growth and development."

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- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- Keep your answer short and simple.

### Example: What is sex?

Know the context of the question ( see above guidelines) i.e.: did they hear something on TV, see something on the computer or are they just curious? Be aware that today's culture does not label many sexual behaviors as "sex." Remember the above key questions. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

### Possible responses:

- "The word can mean different things. It can mean your gender-male or female."
- "It is any sexualized behavior with another person (engaging in intimate contact with another's private body parts). It can also mean sexual intercourse."
- "As Catholics we believe that sexual behaviors and intercourse are a very special activity that is reserved for married couples only."
- "It is one way a married couple can show how much they love each other."
- "It is how a married couple makes a baby."

## Practical Suggestions



This is a good age to reinforce the virtue of modesty and the concept of privacy. At this age children may become easily

embarrassed by nudity - yours or theirs. You can use the Circle of Grace concepts to assist you in teaching a respect for privacy and to teach modesty. You can reinforce these concepts by:

- Making sure the bathroom door is closed when in use.
- Dressing and undressing should be done alone, behind a closed door.
- When discussing sexuality with your child, remind them to refrain from sharing this infor-

mation with other children or siblings.

- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situations that enter in their Circle of Grace

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## Church Teaching *Preparing for Puberty*

A large part of our total human development is our response to our own sexual identity. This identity affects all aspects of our lives, physical, psychological, spiritual, and social. It is necessary for us to acknowledge who we are, male or female, as such differences help to bring balance and harmony to our own lives as well as to society and to the family (CCC 2333). Acknowledgement of these differences also helps us learn to respect appropriate boundaries in our relationships with others.

The onset of puberty can be a time of confusion about our identity. At this stage, the development of healthy friendships and an understanding of appropriate boundaries can lead to



the proper "integration of sexuality within the person" (CCC 2337). It is especially important at this time that children learn to first develop strong healthy relationships with members of the same gender, first and foremost the parent of that same gender. Where this person is absent, a relative, older sibling, or even a strong mentor can help fill that role.

As we grow and develop physically, we must also try to keep up in other areas of our development, particularly in our spiritual lives. As our sexuality is not meant to be expressed strictly in a physical way, it is important that we develop a proper sense of the virtue of chastity (CCC 2349). If we never develop the ability to express ourselves other than in a physical way, it can lead to an inability to form close bonds of friendship, a lack of self-control, and a loss of personal freedom (CCC 2339, 2347).

*Puberty may begin as early as 8 or 9 but typically begins between the ages of 10 and 14.*

## Growing in Virtue

Prudence is known as the virtue of wisdom. It is also known as the prince of virtues because it governs each of the others. Aid your child in developing the ability to be self-aware and to pay attention to the way that others react to attitudes and behaviors. Children at this age should begin to develop a sense of their own hygiene and appropriate cleanliness. They also may become embarrassed more easily. Help them to develop a sense of what they can control and what they cannot.

Justice is the virtue of right relationship. At this point you may wish to help your child understand that they also have certain responsibilities to themselves. The Church teaches us that God gives us our bodies as gifts and that we need to show proper respect for that gift through care for His creation. Be certain to help your child see that this is not just a burden but it can be a joy. Proper exercise can be maintained though play and sport, bath time can be relaxing after a long day, and practice of proper nutrition can mean fun in the kitchen or a family fishing trip.

### Culture Alert...

We have ample evidence to conclude that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development," said Dr Eileen Zurbriggen, APA Task Force.

"The consequences of the sexualization of girls in media today are very real and are likely to be a negative influence on girls' healthy development," she said.

They gave examples of images from advertising. One featured a well-known female pop star, Christina Aguilera, advertising a trainer. She was dressed in a school uniform with an unbuttoned shirt and was licking a lollipop.



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## Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

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- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

**Example: "What is puberty?" or "What is happening to my body?" or "Why does my sister look different?"**

*Know the context of the question i.e.: Are they noticing changes in themselves or their peers? Did they hear something on TV or are they just curious? The information your child provides will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.*

### Possible Responses:

- "Mom and dad also went through these changes when we were young."
- "Puberty is a physical process that happens in your body usually between the ages of 10-14."
- "This is a natural process created by God so you may also become a parent in the future."
- "Your body will begin to look more like a grown-up."
- "These changes will make it possible for you to be able to make and have a child someday."

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## Practical Suggestions

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Start talking to your child about puberty before it occurs. Puberty occurs in most children sometime between ages 10-14 but, can occur as early as 8 or 9. Help your child prepare for the changes to come by providing him/her with age-appropriate information along the way.

- Remind your child often that their body is designed by God - a unique, one-of-a-kind gift from God. Therefore, we should treat our bodies with care and respect. Together make a list of ways we can care for and respect our bodies (i.e. healthy eating, exercise, getting enough sleep, bathing regularly, etc.)
- Remind your child that like their body, the process of puberty is also designed by God and a gift from God. It marks the beginning of their journey into Christian adulthood.
- When teaching the specifics of puberty, use visual aids like books, videos, pictures or charts that tactfully illustrate

the physical changes your child can expect.

- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situations that enter in their Circle of Grace.

