Hey Dad...what's sex?

The Talk

Healthy Sexuality Education — Basic Goals and Guidance from Focus on the Family

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Why do we wait 'til **MARRIAGE??** to ... y'know ...

My body's gonna **DO WHAT??**

How do I deal with **BULLIES?**

When can I start **DATING?**

Are my **FRIENDS GOOD** for me?

What does **"GENDER"** mean?

Is it normal to ... uh ... **SWEAT MORE?**

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For a more thorough look at the topics in this download, purchase a copy of *The Focus on the Family Guide To Talking with Your Kids About Sex: Honest Answers at Every Age*.

by The Physicians Resource Council

edited by J. Thomas Fitch & David Davis

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Dear Parents…

Welcome to using these overview sheets on sexual education.
Breathe deeply—it's okay—you can do this, and we hope this tool helps!

About the TIMING…

A quick word as you look this over and prepare to engage your children: The exact ages at which you offer concepts and information can vary based on a child's individual development and sibling lineup. Some need to move ahead a little sooner, while others need a slightly slower pace. The stages we offer are not hard-and-fast rules, yet they do provide age-appropriate suggestions.

When it comes to timing, bear in mind that a rather common error is for parents to withhold information too long or to procrastinate. Be aware of that trend; we believe you want to be the first to interact with your kids about these ideas—not other sources that may not hold your values or have your child's best interests at heart.

About our FORMAT…

For each age range, we've provided an overview of the goals you'll seek to accomplish as well as some different strategies and tips for accomplishing those goals.

Also, there are a few "Let's Talk More" guides for those special topics or events that require a little more specific planning or in-depth treatment.

With a quick-read format, we hope you'll feel ease of access to the points for this essential task of educating your child. Also note that this interactive download contains links to additional content and resources. By clicking on the green, underlined words while at your computer, you'll be directed to more in-depth materials on these important topics.

About PARENTS' COMMON ANXIETIES…

Before sending you off into the material, we'd be remiss not to mention how likely it is that sex-ed stirs anxiety or even fear for parents. Sometimes thinking about this topic means revisiting your personal wounds or the shortcomings in the sexual education you received. If so, you are not alone!

Should you need additional guidance or help in facing wounds or worries around sexual topics, we understand and warmly invite you to call us! We have a team of licensed counselors who can offer their caring support by phone through a confidential consultation—our Counseling Department line is 1-855-771-HELP (4357).

Don't let shame or fear keep you from reaching out or blockade you from the vital job of educating your child. Taking care of yourself may be the most empowering and helpful step in being available to calmly and fully educate your child.

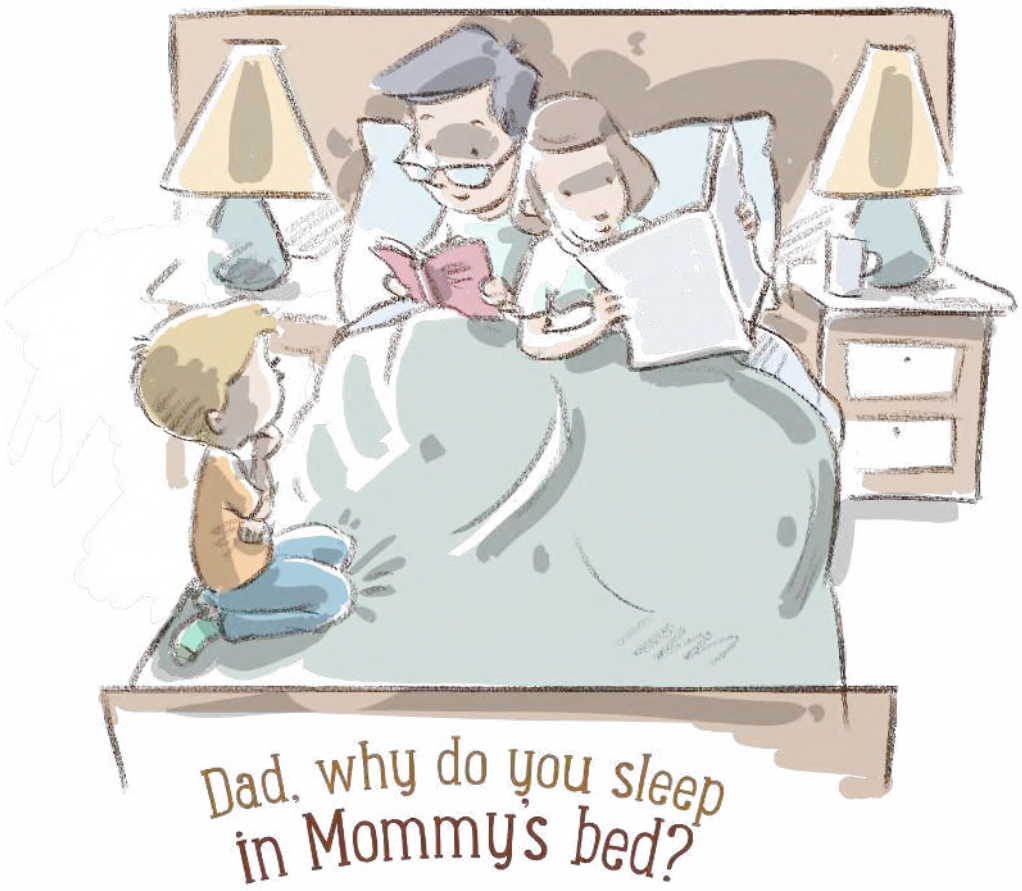
Finally, we want you to feel encouraged as you use these basic guidelines in your family! A child's sexual education begins the day he or she is born and continues through all life stages. We hope that parents will move from passivity to pursuit and from fear to fun at each amazing stage!

