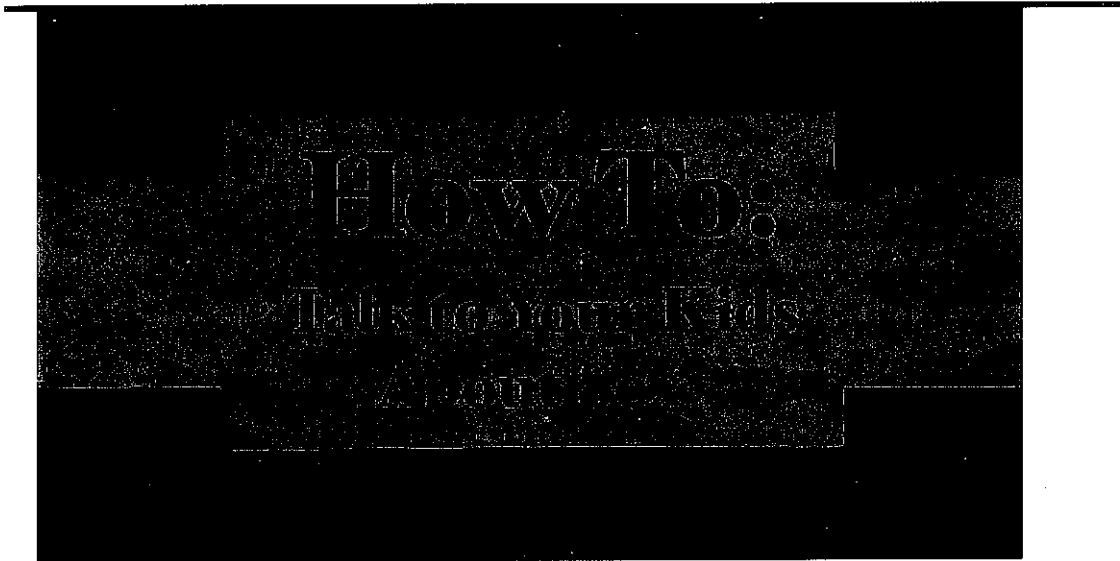


HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEX

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[Wisdom](/categories/wisdom) (</categories/wisdom>)



Note: In working on our book about marriage and sex (due out in early 2012), my wife Grace and I found some important research that didn't quite fit the book but we felt would benefit others so we are passing the information along. If or when we write a book on parenting we will have the space to expand this more fully. In the meantime, we hope this is helpful.

A child's sex education often comes through schools or churches. But a Christian parent should always be the first person to speak with their child about sex related issues. As [Ephesians 6:1-4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%206.1-4) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%206.1-4>) tells mothers and fathers:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."
Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

TALK TO YOUR KIDS EARLY

The appropriate age to discuss these matters varies from child to child but if a parent is going to err, it should be sooner than later. Ensuring the lines of communication are open and honest between a parent and child is paramount. For younger children, this includes talking to them about inappropriate viewing

and touching as well as keeping them in safe surroundings. Here are some tips for keeping your environment safe for your kids:

Children are never to be left with people that are not fully trustworthy.

If your child plays at a neighbor's home, make sure you know who is there and that a trustworthy adult is in charge.

Ensure there is not pornography in the home.

Remember that abuse often comes from other children.

Dialogue about inappropriate touching and viewing should begin when your child is very young to help prevent sexual abuse. Conversations about sexual contact and inappropriate exposure should happen no later than age 10.

Parents are not always well educated about the facts surrounding childhood sexual abuse or wait too long to open lines of communication. Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and go with your gut. For more helpful information, visit the [Kids Need To Know website](http://www.kidsneedtoknow.com/Welcome.html). (<http://www.kidsneedtoknow.com/Welcome.html>)

TALK REGULARLY WITH YOUR KIDS

The "sex talk" is not a one-off conversation. Regular dialog about sexuality should begin when children are young and last until they're married for the sake of loving, biblical guidance. The fact is parents are not always able to shelter their kids from every single outside influence. Whether information is coming from neighborhood kids or through inappropriate media content (even when its viewed accidentally), healthy, regular rhythms of communication is vital.

As you share God's standard and your concern, lavish your children with affection and encouragement

As an example from the statistics, a staggering 90 percent of children between the ages of 8 to 16 have viewed pornography on the Internet, in most cases unintentionally (London School of Economics January 2002). The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is 11 years old and the largest consumers of Internet pornography is 12 to 17 year-old boys. Youth with significant exposure to sexual media were shown to be significantly more likely to have had intercourse at ages 14 to 16 (Report in Pediatrics, April 2006). That means that the average age (http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED492903&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED492903) for first intercourse in the United States is now 16.4.