*Children many times mirror their parents' behavior, good and bad. They do this because they trust their parents as all-knowing and look to them for guidance.*

### Parent Resources

- Tell Me Now DVD- 22 minutes, presents age-appropriate information about puberty and sex to 3rd to 5th graders in an entertaining and fast-paced format. Designed to be viewed with your child. Includes educational guide, DVD and activity booklet.  
<http://www.medinstitute.org/products/item124.cfm>
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## Church Teaching *Ability and Responsibility*

The Church teaches us that there is a necessary distinction between power and responsibility. At this age level, bullying becomes common among children who have not gained this understanding. Having a particular ability does not always mean that it can or should be used in all times and places. As our children grow and develop, their bodies develop fascinating new abilities. They become, stronger, faster, and more attractive. With these new powers comes the responsibility to use them in accord with God's plan, being

*The use of power is not meant to be "arbitrary or destructive" but rather is meant for a specific purpose (CCC 373).*

good stewards of what we have been given. The use of these powers is not meant to be "arbitrary or destructive" but rather is meant for a specific pur-



pose (CCC 373). One with strength is meant to use it to protect the weak, but abuse of that power may lead to bullying. With regard to our sexuality, we are not called to use these powers to cause harm and destruction but rather to help us in forming close bonds of friendship and in the transmission of human life. The practice of chastity and self-mastery enable us to be persons of integrity, entering into new friendships that are not self-seeking but rather ones that are a genuine gift of self (CCC 2337-42).

## Growing in Virtue

Justice is the virtue of right relationship, as your child's body begins to develop, it is good to begin to have the conversation about the difference between responsibility and power, between what I should do and what I can do. This becomes particularly important as differences between children become more noticeable as some mature faster than others. Make certain that your child is aware of bullying and other anti-social behaviors at school, and help them to feel comfortable in speaking with you about them.

Temperance is the virtue of balance and self-control. As your child begins to head into puberty, they may be prone to swinging emotions and excessive behaviors. As

they enter this stage of life, it is important to help them learn balance in what they eat, the activities that they participate in, and with whom they as-

sociate. Help your child learn to turn off the TV or video games and to make time for a variety of activities. Helping them to develop a personal schedule will keep them from the feeling of being overwhelmed by school, burnt out by sports, or overly isolated by spending too much time alone reading or playing video games.



### Culture Alert...

Science Daily on [sciencedaily.com](http://sciencedaily.com) reports "Popular TV shows teach children fame is most important value, psychologists report; being kind to others fell dramatically in importance over 10 years."

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- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...")
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.



## Examples: What is a period? or What is a tampon /feminine pad?

*Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Are they noticing changes in themselves or their peers? Did they hear something on TV or are they just curious? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.*

### Possible Responses:

- "A period, also called a menstrual cycle, is the process by which a female becomes physically capable of having a baby."
- "A girl will get her first period (menstrual cycle) sometime during puberty and will continue having menstrual cycles for the next 30 - 40 years."
- "Each menstrual cycle occurs over a period of about 28 days and has three phases: a buildup of tissue and nutrients in the uterine lining, ovulation and finally menstruation (the shedding of the uterine tissue and lining)."
- "A period is a natural process and is nothing to be afraid or embarrassed about; all girls have a period when their bodies mature."

## Practical Suggestions

Though it may seem too early, now is the time to start talking about the future. Your child is making friends of their own and is spending more time away from home at sleepovers, scouts, sports, etc. Prepare your child for the challenges that come with this kind of independence by:

- Providing opportunities to practice being responsible (i.e. prepare an evening meal for the family, help shop for groceries, do their own laundry, etc.)
- Teach and practice how to make a good decision (i.e. the POP method –

Name the Problem, list your Options, Pick a solution).

- Continue to monitor their media. Preview movies, music and video games, comment on inappropriate TV shows or commercials. Children are affected by seeing and hearing sexually-explicit material. Continued vigilance on your part models what you expect from your children not only when they're home, but especially when they're away from you.
- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situa-

tions that enter in their Circle of Grace.

- Your child's Circle of Grace lesson is on the Internet. Review the lesson's parent take-home sheet with your child.
- Open dialogue and involvement with your child regarding internet/social networking usage is essential to their internet safety.

"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).

## Parent Resources

- **Tell Me Now** DVD- 22 minutes, presents age-appropriate information about puberty and sex to 3rd to 5th graders in an entertaining and fast-paced format. Designed to be viewed with your child. Includes educational guide, DVD and activity booklet.
- <http://www.medinstitute.org/products/item124.cfm>
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout
- The Archdiocesan Anti-Pornography teaching sheets for parents/ ministers are on our website under Safe Environment ([www.archomaha.org](http://www.archomaha.org)). This site also has a pamphlet, *7 ways to protect your family from pornography* that has important internet safety information.

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## Church Teaching *Power for Good*

As your child develops physically their sexuality gives them two great new powers. The Church calls these “fecundity” (or procreation) and “unity”. A physically mature human being has the power to aid God in the creation of new life (CCC 373) and the power to create a very intimate bond with another human being. The

*A physically mature human being has the power to aid God in the creation of new life (CCC 373).*

graces given in the Sacrament of Marriage strengthen these powers, sealing the bond between the couple, making it indissoluble and giving the couple special grace to help them welcome and raise their children (CCC 1640). The abuse of these powers can lead to a variety of disordered acts including lust, masturbation and fornication among others (CCC 2351-59). When

these powers are abused, they can be lost or diminished in a variety of ways, leading to an inability to form close bonds or even to be able to have children. While society and the media often encourage these acts or call them normal, these acts often lead to slavery to sin in the form of pornography addiction, poor lifestyle choices, and other destructive behavior. These acts lead to an understanding of others as objects rather than persons making the possibility of genuine intimacy almost impossible. This is why it is vital that children, even from a very young age, be given guidance in self-mastery and chastity in this regard (CCC 2346-50).