Sincerely,

Your Friends at Focus On The Family

Healthy Sexuality Education: Ages 0-3

A child's sexual education begins the day he or she is born and continues through all life stages…



Goals – What to accomplish from birth to 3 years of age:

- Work on establishing parent-child bonding and attachment. Create an atmosphere of emotional security in the home.
- Help the child begin to realize that he or she is either a boy or a girl. Find ways to make him or her feel positive and celebrated for being male or female.
- Begin to teach the proper references for their genitals: *penis, vagina and private area*.
- Protect the child from sexual abuse or distorting rumors and experiences.

Strategies & Tips

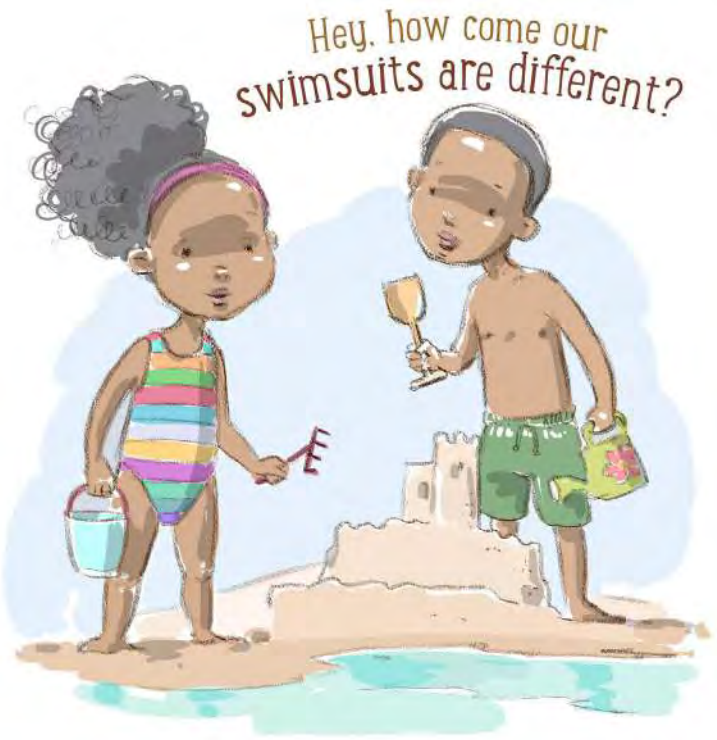
- Begin by caring for the child's physical needs: diapering, feeding, bathing and playing. Keep both mother and father actively involved even during infancy.
  - For more on this, see *Focus on the Family's Complete Guide to Baby & Child Care*
- Respond to child's cries in a timely, predictable manner.
- Provide ample touch and eye contact for emotional stimulation and brain development. Here are a few activities to facilitate that process:
  - Mom and dad both take turns playing face-to-face games like pat-a-cake.
  - Tell short, positive stories to the child about himself and about mommy and daddy's love for him,
  - Read books and pause between pages to look at the child. Talk positively about both male and female characters in the story. Guide the child's finger to touch each character as you speak.
- Give calm and affirming smiles and verbal cues to the growing child:
  - Use repeated motions (little touches on the nose/arms/shoulders) when talking or singing to the child.
  - Frequently repeat memorable songs or phrases (jingles that celebrate your child's name and that he or she is "Daddy's or Mommy's boy/girl."
- Allow the child to see and hear Dad being kind and appropriately affectionate toward Mom, and Mom doing the same in return.
- When one parent is unavailable—for example, in a single-parenting situation or during deployment or illness—make a conscious effort to have consistent male and female role models taking part in the child's life in a safe and predictable manner.
- When holding the child, hand him or her back and forth between parents while speaking positive words. Allow the child to see, hear and feel safety when held by both males and females. Here are some phrases you might say:
  - Mention simple affirmations like, "I love that you're a girl, like mommy," or "I'm so glad you are a boy like daddy."
  - Create an affirming nickname or phrase that only mom or dad uses with the child. This can be a special and fun "gift" between the two of them.
  - Affirm that the child, too, is male or female by highlighting small similarities between him or her and the same-sex parent—for example wearing the same colors or occasionally wearing the same T-shirt design.
  - Boys in particular approaching and beyond 18 months of age need to experience males (dad especially) as good, receptive and welcoming through one-on-one outings and play.

