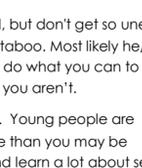


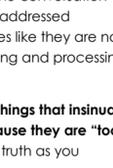
TALK... NOW?

- * **Parents need to be the main educators, especially in the area of sexuality.** There is no replacement for the moral guidance and direction of a parent. What is discussed and taught in school is designed as a supplement, never a replacement, to what is already thoroughly addressed at home.
- * **It is never too soon to talk with your "tween".** It may seem to you that your child is still much too young and naïve about sexual matters, but chances are he/she has already heard much more than you think. As the primary educator in this area, you don't want to be the last one to address these important issues.
- * **Having a healthy knowledge about the complex facets of sexuality will not rob your child of innocence,** but will help him/her have truth to fall back on when they are exposed to unhealthy messages. Your ongoing conversations will provide him/her with information to make solid judgments about what he/she will inevitably encounter. 
- * **It is important to have numerous, ongoing conversations about this topic instead of one long "talk."** Your goal is to create and maintain an open line of communication throughout the years, not just to provide information on one single occasion. Bringing the topic up multiple times may be a cause for occasional eye-rolling, but it leads to a continual formation of character for your son/daughter, rather than a "one-and-done" crash-course.
- * Your task is much more involved than simply telling your child not to have premarital sex. **There are many aspects about sexuality that need to be addressed,** even to young people who will decisively remain entirely chaste for years to come. Your job is to give continual guidance and encouragement as your child matures and encounters more complicated issues in regards to sexuality.
- * **It's normal to be uneasy** about discussing this topic with your child, but don't get so uneasy that he/she gets the impression that sex is something evil, dirty, or taboo. Most likely he/she will initially find this discussion extremely "awkward;" your task is to do what you can to eliminate that, even if it means "faking" being comfortable when you aren't.
- * Don't assume your son/daughter knows little or nothing about sex. Young people are exposed to a significant amount of sexual information, much more than you may be aware of or comfortable with. Even the "good kids" hear, see, and learn a lot about sex, even if they show no interest in it. They will hear things from peers at school, on the bus, in the lunchroom, on the field, and in the locker-room. **Young people are inundated with messages about sex** from movies, television, the internet, social media, music, videos, the news, video games, advertisements, and even grocery store magazines (have you seen them lately?!). Many of these messages are distorted and need to be counteracted by attentive, devoted parents.
- * Young people **need to hear and learn about both the physical and the moral elements of sexuality.** Plan on devoting time to addressing each, with an emphasis on the latter. You may be the sole voice of morality and conscience that they hear regarding sexuality.
- * Don't try to address everything in one conversation. **Breaking up the issue into various topic-centered conversations is the best way** to foster the ongoing dialogue, especially as your son/daughter has more questions that arise.
- * **Don't underestimate your influence!** They may act like they think you're "out of it," but polls throughout the years show that teenagers consistently cite their parents' beliefs as being major influences on their own attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- * **Do not let an imperfect sexual life or past cause you to shy away from talking** to your son/daughter about sex. Some parents feel that because they have lived less-than-virtuous lives themselves, they have no place to teach their children about sexual morality. Your son/daughter needs your direction, and there is no replacing that, as blemished as you may feel your own life has been. Pray for the grace to speak to them; it will be given to you. Your experiences are valuable when presented in an appropriate manner. Prudently sharing your own mistakes and lessons-learned may help your child to feel comfortable coming to you. You're on their side, and sharing helps them to see and understand that.

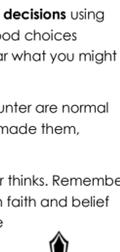
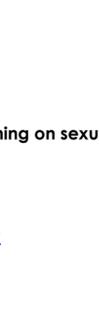
A LITTLE FURTHER...