## Growing in Virtue

Temperance is the virtue of balance and self-control. As your child enters these years of dramatic change, help them to develop mastery over their own wants and desires. A good way to do this is to replace a bad behavior with a good one. Strong sexual desires can be controlled with exercise; overeating can be controlled by engaging in the practice of music or the arts; anger and frustration can be tempered by care for a pet or other animal. In each of these things, it is important to find balance. Without it, even a good habit, like exercise, can get out of control.

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. As your child gets older they

may find that it can become a bit scary to do the right thing. From time to time doing good may have consequences that cause pain. If I watch my weight, I will have to go hungry. If I defend a classmate, I may be ostracized. Be certain that you help your child by acknowledging your awareness of these things. Let them know that you are proud of them for taking the more difficult path. The more they grow in this virtue, the easier it will be to practice.

### Culture Alert...

1 in 7 children who use the Internet have been sexually solicited—2005 (Internet Filter Review)



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- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.



### Examples: What is a wet dream?

*Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e. Did they experience this themselves or hear their peers talking about it? Did they see something on TV or are they just curious? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.*

### Possible Responses:

- Boys' bodies go through changes as they mature preparing them for fatherhood.
- A wet dream, also known as a nocturnal emission, is a normal occurrence for boys.
- Sometimes, while sleeping and without realizing it, a boy may get an erection followed by a release of semen.
- Nocturnal emissions are the male body's natural way of releasing semen.

## Practical Suggestions

Your child is beginning to develop sexually; therefore, it is important to help your child understand the Church's teaching on masturbation at an early age.

➤ The act of masturbation is disordered and is a misuse of God's gift of sexuality.

➤ Having your child understand this now will help them when they experience temptation. This is especially important if they are exposed to pornography on the internet. (Viewing pornography while masturbating is one of the key elements in becoming addic-

tive to Internet pornography.)

➤ When your child asks a question, resist the urge to provide an immediate response.

➤ You can learn a lot about your child and about the real intent of their question by simply asking a few clarifying questions before answering. For example, if your child asks, "Is masturbation wrong?" respond with "Why do you ask?" followed by "Tell me what you think masturbation is." Then really listen to their reply.

➤ Sometimes adults can get so caught up in the process of formu-

lating the best possible answer that we don't take the time to find out what it is that our child really wants or needs to know.

"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).

## Parent Resources

- Teresa Tomeo's (with Molly Miller & Monica Cops) *All Things* series for Catholic Tweens, Bezael Press, 2009
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

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## Church Teaching *Spirit and Flesh*



Because human beings are composite beings, spirit and body, there already exists a certain tension in us; a certain struggle of tendencies between "spirit" and "flesh" develops (CCC 2516). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the life of a junior high-age child. It is also a reality that every person will struggle with for the rest of their lives. It is the "daily experience of spiritual battle" (CCC 2516).

As your child begins the transition to adulthood, they will often be surprised by the overwhelming emotions, called passions, that will often move them to act one

way or another (CCC 1763). When properly directed, the passions can move a young man or woman toward amazing acts of courage and self-sacrifice, strong dedication to the faith, and even profound and genuine love (CCC 1765). When misdirected, the passions can lead to rash action, misguided sentiment, and abusive behavior (CCC 1768). It is at this particular time in life when your child will need to begin to learn discipline with regard to emotions and desires. By doing so, they develop emotions that point them toward the good thus bringing their heart in line with their soul, allowing the body to be redeemed with the spirit (CCC 1770).

*When misdirected, the passions can lead to rash action, misguided sentiment, and abusive behavior (CCC 1768).*

## Growing in Virtue

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. As your child gets older they may find that it can become a bit scary to do the right thing. From time to time doing good may have consequences that cause us pain. If I watch my weight, I will have to go hungry. If I defend a classmate, I may be ostracized. Be certain that you help your child by acknowledging your awareness of these things. Let them know that you are proud of them for taking the more difficult path. The more they grow in this virtue, the easier it will become.

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and his Church (CCC 1814). As your child begins to develop psychologically, they transition from a concrete understanding of the world to a more abstract understanding. Adolescence is a key time when children begin to question everything from household rules to religion. It is important at this stage to help your child develop the ideal of "faith seeking understanding." While our faith is a gift to us from God, we can nurture that faith by feeding it with reason and virtuous behavior. It is important at this stage that parents understand the distinction between questions about the faith in a genuine search to make faith stronger and intentional doubt of the faith which may make it weaker. Frequent and consistent practice of the faith is crucial as is the ear of a trusted and knowledgeable adult to field those questions.

### Culture Alert...

Chance that an American parent requires their child to do their homework before watching TV: 1 in 12.

[www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org)

# Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more.") Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Examples: Is sex a good or bad thing? or Why is sex bad? or What is the big deal about sex?

*Know the context of the question (see the above guidelines) i.e.: Is this something that their peers are talking about? Did they see something on TV or the computer? Remember that today's culture promotes that sex is no big deal. It promotes the false assumption that what you do with your body has no effect on your person: a disconnect of the person from their bodies. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.*

Possible Responses:

- "As Catholics, we believe that sexual intercourse is an awesome gift God gives exclusively to married couples as a way to express love for each other and to bring new life into the world."
- "Sometimes people misuse sexual intercourse by having sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse; or before marriage, it can cause some negative or life-altering consequences (i.e. broken relationship with God, unplanned pregnancy, sexually-transmitted disease, broken heart, bad reputation, guilt, etc.)"