- Allow relating and play with the child in ways that may vary based on gender.
    - Be aware that Dad may handle or hold the child differently than Mom and vice versa. Allow appropriate differences.
    - Introduce some toys that are generally understood to be "boy-" or "girl-specific."
    - However, avoid shame or scolding for opposite gender role play; rather, simply redirect and affirm when necessary.

- When bathing the toddler, calmly, casually and routinely use phrases like:
    - "Your body is so good that we protect it and keep it safe."
- When washing the genital area:
    - "This is your private area. Private means that nobody else touches here. Only mommy and daddy are supposed to help you by washing here."
    - If the child is a boy, use the word "penis" during conversations about the "private area." If a girl, use the word "vagina."
    - Say, "This part of your body makes you a boy/girl. Do you know, I am glad you were made as a boy/girl? I am proud you are my son/daughter!"
        - Then add, "If any friend, family member or person wants to play touching games or see your private areas, you can say 'No' and walk away. Then tell Mommy and Daddy because we are here to help and protect you."
        - Occasionally practice the three actions with the child: "No. – Walk or run away. – Tell Mom and Dad." Ask the child to repeat after you so they can internalize this "rule" through gentle and occasional repetition, just as he or she might learn a song or the ABC's.
        - Assure the child that he or she is safe. Make it clear that safety is the whole point of knowing and practicing these steps. Say, "It's kind of like buckling up your seat belt in the car. It helps keep you safe and ready just in case something happens."

Healthy Sexuality Education: Ages 3-7

A child's sexual education begins the day he or she is born and continues through all life stages…



Goals – What to accomplish from 3-7 years of age:

- Refer to previous stage's goals and continue to follow these tips as well.
- Teach that their body is good (not shameful) and has a good purpose, to be used as designed.
- Along with teaching non-slang references to genitals, add terms specific to the birth process and basic body awareness: *Womb, umbilical cord, scrotum, testicles, ovaries, breasts.*
- Offer broad basics of human reproduction: *Growth of baby inside mother, sharing between a father and mother creates life, birth process/event.*
- Communicate that families are the intended place in which children are born, nurtured, loved and taught by their mom and dad; when there are exceptions to this, show that people can adjust to challenges with courage and help.
- Further develop self-protection from abuse or distorting experiences; convey that parents are children's best teachers on these topics, not peers or others.

Strategies & Tips

- Find routine moments to make body-affirming statements. For example, as cleaning a scrape on a boy's leg, smile and say, "As you grow into a man you will grow more hair on your legs," or to a girl, "Your leg is soft like a lady's."

- Use a valuable item as an illustration of worth: "Your body is so good we protect it…it's kind of like my jewelry here. This ring is a special symbol to me and is worth a lot of money, too, so I am careful with it and keep it very safe. It's the same with our bodies and our private areas—they are so special and meaningful that we make sure they are safely protected and healthy in how we use them.

- Find opportunities to positively remark about a mother who is expecting or nursing a baby. Cue off this to mention how all our boy and girl body parts have a good and beautifully created purpose. Simply listen and follow any child-directed curiosity in response. Clarify what they are truly asking before responding.

