

Talking to Your Kids about Sex



I have observed with a lot of surprise that my son and daughter are fast growing into puberty. They are suddenly emerging into teenagers with hormone issues, pimples and changing anatomies. This has led me to start thinking about taking our discussion on sex and sexuality to another level; and I realize that I, along with many other parents, especially from the part of the world where I come from, are not equipped nor prepared to discuss this very important issue.

As parents, guardians and mentors, we owe our children the primary responsibility of giving them correct, factual, and age specific information on sex and sexuality, before they begin to look for the information elsewhere; but the reality is that too many children learn about sex from sources other than their parents. Too often we find it a very sensitive issue that is rarely discussed, and left to the child or teenager to discover through television, music, pop culture, the internet, or the playground. Others discover it the hard way, by being lured into sexual activities that they are not ready for, and bearing scars for life by just sheer guilt, Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and the physical and emotional consequences of abortion.

Churches and individuals have made laudable efforts to teach biblical principles of sexuality to young people. But these important concepts are not always accompanied by accurate medical information or practical refusal skills.

Furthermore, youth-group presentations usually begin late in the game (i.e., during the teen years) and rarely involve an on-going dialogue about this subject.

I remember vividly when I started my period at 12 years of age. I had never had such a discussion on menstruation, sexual education or anything related to it. All I was told was that I should be careful and not get pregnant, leaving me clueless on the connection between menstruation and pregnancy. For many years my thinking was that one could get pregnant by just touching a man! This is the life story of many girls in my generation.

Sexual education for girls and boys has to begin at home. The information has to provide the child/adolescent an understanding of the sanctity and beauty of sex, and God's intention for it, before we begin to get to the details.

Here are some principles I borrow from Dr. James Dobson, a renowned paediatrician and child psychologist about sex and sexuality to young people:

Innocence is a function of attitude, not information: A child who understands the specifics of sex, while seeing it as an act that, in the proper context, that expresses love between two married people and begins new life, retains his innocence. But a child who knows very little about sex can already have a corrupt mind-set if he has been exposed to it in a degrading, mocking or abusive context. Therefore, giving a young person factual details about sex and sexual intercourse do not rob them of their innocence.

Your attitude about sex determines how you communicate it to your children: For many people uneasiness about sex may be rooted in life experiences, especially if they involve sexual abuse experienced during childhood, adolescence or even adulthood. Their perception has already been determined by those encounters which make it very difficult to talk about sex in a healthy and factual manner. These issues can be addressed by the help of the Holy Spirit. If you realize that these are issues for you, it is never too late to receive counselling and healing. There are books by Christian authors and counselling available for you to help address these issues: Two good examples are ***The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfilment*** by Dr. Clifford and Joyce Penner and ***Intended for Pleasure*** by Dr. Ed and Gaye Wheat. Counselling is also available at 08033220730.

Don't wait to tell your child everything you know about sex during a single, intense marathon session Doing so risks either waiting until it's too late or dumping more in the child's lap than he can process. Instead,

Information should be relevant to the age group of the child so as not to give the child too much information that he or she may not be able to process.

information should be released gradually during many conversations over a period of several years. The same principle applies to any other area of life — faith, values, responsibilities, relationships, handling money and so on — in which you intend to offer guidance to your child. These subjects are too important to be confined to a single conversation.

In many instances, you will be giving information on what your child needs to know. Your five-year-old is probably going to want to know how the baby inside Aunt Shola is going to get out. But your child may not think to ask how the baby got there, and you don't need to broach the subject at that time. On the other hand, if you haven't yet had any discussions about reproduction with your ten year- old, you will need to take the initiative to start some conversations. She has already heard all sorts of things on the playground and needs to hear from more reputable and mature sources. **What if your child asks you question you can't answer?** Be honest, and then do some research. You gain far more stature in your child's eyes by showing candor than by bluffing. You may not have a detailed knowledge of the intricacies of the menstrual cycle or the developmental stages of puberty, but you're never too old to learn.

I pray God to us the knowledge, strength ,skills and right attitudes to communicate His plans and intentions about sex to the next generation.

Other Resources:

www.focusonthefamily.org

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Talkingaboutsex/Documents/DCSFtalktoyourchild.pdf> (this is a PDF flier that you can actually download and print)

Practical Tips:

- *Create an atmosphere for trust and open communication between you and your child*
- *Discuss the **principles** and **context** of sexual intercourse first*
- *Address any underlying concerns and questions in a calm and rational manner. Avoid any body language that expresses surprise, defensiveness, guilt, etc.*
- *You may wish to get educational pictures of the human anatomy. You can get them in educational bookstores.*
- *Do NOT use pornographic movies or pictures to teach your child sex education*