## Practical Suggestions

Continue to build a good relationship with your child. The time and effort you put into spending time with and getting to know your child at every age and phase of his development will really pay off. Regularly spending time with and being present for your child means you'll more likely notice and be able to support your child through the many emotional and physical changes that happen during puberty. Daily activities that could be used as relationship builders include:

- Do a chore together (wash the car, fold the laundry).

- **Eat at least one meal together every day.**
- Use drivetime or bedtime to get in the habit of doing a daily check-in. Use the following conversation starters... How was your day? Tell me 2 good things that happened today. Tell me 2 tough things that happened today. How did you notice God's love today? Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Tell me about one thing you learned/discussed at school today.
- Your child's Circle of Grace lessons about their God-given

uniqueness and that all relationships are called to be sacred. They will have a chance to discuss safe and unsafe situations. You will receive a letter that will give you valuable information to discuss unsafe situations with your child.

"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).

## Parent Resources

- **Tell Me Now** — DVD — 22 minutes, presents age-appropriate information about puberty and sex to 3rd to 5th graders in an entertaining and fast-paced format. Designed to be viewed with your child. Includes educational guide, DVD and activity booklet.

<http://www.medinstitute.org/products/item124.cfm>

- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout



# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Social Sin*

Around this age your child may enter a stage of group thinking in terms of their moral development. You will likely often hear the excuse, “Everyone is doing it.” This is the time to remain strong in your convictions and help your child to understand that participation in sin is still sin. As your child begins to develop more on a social level, this might be a good time to discuss with your son or daughter that we have a moral responsibility, not just for our own sins, but also for the sins of others when we participate in them (CCC 1868). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives us



*The Catechism of the Catholic Church shows us a number of ways that we might participate in the sins of others.*

a number of ways that we might participate in the sins of others: “by participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so and by protecting evil-doers” (CCC 1868). Every time that we sin, it becomes easier to sin (CCC 1865). We call this the development of vice. Adolescents who develop a “follow the crowd” mentality, will be more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors when prodded by peers. Vice has a tendency to cloud one’s judgment and can cause one to begin to justify their actions in a variety of ways (CCC 1865). Vice can also cause a person to have misplaced values, to respond negatively without thinking, or to develop unhealthy relationships.

## Growing in Virtue

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. A great part of this particular virtue is perpetual vigilance. As your child transitions into junior high school, it is easy for them to become distracted by all of the changes going on in their life around them. At this stage of life they are often likely to make grave mistakes due to inadvertence, emotions or mood swings, general ignorance, or due to bad habits. It is important to point out to them where these mistakes are common so that they can grow in self-mastery and make appropriate choices. At the same time, it is also important to understand that appropriate correction is also necessary at this stage. If our response to failures is too weak at this point in our child’s life, we

may be setting them up for greater failures in the future.



Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and His Church (CCC 1814). As this virtue develops in your child, it is

important to make certain that they not only believe, but that they also act on that belief. They should be prepared to profess their faith boldly in both words and actions. Doing this requires confidence and conviction. They will gain these traits by watching and learning from you and the other adults in their lives. Parents can greatly aid their children at this stage by giving them an apprenticeship in prayer, communal worship, and works of mercy. This requires both a personal relationship with Jesus and integration into the community of believers.

### Culture Alert...

*It is important to note, that even at this age, there are common phrases for casual sex which are: “FWB” (friends with benefits ) or “hooking up” with someone.*

# Guidelines for Answering Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more.") Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Example: When is it okay to kiss someone I like?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Do they currently "like" someone? Are they experiencing peer pressure to have a boy/girl friend? It is important to note, that even at this age, there are common phrases for casual sex which are: "FWB" (friends with benefits) or "hooking up" with someone. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

## Possible Responses

- "Instead of talking about when, let's first talk about what kissing means. In our family, kissing is a big deal, not something you do just for fun."
- "We believe that you only kiss someone you really love and care about."
- "It's also important to know that kissing can easily lead to other sexual activity."
- "Before you kiss someone you need to know and be able to talk about your sexual and physical boundaries so things don't get out of hand."
- "Remember, as Catholics we believe that sex is for married couples only. While you are single we expect you to abstain from sexual activity."

# Practical Suggestions

Though your child may look more like an adult and may want more freedom and independence, they still need you to be present and involved in their lives. Several studies show that teens really do want parents to set limits and talk to them about pressures like teen sex, alcohol and drug use

Unfortunately, most teens won't just say "Mom, Dad, I want your advice and help". In fact, many teens do just the opposite; they roll their eyes or walk away. However, now is not the time to retreat! Instead, take advantage of the time you do have together to listen and ask questions. Teens may be more likely to talk when:

- Driving: Turn off the radio; take off the headphones and talk. Sometimes car conversations, especially at night, can be

easier on your teen. You're looking at the road and not focused on them. Just the fact that they do not have to make eye contact, may help them feel more at ease and less on the hot seat.

- Doing a chore together: Sweeping the garage or doing dishes side by side may help facilitate conversation. Again, your teen may feel less scrutinized because your focus is more on the chore and less on your teen.
- Before bed: Your teen's biological clock is now set to stay up later (and rise later, too!) Their later bedtime may make it harder for you to stay awake but do! For your teen it may be a time they're more apt to talk.
- Taking time to talk to your child is crucial at this age as they are experiencing many changes and pressures.

The Circle of Grace 7<sup>th</sup> grade lesson is about respect of oneself and others as this is an age where many youth experience bullying.