- Amid routines, intentionally make eye contact and say, "I am so glad you are my son/daughter and in our family! Parents are here to protect and teach their kids, and I'm excited to help you learn as you grow."

- Notice body developments; celebrate with, "This is great! Ya know, growing up means new things and lots of questions. Sometimes others have incorrect info … so you can always check things out with me and we'll find the right answers together." Clarify the actual nature of any questions before elaborately replying.

- If you or someone you know lives apart from mom/dad, or if someone is in an adoptive family, use this to speak positively about how people can work together to provide the mommy and daddy type support that a child is made to need.

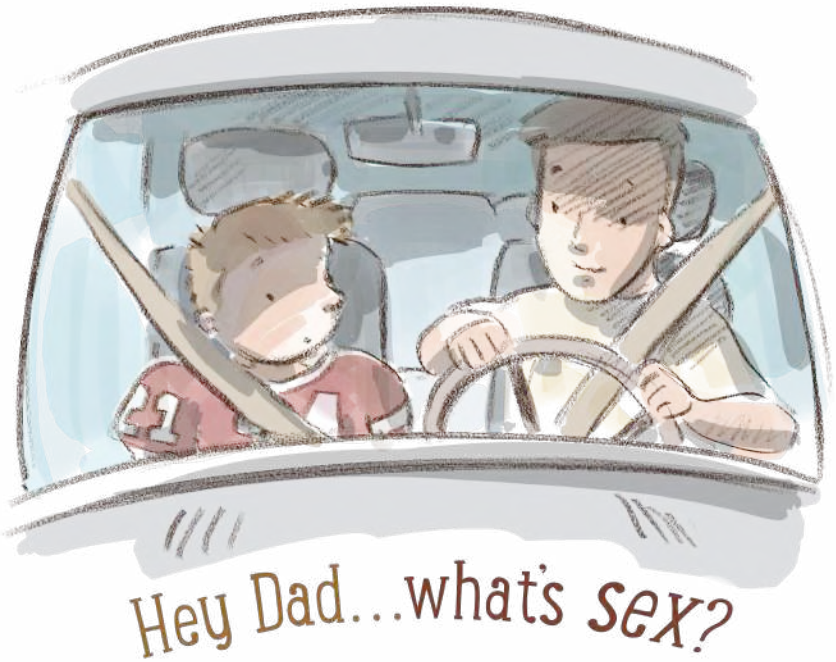
- As you explain how moms and dads live together and make a family, ask whose family they know that's similar or different. See where conversation goes; use this to talk about your values and what is ideal. At the same time, tell how faith or positive support can help people do well despite differing circumstances.

- Role-play plausible scenarios where playmates or adults try to cross physical boundaries ("playing doctor" or offering bribes). Rehearse the response of saying "no" and then getting away and telling parents or a trusted adult.

- Maintain content safety filters for all home technology with Internet access.

Healthy Sexuality Education: Ages 7-12

A child's sexual education begins the day he or she is born and continues through all life stages…



Goals – What to accomplish from 7-12 years of age:

- Prepare the child ahead of time for the physical changes of puberty in themselves and their male and female peers.
- Along with non-slang terms for genitals and the birth process, add words specific to fertilization and conception: *Egg, semen, sperm, period/menstruation.*
- Inform, broadly speaking, on intercourse (sex) and its reserved place in marriage.
- Gradually add direction and awareness regarding concepts of pornography, masturbation, premarital sex, homosexuality and sexually transmitted infections.
- Attempt to be the first source of their learning on difficult topics they will begin hearing of—especially those contrary to your values or respect of others (sexual profanity; misuse or abuse with words like fat, sissy, gay, lesbian, queer).
- R einforce privacy boundaries and respect for self/others, including how we use social media, cell phones, Internet filtering and various technology.
- Determine if the child's maturity, exposure or development displays readiness for a special milestone event or retreat to talk more in-depth. Focus on the Family's Launch into the Teen Years is a perfect resource for this time.

Ideas & Tips –

- Ask casual questions about male and female friends they especially like. Then primarily and simply listen to earn trust. Avoid shaming or dismissal.

- Tell some of your own positive or challenging memories of being their age—of new things with peers or body concerns. Mention how feelings come and go and don't "make us who we are." Welcome them to talk without embarrassment.

- Talk about how good it is for a man and woman to marry and love only each other—and how sharing openness, special kisses and closeness with the body is part of spouses' exclusive love, bonding and potential for making children…

- …and, that's why fully sharing our bodies is intended only for one person in life with whom we have 100% commitment in marriage, between a man and woman.

