

Helpful Hints for Parents

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality issued in 1995 by the Pontifical Council on the Family stresses that parents have “the original, primary and inalienable right” and a serious duty to give their children a positive and gradual education in chastity and human sexuality. Since each child is uniquely different, the parent or guardian is in the best positions to determine the appropriate time for providing accurate information that is consistent with the child's physical and spiritual development. Here are ten practical suggestions:

1. It is important to realize that a child's curiosity about sex is normal and usually innocent.
2. Some parents may be uncomfortable talking about this topic. You don't have to be an expert or have all the right answers. How you respond is often as important as what you say.
3. There is really no set way or ideal time to talk to your child about sex. Rather, take advantage of various opportunities to answer a child's questions or to talk about the meaning of life and love. And remember, sexuality education is easier and makes more sense when it is given in the context of your religious and moral values.
4. In answering a child's questions, parents should use words that are neither too explicit nor too vague. Giving too many details to children is counterproductive. But delaying the first information for too long is also imprudent. Parents should not give the impression that sex is something shameful or dirty. Rather, it is a great gift of God who has placed the ability to generate human life, thereby sharing His creative power with us.
5. The media and numerous societal forces exploit sexuality making it difficult, even for adults, to make responsible decisions about sexual behavior. Realize that it is all the more difficult for young people.

6. When discussing the topic of sexuality, especially with teenagers, do not be afraid of disagreements. Try to convey your message without condemning or using verbal attacks. Point out that sexuality involves significant choices which have serious consequences. Praise morally good decisions.

7. Good communication is the mortar that holds family relationships together. The two essential messages in all family communications are:
 - The importance of self-worth
 - The importance of personal responsibility

8. Think of sex as a 9-letter word. S E X U A L I T Y is about the God-given gift of being male or female. Stress the value of healthy interpersonal relationships and the sacredness of human life.

9. Parents should teach that we are called to use our sexuality according to the plan of God in the context of marriage. Insist on the positive value of chastity and its capacity to generate true love for other persons. Only a person who is chaste will know how to be a great lover, whether in marriage or as a single person or in a life consecrated to God and the Church.

10. Expect good results and you will get them.

Lawrence Rilla
Office for Religious Education
Archdiocese of Washington