*"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue"*  
(CCC 1469).

## Parent Resources

- For youth - Teresa Tomeo's (with Molly Miller & Monica Cops) *All Things* series for Catholic Tweens, Bezael Press, 2009
- For parents- *Good Discipline, Great Teens*, by Dr. Guarendi.
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Son and Spirit*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that the Holy Spirit is the “interior Master of life according to Christ, a gentle guest and friend who inspires, guides, corrects, and strengthens this life” (CCC 1697). As your child prepares to receive the “Sacrament of the Holy Spirit” this year, it is important to understand that, with this sacrament, God will begin to bestow special and often powerful gifts (charisms) upon your child in order to help them strengthen and lift up his Church (CCC 799-801). As parents, it is a part of our



role to help our children to discern the path to which God is calling them. A great part of this discernment process is the development of an

*God calls us all to this intimate union with Him (CCC 2014).*

ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments—“the holy mysteries”—and, in Him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with Him” (CCC 2014). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we have a natural longing for this relationship (CCC 27). By assisting our children in fostering this union with Christ, we can help them avoid attempting to fill this longing with less healthy relationships and help them avoid filling their desire for intimacy with pre-marital sexual encounters.

## Growing in Virtue

In the Catholic understanding, prudence is also known as practical wisdom. Wisdom of this type helps us discern when to act and to what degree, in some sense, judging our own strengths and those of the world around us. Prudence enables us to make right judgments. At this stage of development teens often fail to consider the consequences of actions. They can have a “live for today” mentality. You can help your child develop appropriate judgment by teaching them how to deal

with money and finances, by watching the news together and discussing how people get into bad situations, and by pointing out the unrealistic aspects of movies and television shows.

While prudence helps us to make appropriate judgments, fortitude is the actual courage needed to carry them out. Unfortunately, the only way to grow in fortitude is to do difficult things. This means learning self-discipline, working hard, and setting strong boundaries. Statistics also show that good examples and influences also help in this regard. For example, single parents who cohabit are more likely to have children who engage in pre-marital sex while parents who eat dinner with their children every night are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

### Culture Alert...

Hook-ups are sexual encounters ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse. They are often short-lived, nonexclusive, and emotionally shallow, with a purpose of one-time sexual activity (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). The terms “friends with benefits” and “casual sex” are also used as synonyms for hooking up (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).



# Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more."). Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...")
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Examples: When can I start dating? or When can I "go with" someone?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Do they currently "like" someone? Are they experiencing peer pressure to have a boy/girl friend? It is important to note, that even at this age, there are common phrases for casual sex which are: "FWB" (friends with benefits) or "hooking up" with someone. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

### Possible Responses:

- "Before we talk about when, let's talk about why. In our family, we believe that dating has several important purposes - to get to know others and yourself better (likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, values, personalities); to learn how to communicate and have fun with the opposite sex; and after high school, choosing your future spouse."
- "When you show us in everyday activities that you are responsible, trustworthy and respectful, we will know you are ready to date."
- "You may be allowed to go on a Group Date – several boys and girls going somewhere together when you are 14."
- "Car dating - one boy and one girl going out without a chaperone can begin when you are 16 because, at that age, you will be better able to handle yourself alone and you would be able to drive the car if something happened to your date."

# Practical Suggestions



Try to remain compassionate and empathetic as your child experiences the many emotional and physical changes associated with adolescence and

puberty. Remember what this time was like for you and treat your child as you would have liked to be treated. Some families celebrate or affirm the changes that occur during puberty while others quietly acknowledge changes and make

appropriate adaptations. Regardless of how your family deals with puberty, make sure to avoid the following:

- Minimizing your child's emotions. Hormonal changes during puberty may make it seem like your child is on an emotional roller coaster. Prepare your child for the possibility of emotional changes and acknowledge emotions when they happen. Help your child learn to separate feelings from behaviors, (i.e. "Even though you may be feeling crabby

or down, it's not okay to say hurtful things.")

- Teasing or making fun of your child. He is already hyper-sensitive and maybe even confused by the changes occurring in his body. Now is the time for compassion and sensitivity. Without it, he may physically or emotionally overreact to teasing or joking.

*"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).*

## Parent Resources

- *There are No Simple Rules for Dating my Daughter: Avoiding the Pitfalls and Pratfalls of Teen Romance*, by Kathleen M. McGee and Laura Buddenberg, Boys Town Press, 2005
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Redemption*

There are a number of common misconceptions about sin and redemption that often creep into our understanding of the relationship between God and human beings. Frequently, Christians have an idea that getting into heaven is about being “basically a good person.” This is often described using the image of a set of scales with our good deeds on one side and our bad on the other. As long as our good outweighs the bad, we



get our foot in the door and we are safe. Unfortunately, it's not that easy (CCC 1989-1994). Freshmen will tend to learn quickly that this is also not the

way that human relationships work (CCC 1913). One cannot be mostly good to their friends and still occasionally, lie, cheat, or steal. When a relationship becomes broken it needs to heal. This begins with saying we are sorry, making restitution, and making a firm resolution not to continue the offense (CCC 1450-1460).

*God reaches out to us through Jesus Christ in the Sacraments.*

When we commit sin we are not offending a human but God (CCC 1440). This means that consequences are eternal. While we do not have the power to heal that relationship on our own, God reaches out to us through Jesus Christ in the sacraments, particularly Reconciliation, and allows us to hear with our own ears that we are forgiven (CCC 1441-1442).

