



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Countercultural Parenting, Part 6 CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY

Some parents question whether boundaries have changed to include as acceptable, sexual behaviors that were unacceptable when the parent was a teen. In today's culture too many TV shows, soap operas, movies, MTV-style of music and commercials advertise promiscuity, disregard human dignity, and glorify "party animal behavior," permissiveness, immodest dress, sexual body-language, and the use of crude language. We have a recipe for disaster when we add to this environment "teen-stagers" who focus on being accepted, desire to be part of the "in crowd," and hate to be singled out as "weird," a "dork," or "out of the loop!" The temptation is to "go with the flow" of popular culture. No wonder that 21st Century parents question what is acceptable sexual behavior for adolescents.

Adolescence is the time for developing a personal identity that carries through adulthood. It is the prime time:

- to develop personality by relating with others
- to learn how to name, claim, and tame emotions
- to cultivate self-respect, responsibility and accountability for choices and the results of actions
- to apply what the Ten Commandments teach about relating with others: ***people are precious gifts of God, made in God's image. People are expressions of God—not objects to be used, misused, abused, or discarded.***

Adolescence is the time to discover and develop the "I." Only a healthy "I" is capable of relating maturely. Only two healthy "I's" can become a life-giving "We." When adolescents jump into a serious relationship they stunt the growth of the "I." They focus on pleasing the "other" and often lose sight of "self." Once the relationship becomes sexual, it grabs most of their energy and it puts a freeze on development.

Sexual relationships are for people who have matured beyond adolescent attitudes of "me, myself and I." Sex is but one facet of a permanent relationship. Mature people know that love is far more than a feeling. It is a choice to do what is best for another person, even at the cost of sacrifice. One person expressed it this way, "Sex is just one high note in an opera. It is the hundreds of other notes that make the opera memorable or enjoyable."

Everything in creation has a life-giving purpose. Goodness follows when we use our gifts *as they were designed by their Creator*. Sex is a part of God's design. Therefore, sex is a gift. When used as intended –within a committed relationship – it is freeing, a celebration, private but not secret, it carries no sense of shame, it brings joy, well-being, hope, and all good things. It creates life emotionally and

spiritually, and sometimes it produces a child. Sex includes foreplay, that is, touches or sexual expressions intended to cause sexual arousal and preparation for intercourse.

Initial adolescence is a time to develop MANY relationships. Group activities like dancing, bowling, swimming, spectator sports, and activities that involve intellectual and social skills help teens to find what qualities they like in other people, what increases life within them, and what about themselves is ready or needs development in order to have a healthy relationship. Adolescence is a time to focus on kindness, respect, laughter, shared interests, and conversation skills.

Encourage double-dates around age 16. Single-dating more easily provides a context for temptation to win out. Holding hands, goodnight kisses, spontaneous kisses on the forehead or cheek, and walking arm in arm can be healthy, holy expressions. But “making out” – prolonged kissing, intimate touching and/or close body connection with arousal as the goal – falls into the foreplay category reserved for marriage.

Engage teens in dialogue about appropriate sexual behavior and include these final thoughts:

1. Sexual self-control eliminates the possibility of unwanted pregnancy, venereal disease, ruined reputation, “freezing” emotional development, and having an adolescent child make a choice between adoption, abortion, and motherhood.

2. A couple is not ready for a sexual relationship before they are able to sacrifice their lives for the sake of each other and a child, and to provide a home, steady income, health care, education, and the intention of lifetime fidelity.

3. It takes self-control to avoid pleasurable occasions of lust. Self-control is a quality of true love. The difference between love and lust is the theme of a poem by Sebastian Temple:

Love is a silence; lust is a roar.
Love is satisfied; lust wants more.
Love is a giving; lust only takes.
Love is a mending of hearts lust breaks.

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