- Use references to marriage between "man and woman" to state that some people don't follow that plan… and that for complicated reasons some people may want to be with someone of their own sex. Ask, "Have you ever heard of something like this…called homosexuality?"

- Then calmly set the stage for unfolding talks: "…when you do, let's keep talking about it, because people on the TV and news have lots to say about it; it's sometimes controversial." Mention that there are important values you hope they will ask you more about—especially when they hear the terms gay or lesbian. "We are to never tease or insult people with these very sensitive words."

- "Valuable cars have alarms on them, right? That's to prevent thieves who steal, lie and misuse. Well, you are WAY more valuable than a car; what preventative alarms can you have when it comes to sexual messages or your body?"
    - Here's one: Sometimes people will use another person's body or looks in a selfish or mean way. Do you know of examples?
    - Here's another: Have you ever seen a commercial where someone's body image is used? This is often to sell something and it tempts people to look at another person for selfish pleasure. An extreme form of this is called "pornography." Have you heard of it or seen it?
    - Pornography is full of deception and misuse of sex. That's why I want us to keep sharing—so you will know the true and beautiful plan for sex and use your "alarms" to recognize the lies that pornography shows.
    - Even though we can choose to stay away from pornography, it's hard to avoid it in our culture. It's okay to let me know when you think you see it or if you've ever come across it anywhere.
    - Make sure Web/phone/tablet filters are in place if they are not already.

- See our "Let's Talk More" guidance sheets at the back of this packet for additional topics as needed.

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Healthy Sexuality Education: Ages 12-18

A child's sexual education begins the day he or she is born and continues through all life stages…

Goals – What to accomplish from 12-18 years of age:

- Fully present the biology of reproduction, intercourse and sexually transmitted infections, reviewing all of the previous stages' information.
- Beyond mere biology, convey the positive relational aspects of marital sexuality: *Procreation, union, shared sexual pleasure, lifelong bonding.*
- Normalize struggles with self-esteem, self-doubt, appearance and even sexual attraction confusion as common during adolescence.
- Set your family's expectations with dating and other social/sexual values experienced in culture; maintain open dialogue as events prompt. Help your daughter feel wanted. Help your son feel competent. A great resource on this topic is Boundaries in Dating by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.
- Accomplish a "YES" versus a merely "NO" outlook regarding abstinence—"yes" to healthy choices and values versus "just say no" or seeming anti-sex.
- Address the misuse of people as sexual objects rather than persons—ranging from peer mistreatment to human trafficking and the existence of a sex industry.
- Assure them with messages of grace and restoration in case mistakes or poor choices occur.

Ideas & Tips –

- See our "Bringing it All Together" and "Let's Talk More" guidance sheet at the back of this download for teaching resources.

- Emphasize character and identity as motivation for sexual decision making, rather than unwittingly conveying "save sex because it's unsafe/dirty/wrong."
    - "Because of how loved you are and how focused you can be on patience and wisdom, I trust that you can and will save sex until marriage."
    - "I also know honesty is hard at times, but if you ever feel pressured by others or struggle with sexual issues, you can bravely talk to me for help."

- Draw a "word-picture" for the beauty and importance of keeping sex in its place using a "fire and fireplace" analogy:
    - Fire built in a fireplace is warming and beautiful. Moving the same fire over onto the floor still creates heat but it's out of its place, damaging and hard to control. So it is with sex and all it creates.

- Plan an activity together of baking two loaves of bread as a lesson on the proper ingredients and timing for choosing to have sex:
    - Follow exact recipe with one loaf; alter the approach on the other (shorten time for bread to rise or omit key ingredient). As your child to look for differences between the two loaves. Compare the outcomes when timing (patience) or essential ingredients (marriage) are dismissed.
    - Show, however, that if something doesn't go well with the plan or recipe, the product is not merely "thrown out." Use this to talk about overcoming mistakes or redeeming troubled situations.

- Ask what they hear and believe about dating and how they think people come to choose a spouse. Suggest that both of you independently write down guidelines that might help them be successful with your family's values in this area. Combine the best ideas of both into "rules of thumb" for their teen years.

- Participate in whatever social media you allow for your teen; watch for the "conversation starters" and teachable moments from posts and interactions.