## Growing in Virtue

Charity is also the virtue known often in Scripture as love. As children move into high school, they and perhaps some of their friends may begin dating. It may be prudent at this point to reiterate that the love that the world teaches and the love that the Church teaches are often two very different things. St. Paul reminds us of this virtue often at weddings (1Cor 13) when we read his description of true love as opposed to infatuation. He tells us that love requires the sacrifice of our own desires for the

good of the other while infatuation seeks only to possess the other for the sake of personal gratification.

In these same relationships temperance is also a necessary virtue. Temperance helps us to find balance and to place limits, not being prudish but not going the way of the playboy either. Temperance requires an understanding that all things have their appropriate place and time. It requires an understanding that God gave us good things to enjoy, but that He wants us to share that joy with others as well. Thus we should eat but not overeat, sleep but not become lazy, drink but not become drunk, and temper our sexual desires with the fire of a loving marriage.

### Culture Alert...

76% of victims in internet-initiated sexual exploitation cases were 13–15 years old and 75% were girls. Most cases progressed to sexual encounters. (Journal of Adolescent Health—11/04)

# Guidelines for Answering Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more.") Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married" or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Example: What's wrong with pornography?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Did they hear peers talking about it? Did they see something on TV or the computer?. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them. **Remember that 80% of 15-17 year olds have had multiple hard-core pornography exposures and the largest consumer group of Internet pornography is 12-17 year-olds.**

### Possible responses:

- "Pornography diminishes the God-given value and dignity of each person."
- "It devalues God's purpose for sexual attraction and sexual intercourse."
- "Pornography causes the viewer to objectify the body rather than the person and depicts women as just objects to be used for sex."
- "Viewing pornography can be very addictive, especially for boys and men. "
- "Males who regularly view pornography often find themselves needing to view more and more as well as harder core porn to get the same pleasure."
- "Viewing pornography can also lead to unrealistic expectations about sex and can make it difficult to form relationships in the real world."

# Practical Suggestions



Today's technology makes it easy for kids to stumble across or find pornography. Here are a few steps you can take to protect your kids from the dangers of pornography:

- Monitor your teen's electronic devices. Install monitoring or filtering software on computers, check the history to see which websites your kids are visiting, talk to your cell phone provider about limiting or monitoring the amount of media your child can access via their phone.
- Computers, TV's, DVD players and gaming systems should not be allowed in your teen's bedroom. Remember bedrooms are primarily for sleeping! Keep all electronic media in a very public room of your house (family room, den, rec

room), a room you frequently visit unannounced.

- Find opportunities to discuss ways media attempts to deceive one into thinking that sex is a commodity to be purchased and promotes what you do to and with your body has no effect on you as a person: a disconnect.

"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).

## Parent Resources

- *If You Really Loved Me: 100 Questions on Dating, Relationships and Sexual Purity*, by Jason Evert, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009
- *Pure Love*, 35 pg. booklet by Jason Evert, Catholic Answers, 2003
- Archdiocese website, [www.archomaha.org](http://www.archomaha.org), click safe environment then anti-pornography
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality handout
- *Theology of the Body for Teens: High School Edition*, Ascension Press, 2006



# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *True Liberty*

The word “sophomore” means “wise fool.” The use of this term in academia is meant to remind us that having knowledge and having the discretion to know when and how to use it are two different things. Often students at this age have left the naivety of their freshmen year behind, but they still have a lot to learn. In some cases they may have learned to act in a generally virtuous manner or developed the ability to embrace certain virtues but likely have not mastered any of them. This is often due to the fact that, while they have learned the concepts, they have little experience with being truly challenged (CCC 1803-4).

As your child gains the privilege to drive, perhaps holds down a job, or begins to participate in adult level activities and organizations, they may begin to notice that it was easier to do the right thing when mom and dad were watching. This is a good time to dis-

cuss with your child the difference between true freedom, the ability to do what is right, the ability to do as I want

*The virtuous person is always free to do what is right.*

without regard for the good (CCC 1731, 1740). The virtuous person is always free to do what is right, but the person with bad habits is always a slave to their emotions, whims, and appetites (CCC 1733, 2339). Any person can know how to drive. A license shows that I have trained and shown myself responsible and controlled enough to be trusted. In a similar way, anyone can abuse their sexual powers in a variety of ways; only a chaste person “governs their passions and finds peace” (CCC 2339).

### Growing in Virtue

Charity is also the virtue known often in Scripture as love. Love as it is understood in the Church is not just a strong emotional feeling but rather a virtue that requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. St. Paul reminds us of this virtue often at weddings (1Cor. 13) when we read his description of true love as opposed to infatuation. Genuine love is not blind. It

knows the costs and chooses to accept them, even when it means death on a cross.



#### Culture Alert...

- Sexual Lyrics in popular songs linked to early sexual experiences. [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)
- A study reported in Pediatrics magazine found that sexually active boys aged 12 -16 are four times more likely to smoke and six times more likely to use alcohol than are those who describe themselves as virgins. Among girls of the same age, those who are sexually active are seven times more likely to smoke and 10 times more likely to use marijuana than are those who are virgins. [www.TroubledTeens.com](http://www.TroubledTeens.com)

The theological virtue of hope is directed at our salvation. It is a balance between despair at our own wretchedness and presuming that God will give us the gift of His glory. The sins against this virtue are common at this age where some teens will act sinfully, presuming that God will forgive them later, while others fall into deep despair and insecurity not trusting in the good things that God wants to give them. The former will justify any action but the latter may fall prey to flattery and bribery. Knowing your child well at this stage will help you to help them to find the balance that is the hope God intended.

