

Parents & Kids, Talking About Sex ©

TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS — HOMOSEXUALITY

Whether their child asks questions or not, parents have the right and responsibility to be a child's first teachers of human sexuality. Children have asked and unasked questions about sexuality, including about homosexuality. For example, "What's so bad about being gay?" This really has many dimensions – Is homosexuality always a choice? Is it a sin to have homosexual inclinations? Can therapy change homosexual inclinations?

As with any question, the first thing parents need to do is find out what concerns are behind the question and what their child already knows. Parents should be prepared for the insulting slang terms their child may use when asking questions. Even if their child does not use slang, parents can still use this as a teaching opportunity by asking their child what terms they have heard and then discussing the messages these words send and how they can make people feel. Such terms may not only damage another person's dignity, but can also undermine the dignity of the person using the term.

While growing up many boys and girls have homosexual feelings. This does not mean that they are homosexuals. Modern culture may prompt same-sex thoughts, dreams, feelings, crushes, or even sexual experiences. Some children are confused, upset or scared and question whether this means that they are a homosexual person. The term homosexual person describes men or women who have a sexual attraction to people of their same sex over a significant period of time. Adolescent experimentation does not necessarily mean that a child is a homosexual person.

Most parents will not know if their child who is asking questions has homosexual inclinations. Children are often afraid to share their fears, questions and concerns. If children do share their concerns, parents should try to accept the gift of trust that their child is giving them. Revealing a homosexual inclination is psychologically better for a child than suffering from the constant worry that they will be found out. Concerned parents need support from understanding spiritual advisors.

Many parents find it difficult to separate the homosexual inclination from homosexual activity. This is a good opportunity for parents to clarify their own values and beliefs. They can talk with their priest or religious advisor. Before talking with their child parents should be ready to answer these questions:

Is homosexuality always a choice?

"A considerable number of people who experience same-sex attraction experience it as an inclination that they did not choose (Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, USCCB, 2006, p. 7)." There is currently no consensus on the cause of the homosexual inclination (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2357). We must be wary of news or studies which claim such causes particularly those that purport to show a genetic origin or biological basis. These claims are often inconclusive.

It is a sin to have homosexual inclinations?

"While the Church teaches that homosexual acts are immoral, she does distinguish between engaging in homosexual acts and having a homosexual inclination. While the former is always objectively sinful, the latter is not. To the extent that a homosexual tendency or inclination is not subject to one's free will, one is not morally culpable for that tendency. Although one would be morally culpable if one were voluntarily to entertain homosexual temptations or to choose to act on them, simply having the tendency is not a sin (Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, USCCB, 2006, p. 5)."

Parents & Kids, Talking About Sex ©

TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS — HOMOSEXUALITY - page 2

Can therapy change homosexual inclinations?

“There is no consensus on therapy. Some have found therapy helpful. Catholics who experience homosexual tendencies and who wish to explore therapy should seek out the counsel and assistance of a qualified professional who has preparation and competence in psychological counseling and who understands and supports the Church’s teaching on homosexuality. (Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, USCCB, 2006, p. 7).”

What should a parent do if they learn their child may have homosexual inclinations?

Parents can encourage their child not to define herself/himself primarily in terms of their sexual inclination or to participate in “gay subcultures,” which often tend to promote immoral lifestyles. Rather they should encourage their child to form friendships with the wider community. Young people in particular need special encouragement and guidance to seek out a confessor and spiritual director who will support their quest to live a chaste life. *“Every effort should be made to ensure that adolescents have access to age-appropriate professional counseling services that respect Church teaching in matters of human sexuality (Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, USCCB, 2006, p. 22-23).”*

What are persons who have homosexual inclinations called to do?

Like all gifts from God, the power and freedom of sexuality can be channeled toward good or evil. Everyone – the homosexual and the heterosexual person – is called to personal maturity and responsibility. With the help of God's grace, everyone is called to practice the virtue of chastity in relationships. Chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, in the area of human sexuality, properly ordered in a way that values and respects one's own dignity and that of others. It is *“the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression (Pontifical Council for the Family, The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 1995, no. 16).”*

How can a person with homosexual inclinations live a chaste life?

Every person needs training in the virtues and chastity is a virtue that requires special effort. *“The passions are not fixed, unchanging obstacles to moral action.... Repeated good actions will modify the passions that one experiences.... In this effort to train our desires to be in accord with God’s will, as Christians we do not have to rely solely upon our own powers; we have the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. The Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance are essential sources of consolation and aid.”* Reading the Scriptures and daily prayer provide crucial support for the spiritual struggle to lead a chaste life (Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care, USCCB, 2006, p. 8, 9, 13).

See Selected Books and Resources on Homosexuality

- ◆ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, second edition*, 2000 - St Charles Borromeo Catholic Church’s website, www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm, allows users to search the catechism.
- ◆ *The Truth and the Meaning of Human Sexuality*, The Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995
- ◆ *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (USCCB, 2006) at <http://www.usccb.org>
- ◆ *The Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality* by Dr. Joseph and Linda Nicolosi, Intervarsity Press, 2002. Addresses strategies to restore a child's gender identity.