

# General Principles for Teaching Sexuality by Developmental Stage

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As you read through these principles, it is helpful to remember that one stage builds upon the next and that the stages of growth and development often overlap.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD** Parents are called to:

- Provide a wholesome and safe environment – especially through the monitoring of media.
- Convey to their children that they are love, valued, cherished and prized.
- Provide first experiences of God’s love communicated through the love of family members for one another and for them.
- Help children develop a personal relationship with God, especially through prayer.
- Give children proper names for body parts.
- Instruct children to respect and care for their own bodies (hygiene, healthy living).
- Educate children to respect the body of others.
- Teach what is good and wholesome touch and what is not.
- Be alert to nonverbal communication as well as direct questions.
- Be discreet about own sexual behaviors.
- Be selective in choosing care givers.
- Answer questions honestly, correctly and with language children understand.
- Spend significant time with each child.
- Provide opportunities for children to witness loving relationships.

**CHILDHOOD** Parents are called to:

- Teach children about their developing bodies and help them to understand basic physiological processes.
- Help children develop habits of caring for the body.
- Assist children to understand the importance of modesty, self-discipline and legitimate privacy.
- Affirm the equality of men and women in word, attitude and action.
- Help children identify genuine and appropriate expressions of love.
- Talk to children about the media and how it portrays values and attitudes that are not aligned with the Catholic Church (sexist attitudes, sex is recreational rather than sacred, sexual orientation, family models, cohabitation).

**EARLY ADOLESCENCE** Parents are called to:

- Teach respect for the changing body.
- Help adolescent deal with their own maturation in all arenas (physical, personal, social, emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual).

- Reaffirm the value of personal maturity.
- Reassure the adolescent that sexual attraction is natural and normal.
- Instruct on proper hygiene and health care as the adolescent become adults.
- Assist in the development of healthy eating and regular exercise routines.
- Monitor and discourage the potential development of risk behaviors.
- Share the basic biological processes of physical maturation.
- Teach the basic facts of human fertility and reproduction.
- Strongly encourage the development of chastity.
- Reassure the adolescent that they have the capacity to love as well as be loved.
- Assist the youth in recognizing the role and model of parents and family regarding love and relationships.
- Instruct the adolescent in the appropriate ways of expressing love physically and emotionally.
- Teach adolescent that Christian marriage is the context in which love is expressed fully by means of the body.
- Teach adolescent how to deal morally with pornographic literature, abusive language, and the exploitation of sex and sexuality as it is portrayed in the media.
- Inform the youth about the Church's teachings and pastoral approaches to the issue of masturbation and homosexuality.

ADOLESCENCE Parents are called to:

- Provide the biological facts about human sexuality and reproductive processes of the body.
- Instruct adolescent in the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage and sexual activity.
- Provide the youth with a thorough explanation of the nature of love.
- Distinguish the meaning of sexuality and sex from a Catholic perspective.
- Encourage youth to adopt Jesus as a model for personal maturity and committed friendship.
- Instruct the youth on the nature and effects of sin, especially those related to sexuality.
- Reinforce the Catholic Church teaching that genital sexual intimacy finds its proper place only in the context of marriage.
- Teach and model wholesome personal relationships with the same and opposite sex.
- Provide instruction on engagement, marriage and parenting that is based on Catholic teaching.
- Instruct the youth on the Church's teaching concerning masturbation, non-marital sex and contraception.
- Provide for explanation of the Church's teaching about reproductive technologies and sterilization.

\*From: *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*

(Please refer to the *Growing in Love* Resource Packet for specific information about puberty.)