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## Guidelines for Answering Questions

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- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. “Why do you ask?”, or “Tell me more.”) Your child’s response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family’s Catholic values (i.e. “When you are grown and married...” or “As Catholics, we believe...”)
- If you don’t know the answer, say “That’s a great question but I’m not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today.” Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

### Example: Why should I stay a virgin?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Did they read something or hear peers talking about it? Are they experiencing some peer pressure? Did they see something on TV or the computer? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

### Possible responses:

- “Even though it may seem like a hardship right now, remaining a virgin is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and your future spouse.”
- “And it can actually be freedom from stress. Most teens say high school is pretty tough, lots of homework and other pressures to deal with. By remaining chaste and abstinent you can make your life a little easier by not having to worry about the many risks that come from engaging in sexual behavior before marriage.”
- Some of the risks of pre-marital sexual behavior are:
  - Getting pregnant/ fathering a child as teen
  - Getting a bad reputation
  - Broken trust with your parents, family or friends
  - Damaging your relationship with God
  - Sexually transmitted diseases or infections
  - The emotional baggage that comes with hooking up and breaking up
  - Broken hearts
- Staying focused: Prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments can give you the strength you need to remain chaste.

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## Practical Suggestions

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Most parents want their children to save sex until marriage but are unsure how to talk about it. Some parents may feel hypocritical because they did not remain abstinent. Some just don’t know where to start. No matter what your hesitations may be, here are some ways you can encourage your teen to remain abstinent:

- If you are married, model faithfulness, if you are single model abstinence
- Create and regularly discuss a family dating policy that describes

your rules and expectations about dating

- Help your teen set and maintain specific sexual boundaries and limits
- Use examples from TV shows, movies or new stories to talk to your teen about the benefits of abstinence or the potential negative consequences of teen sex
- Discover your teen’s love language (e.g. *The Five Love Languages*) and be generous with your expressions of love and affection



*“Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue” (CCC 1469).*

### Parent Resources

- *If You Really Loved Me: 100 Questions on Dating, Relationships and Sexual Purity*, by Jason Evert, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009
- *Theology of the Body for Teens: High School Edition*, Ascension Press, 2006
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Cain and Abel*

In the Bible, the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) gives us an example of the difference between the children of the world and the children of God. Cain is the older and presumably stronger brother, but he is a man of weak faith who tries to hold onto the best things of this world while still grasping for heaven. He attempts to offer a sacrifice to God

from his harvest, but is only willing to give of the leftovers after he has taken the best parts for himself. He is the typical man of the world who desires things that are passing: fame, wealth, worldly power, and physical prowess. Once gained, the world teaches us that we ought to use these in order to dominate others and to meet our own personal goals. According to the world, even sexuality is for the sake of our own enjoyment; a mere plaything to be used at our discretion.

At the same time, Abel, the younger

brother, shows us that when we achieve great things, the truly strong person is the one who has the fortitude to offer it on the altar of sacrifice for the greater glory of God. The passage teaches us that the Children of God are people of virtue. The person with the gift of fame is called upon to use it to spread the Gospel, the one with wealth, to lift up the poor, the one with knowledge, to instruct the ignorant, the physically strong person

to protect the weak (CCC 2444). The passage also shows us that the only rewards that we can expect from the world are resentment and death. The Church teaching on this is clear: we cannot do these things alone, we are too weak. In order to be strong for others we must first be attached to Christ (CCC 1811). Then it is not we who triumph over the world but Him in us (Gal 2:20).

*Children of God are People of virtue.*

## Growing in Virtue

Students often describe their junior year as their most difficult. While prudence helps us to make appropriate judgments, fortitude is the actual courage needed to carry them out. Unfortunately, the only way to grow in fortitude is to do difficult things. This means learning self-discipline, working hard, and setting strong boundaries. Statistics also show that good examples and influences also help in this regard. Be certain that you encourage your teenage child to build up relationships with other teens that are good examples of virtuous behavior.

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and his Church (CCC1814). Yet, faith is more than just intellectual belief. It means acting on that

belief. Parents can greatly aid their children at this stage by giving them an adult apprenticeship in prayer, communal worship, and works of mercy. This requires both a personal relationship with Jesus and integration into the community of believers at your parish.



### Culture Alert...

- On average, music videos contain 93 sexual situations per hour, including an average of eleven "hard-core" scenes depicting behaviors such as intercourse and oral sex. [www.TroubledTeens.com](http://www.TroubledTeens.com)

# Guidelines for Answering Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. “Why do you ask?”, or “Tell me more.”) Your child’s response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family’s Catholic values (i.e. “When you are grown and married...” or “As Catholics, we believe...”).
- If you don’t know the answer, say “That’s a great question but I’m not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today.” Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Example: Why does the Catholic Church say contraception is wrong?

Know the context of the question i.e. “Did they read something or hear their peers talking about it?” “Are they experiencing some peer pressure?” “Did they see something on TV or the computer?” The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

### Possible Responses:

- “In order to best understand the Catholic Church’s teaching on contraception, let’s review what the Church teaches about sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is gift from God, designed by God and created for a purpose. God’s purpose for intercourse is two-fold; unitive – designed to bring husband and wife closer together physically, emotionally and spiritually; AND procreative – open to creating new life.”
- “By God’s design every act of sexual intercourse between husband and wife should be both unitive and procreative.”
- “Contraceptives come in many forms (pills, shots, condoms, etc.) but they all have one specific purpose- to prevent or stop conception, to prevent new life.”
- “When a couple uses contraception they go against God’s purpose for sexual intercourse by preventing the possibility of new life and by not fully accepting the other person as God created them.”
- “Using contraception is a refusal to accept the gift of sexual intercourse as God intends it, and such a refusal can bring with it the negative consequences of sin like guilt, fear, separation from God and loved ones, etc.”