- For older teens, tell a story or carefully select a film or book with a character affected by the pain of overcoming sexual abuse or human trafficking. The faith-based film "Not Today"is a great choice. After watching, discuss the following:

    How does the main character (Caden Welles) go from being a self-absorbed partier to a young man intent on rescuing a little girl being trafficked in India?

    The film attempts to highlight the global problem of sex trafficking by focusing on one father and his young daughter. Did it succeed? Do you feel motivated to be part of the solution? Prayer? Giving? Volunteering? Discuss your ideas on how sex trafficking around the globe can decrease significantly.

- Pose an observation experiment. Ask them to notice for one week things at school, on social media, ads or in conversation that may differ with their values on what's appropriate for sex and the body. Set a time to talk; create a game of it giving $2 for the first several items they bring to discuss with their reasons why.

- Use filters and/or accountability software for all technology with Internet access. Have a common check-in and charging station every evening for phones/devices.

Bringing It All Together *aka* "The Talk"

"The Talk" is merely one among many talks

We much prefer to re-frame what is commonly referred to as "the talk" into an ongoing, casual dialogue beginning with toddlers and continuing throughout teen years. However, no matter how intentionally or incrementally a parent has taught about sex, there is a time to bring it all together into one larger, culminating event.

This time can also serve as a very special milestone for the youngster, marking a memorable stopping place in the ongoing journey of your parent-child interactions.

Goals:

- Provide a memorable and honoring "rite of passage" for man/womanhood.
- Notably bless (approve) the child for who they are and what they are becoming.
- Culminate all the pertinent details about the biology of intercourse. Confirm their understanding.
- Demonstrate non-shameful openness about healthy sexuality and lay a foundation for ongoing support throughout the difficulties of teen years.
- Address questions as they arise, both now and in the future.

Ideas & Tips:

- By age 11-12 (or as you detect the nearing of puberty), schedule a weekend away with your pre-teen. Consult and involve your child in planning where you go and what other fun events you do during the trip. Set aside time each day for reading from a special text, talking and praying.
- Make this an honored tradition among siblings if you have more than one child.
- Consider telling your child ahead of time about some of the fun outings and "talking topics" the weekend will contain. Before or during the weekend, hand them 3-4 note cards; ask them to write questions they may have about men, women, the body, dating, sex or marriage so you can read and think about them.
- Read and discuss our healthy sexuality points from every age and stage combined to cover or review the important terms.
- Using nature illustrations (flowers and animals) to explain biology can provide a useful bridge into the similarities and differences in human lovemaking.
- Select a couple of fitting gifts to give during and/or after the weekend.
    - A Bible inscribed with a short note and the date of your weekend event.
    - A ring, necklace, bracelet or locket symbolizing your time together and commitments you make in

support of one another and God's plan for sex.
    - Present it with the words, "I invite you into the world of man/womanhood with me, as a partner in integrity and growth."

- Have the opposite-sex parent write a note to send with you for the weekend; read this to the child as a special gift from that parent who honors their growth.

- Write out the positive qualities you see in your son/daughter and read it to them; bless them with specific words about their future and making wise choices, and about experiencing help and grace from God and from you when struggling. A blessing may include memories of how you began to discover who your child was becoming, some highlights of how your child has impacted you or words affirming who your child is from your perspective. What characteristics are unique to him or her? What does he or she do well? What is your hope, dreams and prayer for him or her? Include a Scripture that may speak specifically toward your child and be of encouragement.

- Storytelling is excellent and the most impacting way to communicate. Tell a story about someone who made wise choices or even faced a challenge and failed, yet experienced forgiveness and second chances.
    - If you can make this story about yourself, and then reveal that it's your story, this will be especially bonding and demonstrate your approachability and trust in relationships.
    - One story might be about your own sex-ed process—what you received or what you didn't at their age—and how you want to provide the best ongoing education to your son or daughter as possible.

Resources

For further exploration of the material covered in The Talk, consider the following excellent resources:

The Focus on the Family Guide to Talking with Your Kids About Sex by J. Thomas Fitch

God's Design for Sex

Before I Was Born by Stan Jones

The Learning About Sex series, from Concordia Publishing House

How You Are Changing: For Boys 9-11 by Jane Graver
How You Are Changing: For Girls 9-11 by Jane Graver
Sex and the New You: For Boys Ages 12-14 by Rich Bilmer
Sex and the New You: For Girls Ages 12-14 by Rich Bilmer

The Biblical Significance of Sexual Education

The Bible, from beginning to end, uses marriage and the two parts of humanity—male and female —to teach about God's nature and His loving eternal plan in Christ.