- * **Both you and your tween need to know and understand what Christians truly believe.** Before you talk to your child, it's of paramount importance for you to know the Church's teaching about sexuality and its different facets, especially since true Catholic teaching is so often misrepresented and misunderstood by society, and even by many Catholics themselves. There is an inexhaustible amount of solid, easily-accessible Catholic/Christian resources to assist parents with these topics. **Take advantage of all that is available.** Make sure to always rely on sources that uphold Biblical values. There is a list of solidly Catholic resources that will help explain and clarify the true Church teaching at the end of this document.
- * It's extremely important to **always emphasize the sacredness of sex.** This cannot be stressed enough! Explain that, although the media portrays Christians/Catholics as being "anti-sex," in reality the Church reveres sexuality as one of our most cherished gifts from God! It is precisely because sex is so sacred that Catholics react so fervently.
- * Emphasize the **God-given design for sex:** the unique expression of love between a husband and wife with the potential creation of a new life coming from that love. Your son/daughter needs to understand that **society's general view of sex is in total contrast to the Christian understanding of it.** It's an unfortunate reality in our fallen world and unless very clearly taught otherwise, many young people will simply go along with the current manner of thinking and behaving.
- * As unpopular as a position as it may seem to your son/daughter, **give and explain all of the many good reasons to not be sexually active before marriage.** Clarify that the issue is much more than avoiding the "scare of unintended pregnancy or STDs." Otherwise, instead of learning to appreciate chastity, your son/daughter may simply learn to fear pregnancy or STDs.
- * Be open-minded but **don't compromise your values.** Yes, your tween needs to see that you are "in-touch" with the modern world, but what they need even more is to see that they can find the truth in you, uncompromised. The more strongly you communicate value to your son/daughter, the better they will be at rejecting the misinformation and misguidance of society.
- * Be honest and admit to your tween that the lifestyle they are called to is **not going to be an easy one.** They will inevitably see the blatant contrast between what you are teaching them and what society is telling them about sexuality. That contrast can be baffling, but **understanding the reasons for sexual self-control and chastity** helps to explain how and why Christian values sometimes go directly against what "everyone is doing." 
- * It might be intimidating, but **prepare yourself to possibly have to address sensitive topics** such as pornography, masturbation, sexual orientation, abortion, etc. Only go as far as you are comfortable, but be prepared to at least have something to say if you are asked. Young people have easy access to finding their own answers, so if it seems that they are genuinely curious, do not just dismiss a topic as being too mature for them. Details are not always necessary or appropriate, but having something to say may be. Any of these may be a topic for your next one-on-one discussion. That will give you some time to prepare how to answer their questions.
- * Remember that **you are not alone.** There are many other parents who are dealing with this same challenge, even in your own circle of friends. Don't hesitate to reach out to other Christian parents whose judgment you trust and ask their advice. Chances are, they will ask for your advice in turn!

TALK... HOW??

- ☛ Plan a **comfortable, private environment** to talk to your son/daughter. Conversations in the car are good because they allow for a focused conversation while eliminating the need for eye contact, which might be too "intense" for a tween. Other options like taking the dog for a long walk, for example, can similarly provide a comfortable setting.
- ☛ Find an environment **away from distractions** and/or other people. Your tween will be unfocused if he/she suspects that someone might be around the corner listening. If the television is on, siblings are running around, or the phone is ringing, you will find yourself competing with (and losing to) those other "less-awkward" stimuli.
- ☛ **One-on-one conversations are ideal.** Having multiple adults present is overwhelming for a young person. Similarly, speaking to multiple tweens at the same time takes away the serious, intimate nature of the conversations. 
- ☛ If multiple parents are going to speak to your son/daughter, it is **best for those adults to communicate with one another.** It is beneficial for a young person to get the perspective of more than one parent, but it may also be confusing if he/she receives conflicting information.
- ☛ **Be gently persistent and insistent!** It may seem like torture to them (and to you!) and some tweens may even beg to not discuss it, but someday your son/daughter will be grateful to you for having taken the time and love to address this. Don't ever let the conversation be cut short or avoided entirely. It is too important of a topic to not be addressed thoroughly, even if it is not always convenient. Also, it may seem at times like they are not listening to what you are saying. Don't get discouraged; they are hearing and processing more than they let on.
- ☛ Tweens can be sensitive about being treated "like a baby." **Don't say things that insinuate that your son/daughter cannot know or understand certain things because they are "too young"** or "inexperienced." The point is to try to help them understand truth as you acknowledge their process of maturation.
- ☛ **Avoid assumptions.** While every parent wants to think their child has never thought about sex or had any romantic or sexual encounters, studies show an alarming rate of teens and tweens are becoming sexually active at younger and younger ages. Speaking in a way that assumes your son/daughter has not had any experience may cause him/her to feel the need to hide or be dishonest with you. On the other hand, insinuating that your son/daughter has already had experience sends the wrong message about your expectations.
- ☛ **Don't hesitate to share how you felt going through this stage.** This helps them understand that they are not the only ones confronting these changes and issues, and that you understand what they are going through. You can even laugh with them (yes, laughing is permitted when discussing sex) about how Grandma/Grandpa addressed the topic with you all those many years ago. Humor usually helps lighten things up!
- ☛ Following your conversations **give your son/daughter some time to process and reflect.** Try not to bombard them by asking what they are thinking too soon. They may need some time to escape into their less-serious reality. You don't want them to overthink things and become "burnt out" on dialoging with you.

DO's and DON'T's!