# Practical Suggestions



- Your teen is likely driving now, spending less time at home and more time with friends. It is difficult to be present and involved in

your teen’s life if they are never home. One way to keep your teen and their friends close to home is to make your house *the* place to hang out.

- Stock up on your teen’s favorite foods; invest in a larger TV or the latest gaming system and the party’s on.
- It will take some sacrifice on your part: spending Friday or Saturday night at home to chaperone, but it will be well worth the effort.

- You’ll get to know your teen and their friends even better and you’ll be showing them in a very real and meaningful way that you are there for them.

*“Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue” (CCC 1469).*

## Parent Resources

- *Theology of His Body: Discovering the Strength and Mission of Masculinity and Theology of Her Body: Discovering the Beauty and Mystery of Femininity*, 2 books published as one, Ascension Press, 2009
- *Theology of the Body for Teens: High School Edition*, Ascension Press, 2006



# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Actions and Words*

As your child spends this next year preparing for the next stage of their God-given path in life, it might be reasonable to take some time with them in discernment of where that path will lead. For the time being, most will likely devote themselves to the single life but a few may already be preparing for a life of marriage, religious life, or even a vocation to the priesthood. Regardless

of the path that they will eventually choose, it is important to stress with your child that staying on the righteous path will make

the journey far easier than wandering in the wilderness of the world (CCC 1804). While the world tells them to “sow their oats,” the virtue of chastity keeps them safe now, and helps them to experience more fulfilling relationships later, avoiding a duplicitous lifestyle. While many people will try to justify premarital sex and cohabitation as “practice for marriage,” such choices actually help to practice a lifestyle that leads to infidelity and creates a habit of always leaving options open rather giving one’s self fully to another person (CCC 2390-2391). By avoiding a licentious lifestyle now, a person can actually be faithful

*“Before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, I knew you.”*  
(Jer 1:5)

to a spouse they have yet to meet.

In a similar way, we can also love a child that we have yet to conceive. The power of our sexuality is not only the power to create bonds of unity but also the power to transmit life (CCC 1652). People in our culture often use contraception in some form or other until they are ready to have children and then begin the

practice again when they are finished. Such practices are in reality saying to one’s children and one’s partner, “I love you, but only for the pleasure that you

give.” These practices tell the other, not with words but with actions, that we only love them because they are convenient, because they came into our lives at the right time, and in the right place, in the right way (CCC 2370). Our culture tells us that when these things are not convenient, that we should divorce and find another spouse, that we should abort our children and replace them later when it’s more convenient. The role of a Christian is to teach the culture, “for better or worse, sickness and health, richer and poorer” (CCC 1642) and “Before you were conceived in your mother’s womb, I knew you.” (Jer 1:5)

## Growing in Virtue

Charity is the virtue known often in Scripture as love. Love as it is understood in the Church is not just a strong emotional feeling but rather a virtue that requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. St. Paul reminds us of this virtue often at weddings (1Cor 13) when we read his description of true love as opposed to infatuation. Genuine love is not blind, it knows the costs and chooses to accept them, even when it means death on a cross.

The theological virtue of hope is directed at our salvation. It is a balance between despair at our own wretchedness and presuming that God will give us the gift of His glory. The sins



against this virtue are common at this age where some teens will act sinfully, presuming that God will forgive them later; while others fall into deep despair and insecurity not trusting in the good things that God wants to give them. The former will justify any action, but the later may fall prey to flattery and bribery. Knowing your child well at this stage will help you to help them to find the balance that is the hope God intended.

### Culture Alert...

In general, individuals who engage in premarital sexual activity are 50 percent more likely to divorce later in life than those who do not. Divorce, in turn, leads to sharp reductions in adult happiness and child well-being.

[www.TroubledTeens.com](http://www.TroubledTeens.com)

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## Guidelines for Answering Questions

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- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more.") Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

**Example: I want to save sex for marriage but how can I when all my friends are having sex ?**

*Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Are they experiencing some peer pressure? Did they see something on TV or the computer? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.*

### Possible Responses:

- "We're proud of you for making this decision and we know, if you ask, God will give you the strength to stick with it."
- "It may be true that some of your friends are having sex, but some may be exaggerating. National surveys report that 51% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders are not having sex."
- "Regardless, you are making a positive choice for chastity and abstinence in a world that says sex outside of marriage is okay."
- "To keep this commitment you'll need friends who at least support you and at best share the same commitment."
- "You'll also need to be particular about whom you date. It will be easier to keep your commitment if you date others who also choose chastity and abstinence."
- "Remember, prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments will help you remain strong."

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## Practical Suggestions

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Even though your teen will be graduating from high school and may even be heading off to college soon, he/she still needs you.

- What your teen needs most now is to know that you are listening—that you hear, understand and want to share in their concerns and fears and joys.
- Your teen needs you to be a sounding board and a compass. Listen to their thoughts, concerns, hopes and dreams and continue to ground them by gently point-

ing them back to their faith and your family values.

- Continue to make time for each other and be ready for your teen to do more of the talking.

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## Parent Resources

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