

# Dangers of Not Talking About Sex

by Sharon A. McGee

Can you imagine a parent never teaching a child the dangers of a hot stove, putting little fingers in light sockets, or running out in the street? Yet an equally important and potentially dangerous topic is often unmentioned or barely discussed in the home. The topic is sex and avoiding it leaves your child unaware, unprepared, and unprotected.

Sex is God-given and should be introduced by conversation early in children's lives. Little age-appropriate life lessons about sex and the body make children aware of who they are becoming, the changes that are happening, and the knowledge that sex is something that is OK to talk about. This does not mean explaining the specifics of sex to four year olds, but beginning early to teach children the value of their bodies and themselves. Introducing and maintaining good, open communication in the home where no topic including sex is off limits prepares children for the challenges and dangers they are facing in the world today, especially where sex is concerned.

In families, verbal messages define what is and is not OK to talk about, but families also give nonverbal messages by avoiding subjects. Children learn what parents are willing to talk about and listen to, and they won't revisit sensitive subjects. Sexual matters may be difficult to discuss but Proverbs 22:6 places the responsibility on the parent, Teach a youth about the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. This includes matters of sex and intimacy.

Your teen is talking or listening to someone about sex, usually a peer (who knows little more than they do) or the media that gives them incomplete or inaccurate information. Avoiding or delaying discussions about body changes, bewildering feelings, intimacy, sex, or sexuality sets children up to experience problems. Silence creates a sense of secrecy around sex. This can lead to confusion, experimentation, or victimization by those who take advantage of that vulnerability. Accurate information, communication, and conversation help prepare teens and provide the safety net of supportive parents who are willing to talk about issues relevant to their lives. Pastor Jay Wolf of First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama often speaks to parents and teens about relevant matters, including sex. His philosophy speaks volumes in its simplicity, "Before the pizza and perfume collide you better decide." Help your

teen talk about, think about, and decide sexual boundaries and how to hold them. Once that teen is in a tempting situation, it is often too late to decide what to do or how to handle what is happening. Talking honestly and openly does not create a permissive environment where teens conclude casual sex is OK; it does precisely the opposite. Communication lets children know what you would hope they would seek before making any major decision: education, information, and a discussion of all the issues relevant to that decision. It is time to reinforce Christian values while acknowledging the pervasive and powerful issue of sex that teens face today.

Fashions, movies, music videos, even advertisements are permeated with sexual images and messages. Use all these things as teachable moments with your children. Discuss the messages and what is right and wrong. Explain the beauty of sex and God's design for it in marriage and what that means. Be open to any and all questions. This may require some education on your part. It may mean discussing subjects you never dreamed you would hear or seeing things from a teen's perspective to help resolve their confusion or misinformation.

For example, teens today are being taught and many believe, including those from Christian homes, that having oral and anal sex is not really sex. One would assume since both include the word sex, the concept of it being sexual contact would be clear, but it is not. Society makes it seem OK, no big deal, not sex, and a way to keep their virginity. Discussing oral and anal sex are topics many adults are uncomfortable with.

Also the issue of homosexuality is sometimes avoided and a great deal of confusion can occur here. More teens are experimenting in this area because it is presented to them daily in the media. Talking openly removes some of the secrecy and more importantly, some of the confusion that can occur when lessons are learned from other sources. Those lessons are probably not going to be what you would teach. Recently a young teen asked if she could talk to me because she thought she was a lesbian. She loved her best friend who was female. They hugged, sat together at activities, and spent the night at each other's houses, sleeping in the same bed. The teen felt upset because she believed all these things meant she was a lesbian. Thankfully, she talked and we were able to clarify her feelings and thoughts, much to

her relief. Her family had never talked about any sexual issues, mistakenly believing she was too young, and they had never even considered discussing the topic of homosexuality. This young girl was sent out into her world unprepared and vulnerable. Had she not talked about it, she might well have believed she was gay, acted on that belief and felt alienated. Her parents had good intentions, but the lack of communication and information caused their daughter a great deal of confusion and could have led her in the wrong direction.

Teens need to understand that the changes and feelings happening in their body are normal. Parents cannot pretend it will never be an issue until the wedding night. Guys need to understand about erections, wet dreams, and their response to visual images and how to manage those. Girls need to understand what is happening to their bodies as well, including their confusing emotions, heightened physical response to touch, and menstrual cycles. It is never too late to start communicating. Listen and talk to your teens about every aspect of their bodies, sex, sexuality, intimacy, and all the confusing and wonderful feelings that go along with it. Teach them how their bodies are designed to respond and how response does not have to mean action. Explain to them about victimization and opportunist who prey on the ignorance and innocence of children. Conversation, information, and preparation are their protection. If this type of communication is new for your family, it may take a while for everyone to become comfortable participating. Little talks while driving in the car or life lessons from the latest sexually based television ads are great places to start. If you are a parent who has been talking to your teen about sex since they were young, bravo. Keep it up and be sure all topics are being discussed and your children know they can come to you.

In this fast-paced world of immediate gratification, sexual images, and themes bombard a child's life very early. Predators who would take advantage of a child or teen thrive on ignorance and secrecy. Chaos, confusion, and impulsivity occur in the absence of knowledge. God designed healthy sexuality and sexual relationships.

Help your teen know the joys and responsibilities of sex. How can they move through this difficult developmental stage without having good information? The facts of life should be a consistent part of life so they are woven into a child's character, knowledge, and wisdom. This process of life eases them toward adulthood with more education, safe and secure in their relationships and wise beyond their years. They are then increasingly prepared to challenge the ever-growing infringement of adult issues on those formative, vital years.

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