

Parents & Kids, Talking About Sex ©

Tackling Tough Topics - MASTURBATION

"Why is masturbation wrong?"

Masturbation Defined

For young children – Touching or rubbing one's penis or vagina for pleasure is called masturbation. You may hear it called "playing with yourself."

For older children – Masturbation is an immature and self centered response to one's sexual feelings and is always morally wrong. (Single Sex Setting - Grade Eight, The Archdiocese of Washington's *Catechesis on Human Sexuality*)

What does God have to say?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2352, teaches that masturbation is a serious problem. The *Declaration on Sexual Ethics* (Vatican, December 29, 1975) states, "Even if it cannot be proved that Scripture condemns this sin by name, the tradition of the Church has rightly understood it to be condemned in the New Testament when the later speaks of 'impurity,' 'unchasteness' and other vices contrary to chastity and continence." The teachings emphasize that sexual pleasure is intended for mutual self-giving in the context of true love in marriage.

Facts to Consider

1. Masturbation is a selfish use of God's gift of sexuality and for this reason it is wrong.
2. It does not reflect the permanent commitment between a man and a woman to love the other more than oneself. Instead, masturbation is a selfish act of personal gratification.
3. Masturbation treats God's gift of the human body as an object to be used for self enjoyment and pleasure.
4. Masturbation is:
 - progressive, that is, repeated more and more
 - difficult to stop and can become an addiction
 - often surrounded by fantasy and **pornography**
5. The more that a person is focused on self, the more difficult it is to refocus on another.
6. To learn to truly love another, a person needs to practice selflessness and learn how to resist sexual temptations.

Answering Young Children's Questions

Parents need to prepare to discuss masturbation with their children. Although slang terms may make them uncomfortable, a discussion of these terms can help children differentiate between how God intends man and woman to use the gift of sexuality and the way that masturbation can misuse this gift. The slang terms for masturbation and the more clinical terms are far removed from God's intention of mutual self giving in the context of marriage.

Parents need to acknowledge that arousing sexual pleasure by some form of self stimulation can become sinful. At the same time parents need to differentiate between situations when a younger child is half asleep or not thinking about what they are doing and instances when a child is consciously choosing to masturbate for pleasure.

Is masturbation a sin?

Guidance from Fr. Greg Coan, St. Peters-Olney

There are three Latin words that are helpful in answering this question:

- malum (evil)
- peccatum (sin)
- culpa (culpability / fault)

So for example, let's say a two year old comes into a room, picks up a hammer and smashes your big toe. Did the two year old sin? No, because a two year old is incapable of sinning (No peccatum / no culpa). But an evil has taken place, your big toe is really hurting a lot (malum).

Therefore, any time someone masturbates, an evil takes place (malum). This is because it is a selfish act with one's own sexual organs misusing the sexual gift God has given him or her. The sexual gift is given for the exact opposite reason, to give of oneself totally, (selflessly) to another person. So again, any act of masturbation is an evil act (malum).

And if one knows it is wrong, then a sin does take place (peccatum). But then other factors could be involved. Is the person tired? Is the person frustrated? Has the person been unfairly exposed to things that led to it? All these can lessen the culpability involved (culpa) yet it would still be a sin (peccatum).

It is good to tell people that masturbation is an evil and will hurt them, and that it can also hurt their future relationships. It really can become an addiction that overtakes their lives. We are called to give of our lives for God and for others, not to turn inward on self.

Masturbation & Pornography

"What I say to you is: anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his thoughts. (Matthew 5:28)

In *Every Young Man's Battle* Stephen Arterburn & Fred Stoeker state that at least 98 percent of all masturbation involves lustful mental fantasies or pornography. In many instances, pornography encourages the viewer to create an image in his/her mind. This image entices the viewer to fantasize and in time, these images change the way men and women view each other.

How can the masturbation habit be changed?

In *The Courage to be Chaste* Father Benedict Groeschel refers to masturbation as “auto-eroticism.” He states that this sin is a symptom of feeling lonely, frustrated, anxious, bored or just bad about ourselves. He sees auto eroticism as a frequent symptom of a life that is too empty of the things that really matter. Fr. Groeschel recommends “crowding sin out” by filling our lives with so much real love, goodness and happiness that we no longer feel the need to escape.

Mary Beth Bonacci, a nationally known chastity speaker, recommends a deliberate program of rearranging one’s life to reduce the pull of the habit of masturbation.

1. **Confession and reconciliation** - While acknowledging compulsion, habit or addiction may lessen an individual’s culpability before God, she emphasizes the need for frequent confession. Confession is healing in taking our sin away. It brings an abundance of grace and Divine help as it moves us closer to God and further from our sins.
2. **Prayer and Sacraments** – Chastity is not easy but the power to live chastity comes from God, not us. We need to pray fervently for chastity and let the Eucharist heal our guilt, shame and sinfulness.
3. **Real Love** – The temptation to sexual sin is usually the strongest when real love is weakest. To break this cycle we need to fill our lives with healthy, loving, holy relationships based on recognizing the image and likeness of God in ourselves and others.
4. **Goals** –What have you always wanted to accomplish? Define it and do it! “The enthusiasm, the sense of achievement. The self-esteem boost – it’ll do wonders for reducing the need to close in on yourself.”
5. **Therapy** – Fr. Groeschel says that “sexual self-control is often the weakest link in an individual’s personality and control system. When things go badly or when one is under great pressure, undesirable sexual behavior is likely to occur (page 46).” As long as those issues remain, the temptation will remain. A good Catholic/Christian therapist can help.
6. **Exercise** – Lots and lots of exercise. Works off energy.

“When a person’s efforts to be chaste are continually realized, something beautiful happens – something that has to be experienced to be appreciated. There is not only a sense of accomplishment, but also a growing awareness of Christ’s presence and of intimacy with Him in the soul...only one who has experienced this can believe it.” (The Courage to be Chaste, p. 98)

Every Young Man’s Battle by Stephen Arterburn & Fred Stoeker, Random House, 2002

The Courage to be Chaste, Rev. Benedict Groeschel, Paulist Press, 1985

Real Love Productions – A series on the “M” word in Mary Beth Bonacci’s chastity articles at www.reallove.net