- ☛ Asking about what is going on, "romantically" among their peers may be a good way to start a relevant conversation, but **avoid blatantly asking for names;** that can be too invasive and can distract from your point.
- ☛ It's helpful to **talk about some possible situations they may find themselves in someday** when mom and dad aren't there. Help them to determine the best ways to react. It may be difficult for them to put what you have discussed into practice unless they have really thought through real-life circumstances.
- ☛ **Listen, listen, listen!** It is extremely important to your son/daughter to be able to express and share their thoughts with you **without always having feedback** from you. If teens think that everything they say will be followed by lengthy feedback from you, they are more likely to not bring up all that is on their mind, and they do indeed have a lot on their minds. 
- ☛ **Encourage questions.** Tweens may not readily ask the questions that they have, but they do indeed have questions; it's a matter of getting them to be comfortable enough to ask. Remember, in some cases the answers will come from either you or Google, and you don't want to involve Google!
- ☛ If there is something you don't know the answer to, be honest. **Don't try to make something up.** Tell them you will find out for them and plan on making it part of your next chat. It is understandable to want to conceal a lot from your son/daughter, but **they will respond well if you are genuine and upfront with them.**
- ☛ **Try not to lecture!** As we all know too well, tweens tend to "tune out" anything that seems to them to be a lecture. So as full of priceless wisdom as you believe you may be, break it up so it doesn't seem like you are lecturing to them.
- ☛ If you prefer to **write things down, go ahead** (be prepared to be laughed at slightly!), but don't be preoccupied with your list of topics. Prayerfully let the Holy Spirit guide the conversation.
- ☛ Be concise. Tweens **have short attention spans** and often want succinct answers to their questions. It is natural to address a topic you're not entirely comfortable with by shrouding it in a lot of fancy words. Remember your audience; don't overload them with long-winded answers or ideology. Be simple.
- ☛ Don't argue. When your tween expresses something that you disagree with, even if it takes all of your effort, **avoid making it an argument.** Understand that your teen is from a generation that is far more open and permissive about sex than previous generations. You can maintain your Christian values and uphold of Church teaching without being anger or engaging in an argument. Yes, this takes a lot of prayer and grace, but it is possible!
- ☛ Understand your son's/daughter's attachment to friends. It is extremely important for a parent to know their son's/daughter's friends at this age. Tweens are protective over their friends and even when their friends are making mistakes, they tend to remain supportive of them. **Try your best not to overreact to things they may tell you about their friends.** If they perceive that you are harshly judging their friends, they may become resentful and not confide in you again. Give them clear but gentle direction about healthy friendships and good influences. They need to **learn for themselves how to choose their company wisely.** Feeling that they are unjustly being forced away from someone they care about may cause them to be deceptive or to rebel. Restoring that trust and open communication after it has been broken can be very difficult to do.
- ☛ Emphasize the positive. Don't just focus on what they should *not* do; express to them the joy in having healthy, Christian relationships. Don't just scare them with the consequences of sexual immorality; **emphasize the gift, mystery, and beauty of human sexuality and wholesome relationships.** 
- ☛ Emphasize self-control, not parent-control. **Help your tween make good decisions** using their own strong conscience and good judgment. They should make good choices because they believe it's the right thing to do, not just because they fear what you might do or say if they get caught.
- ☛ Reassure your son/daughter that any sexual feelings that they will encounter are normal and **not in themselves sinful.** They should not be ashamed of how God made them, sexuality included, as long as they act in accord with His teaching.
- ☛ Be careful to **not make your tween feel guilty** about what he/she says or thinks. Remember that young people have a lot to figure out and synthesize with their own faith and belief system. You are trying to create a safe, non-judgment zone for this. Give direction, not guilt. Remember you too were once their age and didn't have all of the answers the way you do now! 

LAST, BUT NOT LEAST...

- ☛ **Don't underestimate the power of prayer** about this or anything else. God loves your son/daughter even more than you do, and He knows them better than you do. Continually ask for His grace and guidance in raising your tween and especially in dealing with these topics. We live in an often lost and misguided society in which God alone can truly safeguard our loved ones. Entrust yourself

Some topics to address in your beginning conversations:

- ◆ God's unique design of human sexuality
- ◆ Sacredness of sex
- ◆ Dating
- ◆ Modest dress
- ◆ Good/Bad influences & healthy friendships
- ◆ Good/Bad choices & decision making
- ◆ Self-Control and the virtue of temperance
- ◆ Building and maintaining a strong conscience
- ◆ Physiology & physical changes
- ◆ Peer Pressure
- ◆ Misguided, unchristian messages from society (movies, music, video games, public figures)
- ◆ Appropriate male/female interactions
- ◆ Gender differences in thinking/relating to others
- ◆ Self-Respect

Some helpful resources for Catholic thought and Church teaching on sexuality:

Catechism of the Catholic Church
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccsc_css/archive/catechism3s2c2a6.htm
or <http://www.catechism.cc/articles/qa.htm>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/love-and-sexuality/

Chastity.com
[chastity.com](http://www.chastity.com)

Catholic Education Resource Center
www.catholiceducation.org/en/marriage-and-family/sexuality/

Family Honor
www.familyhonor.org

Why Not - Catholicism
<http://whynotcatholicism.net/view/why-no-sex-before-marriage>

Waiting Till Marriage
<http://waitingtillmarriage.org/7-reasons-why-catholics-wait-till-marriage/>

Catholic Bridge
www.catholicbridge.com/catholic/chastity.php

Sponsored by: Chastity Education Office, Diocese of Erie
Find out more at www.eriercd.org/nfp. Questions or comments? Email Kate at Kwhiteford@eriercd.org or call 814-824-1259.