We've presented themes on the WHAT and HOW to teach your kids about sexuality at various ages, but there is a significant opportunity for the Christian parent to integrate the spiritual significance that is symbolically tied into sex by God's very design.

To help guide us, here is Focus on the Family's statement on the value of men and women:

> *God created humans in His image, intentionally male and female, each bringing unique and complementary qualities to sexuality and relationships. Sexuality is a glorious gift from God to be offered back to him in either marriage for procreation, union and mutual delight or in celibacy for undivided devotion to Christ. Christians are called to proclaim the truth and beauty of God's design and the redemption of sexual brokenness in our lives and culture through Jesus Christ.*

Goals:

- Show how men and women intentionally reflect God's nature—the relationship-based, loving and life-giving character of the Trinity (Gen 2:18, Eph 5).
- Give news of God's creation and approval of our bodies as a good gift, to use as He has planned—as an accurate symbol of Him (Gen 1:26; Mal 2:15; Prov 5:18; 1 Cor 6:19).
- Teach how the Bible uses man-woman marriage as a meaningful "picture" throughout Scripture that shows how God relates to His people (Eph 5:32).
- Teach that the Bible affirms unmarried people for honoring God as they devote themselves to Him, and how forgoing or awaiting sex actually shows the great value of marriage and sex, and all they symbolize (1 Cor 7:32-34; Matt 19:11-12).
- Use mistakes and observations of brokenness to give good news about Jesus' help, care and restoration for us and our world—a reminder of His loving and great salvation from sin (John 4:1-26; 8:1-11; Ps 103:12; 1 Cor 6:9-11).

Ideas & Tips:

- Hold up three fingers and say "God is made up of The Father, Son and Holy Spirit—yet the three parts represent ONE God" (press fingers together to show oneness.) State that God created families like Him (in His image). Hold up three fingers again and say "Dads—Moms—Children … three parts, ONE family" (press fingers together). This is one way we are made in His image (read Genesis 1:26-28).
    - Ask how men and women together show what God is like. Focus on how they tend to be different, yet they work together…"different but still similar" or "unity in diversity," just like the three parts of God.
    - Mention how the three parts of God love and serve each other and how their love brought about the "fruit" of salvation to the world. Likewise, husbands and wives enjoy love, and it creates the "fruit" of children who also love and serve the family and the world (read Gen 2:18-25 and 1:28).

- **Teach:** Just as the three parts of God are necessary for Him to bring us LIFE as Christians, MEN and WOMEN are also necessary to make new life.
    - **Illustration:** Use food coloring; pour yellow water into blue water. Show how "new life" (green) appears. *Combining difference to make life is God's plan for families.* Conversely, pour blue water into blue water; ask if anything happens. Explain God's good plan is to use our wonderful bodies, husbands and wives together, to show what He is like—a relationship-based Savior who "married" His people, the Church, to bring the LIFE of salvation! (See Eph 5:25-33; Rev 19:9; 21:2; 22:17, Matt 25; 9:15).

- Encourage teens by saying that unmarried people are ALSO a symbol of devotion to God. By respecting the meaning of sex and waiting unless married, Christians are saying YES to God (not simply "no" to sex) (read 1 Cor 7:32-34).

- **Teach:** Celibate people are giving up a key symbol of God (sex and marriage) to be devoted solely to the reality (God Himself). Sex isn't so bad that they avoid it, it's so good they save and honor it for the purpose and pleasures it holds. Teens and single adults can endeavor and achieve this with God's special grace and tender care. Even when challenges or stumbling may occur—He's always there for us.

The Topic of Masturbation

Knowing the larger meaning and purpose of human sexuality helps us direct our children.

When it comes to the topic of masturbation, the question "Right or wrong?" can dominate the discussion. However, pointing teens toward the healthy *relational* (versus solo) purposes of marital sex is usually the most helpful way to guide your talks. And, no matter what the age, it's certainly best to avoid shame which may encourage intense secrecy and embarrassment.

We'll acknowledge, however, there's been no lack of coarse joking as well as staunch religious advice given through the ages on this personal issue. *Don't let these attitudes silence you as a parent.* Keep your goals simple and your references mature and to the point. Your growing child—and especially your teen or pre-teen—will be comforted and aided by your kind, mature wisdom and gentle direction.