A parent must remain aware of the questions and curiosities of their child(ren) and speak frankly—but not crassly—with biblical wisdom like the parents in Proverbs. Take care to never shame or embarrass your child, but treat them respectfully as an emerging, fellow adult.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS SPECIFICALLY

In an effort to protect their children, parents may inadvertently communicate that sex is a sin. But it's important to nuance your communication so that sexuality is understood to be a good gift from God,

enjoyed between one man and one woman for one lifetime. Avoid crass terms or euphemisms but instead, use the medical terms of penis, vagina, breasts etc. With the proliferation and prevalence of social media, it's important to define terms. The way sexuality is presently understood in our culture is vastly different from previous generations—and the change has happened quickly. So it's important to discuss what is meant by sexual exposure, as well as sexual contact.

Christian parents must define in detail what they mean by “sex” and “appropriateness.”

The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSL) has stood from 1992 to 2010 as the most comprehensive sociological study on sex. In that time, the Internet was made public and low-cost, digital filmmaking is now widely accessible. In effect, this means sex education has moved from family and church to the web. In 2010 The Journal of Sexual Medicine published the most updated research on sexuality. The report began by stating,

Compared with the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSL (<http://www.jsm.issm.info>)), in this present study more men and women have engaged in oral sex and a significantly greater proportion have engaged in anal sex. The larger proportions of those who had engaged in anal sex were not limited to the youngest cohorts.

WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT TO YOU, MAY NOT BE SIGNIFICANT TO YOUR KIDS

Unlike previous generations, in our age oral sex is increasingly common and culturally accepted. A report in the Washington Post (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/15/AR2005091500915.html>) said,

"Slightly more than half of American teenagers ages 15 to 19 have engaged in oral sex, with females and males reporting similar levels of experience...the proportion increases with age to about 70 percent of all 18- and 19-year-olds ... "This is a point of major social transition," James Wagoner, president of Advocates for Youth, a reproductive health organization, said yesterday. "The data are now coming out and roiling the idea that boys are the hunters and young girls are the prey. It absolutely defies the stereotype."

The data also underscores that many young people -- particularly those from middle and upper-income white families -- simply do not consider oral sex to be as significant as their parents' generation does. The article (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/15/AR2005091500915.html>) continues,

"Oral sex is far less intimate than intercourse. It's a different kind of relationship," said Claire Brindis, professor of pediatrics at the University of California at San Francisco. "At 50 percent, we're talking about a major social norm. It's part of kids' lives."

What is likely the most comprehensive study (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.02012.x/full>) ever done claims that no less than 61% of teenage girls have similarly performed oral sex on a guy, and 62% have received oral sex from a guy. Another study (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12385159>) reported that, "one in five 11 to 17-year-olds has received a sexually explicit or distressing text or e-mail."

IT IS UP TO YOU TO DEFINE WHAT IS APPROPRIATE

Pastorally, I [Mark] have had counseling sessions--on more than one occasion--with parents who discovered that their Christian daughter had been performing oral sex on her boyfriend while wearing the purity ring her father gave her. Apparently, the father had never explained that oral sex is sex. I also discovered that these same parents hadn't performed oral sex on one another—a detail that underscores how common understandings of sexuality have so drastically changed in just one generation. On other occasions, I've counseled Christian teens that traded naked photos with a dating partner but didn't see it as a problem since they weren't having intercourse. Obviously, Christian parents must define in detail what they mean by “sex” and “appropriateness.”

TALK TO YOUR KIDS HONESTLY

In addition to the Bible's teaching, the statistics bear that God's way is the best way. One study (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16565790>) found that adolescents who engaged in sex (but not drugs and alcohol) were three and one-half times more likely to be depressed than adolescents who abstained from sex, alcohol, and drugs. Furthermore, the correlation (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2372/is_2_42/ai_n13822486/) between adolescent sex and psychological problems is particularly strong for teenagers who have sex before their peers (at age 15 or earlier).

TALK TO YOUR KIDS GRACIOUSLY

Conversations with your child about sex can be awkward so go into the conversation prepared. Here are a few suggestions:

- Write down the big ideas you want to share in advance.

- Get time in private so they know that the issues you are discussing are important.

- Take care not to talk about sex in ways that are shaming or condemning.

Additionally, if there is sexual sin in your past, share the appropriate details at the appropriate time. Discuss how sin has damaged your own life so they can learn from your wisdom. This humble posture may very well open the door of trust. If your child should sin or be sinned against sexually, your goal should always be openness and trust so they tell the truth about what's happening in their lives.

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Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and go with your gut.

As you share God's standard and your concern, lavish your children with affection and encouragement. By doing so you'll be making it abundantly clear that you are the safest person to speak to. Lastly, do not wrongly assume that everything is “just fine” unless they tell you otherwise. With our children, Grace and I often ask the simple, open-ended question, “Is there anything we need to know about”? This helps us to ensure that we are drawing them out to speak to us about literally anything. Our goal is to continually communicate our joy in them, hope for them, and availability to them.

For those wanting to learn more, “How and When to Tell Your Kids About Sex” by [Stan and Brenna Jones](#) (<http://www.amazon.com/When-Tell-Your-Kids-About/dp/160006017X>) may be helpful.