

Tackling Tough Topics - Reverence for Life

"How can parents help Children Develop a Reverence for Life?"

Evangelium Vitae

"It is an illusion to think that we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and in their close interconnection."

Pope John Paul II

Key Message: The Goodness of the Body

- God only gives good gifts. "Designed by God" – Ask your child, "Would you rather have a car designed by Ford or Honda or a car designed by God?" Ask why God's car would be better. (could trust it, safer, unique, freely given, etc.) Remind him/her that our bodies are designed by a loving Father.
- In the story of creation the phrase, "God saw how good it was" is repeated after each day of creation until the creation of man and woman (in God's own image). Then there is an important addition. Instead of referring to the creation of man and woman as good, the Bible says, "he found it very good" (Gen 1:31).
- *Hail Mary* – "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus." Children are often amazed to realize that baby Jesus grew in Mary's womb just as they grew in their own mother's. Parents can explain that before a baby is born, he has a special home inside his mother. This is called the womb and it is where he grows until he is big enough to be born. (Archdiocese of Washington Guidelines – Grade 1)
- "...you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works" (Ps.139:13-14).
- "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame (Gen. 2: 24-25)." When a husband and wife love each other more than they love themselves and are open to the transmission of human life, there is never any shame.

Original Sin - Is sex good or bad?

- Genesis 2:17 "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" – How does a child who runs around as an innocent "naked baby" grow into a fourth grader who says, "I wish you would not talk about our bodies - they are disgusting." Please protect your child from the risks of unsupervised television and internet use.
- Genesis 3: 7 shows what happened after Adam and Eve sin, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

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Original Sin - Is sex good or bad? – continued

- After Adam and Eve sin, they feel different about God, their bodies and each other. If the gift of sexuality is not used as God intends, a person feels differently about God (Adam & Eve hide), different about their body (they are ashamed) and different about each other (Adam blames Eve - he never says he is sorry). Reconciliation gives us forgiveness and grace to help us remain closer to God.
- When children are taught that God's plan for the gift of sexuality is to love one person more than you love yourself and to welcome the possibility of a new life, they begin to understand why masturbation and homosexual activity cannot be part of God's plan.
- The gift of sexuality can be described as the most beautiful gift package you can imagine with the most wonderful ribbons and bows and a tag that says, "Do not open until marriage." (Molly Kelly)

What can a parent do?

- Emphasize that questions and concerns are normal.
- Use parent-child communication to help children develop virtues & skills.
- Know what is age-appropriate for your child. Differentiate between puberty education and sexuality/abstinence/chastity education.
- Encourage your child's school or religious education program to sponsor parent and parent-child programs.
- Form a supportive parent network of families who believe sexuality is a gift from God that deserves respect.
- Use this network to find baby sitters who can be your child's "role models."
- Have a "code word" your child can use to summon you if pornography or inappropriate sexual activity becomes part of a sleep-over or a party.

Using the Correct Terminology

- Most important parts of our body are the parts that make us a girl or boy.
- We cover these parts out of respect.
- Correct anatomical terms are more respectful than slang.
- If children are not taught the correct terms for sexual body parts, they may conclude some body parts are bad or dirty.

Being an "askable" parent - See Home page "What should I say?"

- Parents can create an atmosphere that gives "permission to ask" questions.
- You never want your child to think he/she made a mistake asking you a question.
- Know the frequently asked questions. See "Kids' Questions" on website
- Learn age-appropriate answers. See "Parents' Answers" on the website
- Help your child find the best ways to ask you questions. Sometimes writing a note is easier than asking directly. Remember the car can be the best place to talk.

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Important Reminders

- Unless you plan differently, you may “parent” your children the same way you were raised. You may repeat the same mistakes your parents made.
- Children learn by what they see not by what you tell them. You are their role model. They note your prayer times, language, dress, TV shows and internet sites.
- Examine your beliefs and values so you can integrate religious education into sexuality education BEFORE your child’s school covers the content.

The Virtue of Modesty

- God’s wonderful gift deserves respect and protection.
- The virtue includes language, reading, conduct, gestures and thought.
- Emphasize the message that clothing choices can give.
- Encourage a good habit early when sons and daughters are six or seven years old and you control the shopping.

Defeating Pornography – Suggestions from Fr. Charley Piatt

1. Pope John Paul II's *The Theology of the Body* presents God’s message about the sacredness of the body and of human relationships. See “God and Sex” on the website
2. Viewing pornography does not prove you a real man or woman (a mature lover). It shows that you do not appreciate the power and beauty of true relationships. You’re your child to something higher. Everyone should learn to appreciate the beauty of all people, not just picture perfect models.
3. Continue with the argument that pornography is degrading. Depending on the age I might follow with what would you think if the model was your sister/brother.
4. How about considering that pornography might limit your ability to sense beauty and be a soulful companion to members of the opposite sex. Viewing pornography shows an inability enter into real relationships.
5. More than a few youth have expressed a thought that viewing pornography reflects immaturity. I think we can build on this.
6. Note: more than a few young women view pictures of a pornographic nature of men.

“Media Manager” Websites

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops(www.usccb.org) provides reviews of theatrical movies on network television plus movie and family DVD/Video reviews. **The Parents Television Council (PTC)** (www.parentstv.org) provides a *Family Guide to Prime Time Television* with facts to make informed viewing decisions for their family **National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families** equips and motivates parents to defend God’s truths about sexuality (www.nationalcoalition.org)