Goals:

- With younger children, simply be aware as a parent. Redirect activity when necessary and teach dignified privacy and public courtesy with the body.
- For pre-teens/teens, define masturbation in appropriate terms that make sense without being overly graphic.
- Let your child know you are an emotionally safe source of information and that they are invited to talk comfortably with you about the topic whenever needed.
- Help a child not get stuck in shame or turmoil over the very common experience of teen masturbation.
- Guide your teen with a long-term positive goal when it comes to how they manage their sexuality and understand their urges and normal development.
- Give direction which helps prevent problematic and addictive masturbation—especially as it relates to coupling it with pornography, fantasy or the presence of other individuals.

Ideas & Tips:

Get *The Focus on the Family Guide To Talking with Your Kids About Sex: Honest Answers at Every Age* (Fitch & Davis). Employ its phrases and accurate medical references with your child (see page 169 and the book's index).

- Be aware that genital self-touching, especially when a child is bored or nervous, may occur in very young children and can be quite normal. However, if it's excessive or occurs in public, this is a cue to attend kindly to the child. Our online Q-n-A offers more about redirection and a calm and competent parental response.

- For a pre-teen, explain in proper terms that masturbation means "the touching or movement of the genital area (penis for males and clitoris for females) to the point of a physical sensation called arousal." Be clear that it's not physically damaging to the genitals or body. As maturity warrants, add:
  - "It may also involve an intense sensation in the body, called orgasm."
  - "Becoming aware of or experiencing this ability of the body is a common part of growing up during puberty."
  - "For boys this sometimes leads to the fluid called semen being released out of the penis from the same opening urine exits."
  - "What do you already know about this topic? Do you have any questions? I am glad to talk and to find the correct answers if I don't have them."
  - "It's best if you come to me with questions because there is a lot of misinformation and even harmful information on this topic out there."

- **Clarify:** "Because masturbation is personal and a private topic—and happens with a lot of teens as they grow up—many people make fun of it. I don't want you to get stuck in shame or excessive worry over this. No matter if this topic affects you personally or not, it can seem embarrassing. But please feel free to ask or talk with me about the subject."

- **Teach:** "The sensitivity of genital nerve endings is the way the body is made. The purpose and meaning for us having this in our bodies is ultimately about love and relationship in marriage. This is the main purpose of sex I want you to know about and keep in mind as you develop—sex isn't supposed to be 'all about me.' Self-control and the mature use of the body in marriage is your goal—not to get stuck on masturbation, but also not to feel abnormal about it occurring."

- Here's an **illustration:** "When an athlete wants to become an Olympian, he keeps his purpose in focus and tries to move in the positive direction of his goals."
  - "He doesn't do things that intentionally train him away from his aims (like eating junk food or avoiding regular healthy workouts)."
  - "Yet he doesn't feel surprised, ashamed or defeated during the time it takes to gain the physical and mental maturity to become an Olympian—he just keeps moving."
  - "His coach understands his developmental process and he does too. If there's a problem or barrier along the way they address it together as a team."
  - "I want you to ponder this illustration and take it to heart. What all do you think it teaches in relation to this topic of masturbation?"

- **Teach:** There ARE things that can be harmful if they become associated with masturbation. Mention the following as the main examples:
  - Masturbation as compulsive or an all-consuming emotional escape: Explain that an addictive habit can form if masturbation evolves into a coping mechanism for stress or difficult emotions. Rather than discuss or face worries, like loneliness or social/relational challenges, some people might insulate their heart and lives with masturbation.
  - The use of pornography or fantasy: Because these unreal images produce strong and memorable responses in the brain, this adds to the addictive potential of masturbation and warps our view of healthy marital sexuality.

- Masturbation with another person outside of marriage: This leaves an unintended impact on our minds and hearts and is not in line with the goal and overall marital meaning and purpose of sex.

• State, "While I hope problems with masturbation don't happen, it's important to be open and seek help and wisdom. While it's normal to want to avoid talking to a parent about this as you get further into your teens, let's try to keep the topic open for conversation."

• Mention that staying in the right balance with the mind and body will probably feel challenging at times. That's normal too. Instruct kids to remember:

- "You can usually do something other than masturbate when you have overwhelming feelings. Choosing other actions (sports, games, positive social or spiritual activities) are good alternatives."
- "Your energy and interest in sex is not bad; focus on wanting to grow as a person."

• Consult the "Family Help" link at the top of our homepage, FocusOnTheFamily.com. Search for "masturbation" for helpful ideas on dealing with this topic.