



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.

(Education in sexuality)...which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them.

~ Familiaris Consortio #37



The basic yearning to be in relationship with another comes from your sexuality. Sexuality is a fundamental, God-given characteristic of each person which allows for the full exchange of love. It is rooted in our gender – either male or female – and is ordered to the procreation of children and to the giving and receiving of love. Sexuality is part of humanity which God saw as being “very good.”

“Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul.” (CCC 2332) How true this is! Sexuality impacts our emotions, our capacity to love and create new life, and our ability to form bonds with all persons. Clearly, sexuality is part of God’s plan for us. It is what causes us to relate to one another and to live in community rather than in isolation. Sexuality is an essential part of who we are and it is meant to be cherished and respected.

Sexuality distinguishes man from woman, not only at a physical level but also emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Beginning in infancy, sexuality makes it possible for each gender to develop either maleness or femaleness. And, as it continues to develop, sexuality allows the genders to complement each other. This complementarity fully reveals the deep mystery of love revealed through what is given and how it is received.

Sexuality is meant to be expressed properly and chastely at all stages of development. Children, for instance, express their sexuality through loving actions that are sincerely given and tenderly received from others. Young adults and those who are not married also express their sexuality through genuine, selfless relationships that “will the good of the other.” For those who are married, sexuality is rightly and correctly expressed genitally through the conjugal act. Truly, the underlying purpose of sexuality is the acceptance and donation of love between human persons.

One of the greatest challenges of parenting happens when a child becomes aware of the physical expression of love between a man and a woman. It is in this awakening that the young person becomes aware that the sexual union of a husband and wife has the power to bring new life into existence. In many instances, the youth will desire the good of physical intimacy long before they are ready for marriage. The longing to “become one flesh” with another often precedes marriage by several years. This presents the youth and his or her parents with a true struggle and conflict. In order to realize and respect the deep meaning of the role of the body in human sexuality (giving oneself and receiving another as gift) the youth needs to acquire and practice the virtue of chastity.

If you think back to the section on *Developing Virtue*, you will recall that chastity is the virtue or firm habit that allows a person to express their sexuality according to God’s plan. When developed, chastity puts a person in control of his or her sexual appetite rather than being controlled by it. It preserves one’s capacity to discover mutual respect within relationship and the ability to receive another as a gift from God.

Chastity keeps love pure. It strengthens one’s ability to avoid temptation, respect God’s plan for human sexuality and appreciate the dignity of each person. Chastity makes it possible to freely choose sexual expression in ways that are aligned with God’s will. It is called “an apprenticeship in self mastery” because it takes time and effort to fully develop this habit.

Sexuality is part of God’s plan for human persons. It is what causes us to relate to one another and to live in community. Sexuality provides us with a longing to give ourselves fully and to accept others as gifts. It is an essential part of who we are – a part of us that needs to be cherished and respected through the practice of chastity.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

Sexuality is the ability to give and receive _____ as _____ or _____. It is part of _____, and is seen by God as “_____.”

Parents are the primary educators on the issues of _____ and have the privilege and _____ to share the Church’s wonderful message of life and love with their children.

The four guiding principles regarding information on human sexuality are;

1. Recognize that each child is _____ and _____.
2. When discussing any information about sexuality, _____ should be part of the explanation.
3. Sexuality should always be framed as a _____ created by God that allows us to grow in holiness.
4. Provide all information about sexuality with _____, but clearly at the _____ time.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. Sexuality is defined as “giving and receiving” rather than “giving and taking”. What is the difference between “receiving” and “taking”?
2. How does the definition of sexuality presented in this program differ from the cultural view of sexuality?
3. How did your parents teach you about sexuality? How did their approach impact your ability to give and receive love as God intends?
4. What challenges do parents face in teaching sexuality to their children in today’s culture?
5. What benefits do you see in being the primary educator for your children in matters of sexuality?

Make a Plan

Teaching human sexuality to your children begins with foundational principles that include much more than an explanation about human anatomy and physiology. Four lists of key principles are shown below. The lists are grouped by age categories. As you read each list, ask yourself if each principle is part of your daily family life. If the principle is integrated into your family's life, place a plus sign (+) in the left hand column. If it is not part of your daily life, place a minus sign (-) in the left hand column. It is helpful to remember that the principles from one stage of development build upon the next and that the stages of maturation often overlap.

When you have completed the assessment, look at the principles that you marked with a minus sign. Select several that you want to incorporate into your family's life. Spend time with your spouse or mentor discussing ways that you might build the selected principles into your daily life.

During the early elementary school years, how well do I...	
	Provide a wholesome, safe and holy environment for my children.
	Pray with and for my children.
	Establish healthy habits of hygiene, diet, and exercise for my family.
	Convey to my children that they are loved for who they are rather than for what they do.
	Monitor all the media used by my children.
	Use proper names for body parts, especially genitalia.
	Demonstrate discretion regarding my own sexual behaviors.
	Demonstrate modesty in my dress, language and actions.
	Answers questions related to human sexuality in a way that is simple and respectful of my child's innocence.
	Develop family expectations that are based on prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.
	Commit to sharing several family meals each week with my family.
	Show my family that human relationships matter more than material gain.
	Respect the dignity of my children verbally, physically, and emotionally.
	Respect the dignity of all people verbally, physically, and emotionally.

During the late elementary school years, how well do I...	
	Pay attention to my children's gradual development towards adulthood (physically, psychologically, and spiritually).
	Understand Catholic Church teachings about human sexuality.
	Prepare myself to teach the basic facts about human fertility and procreation to my children.
	Listen attentively to my children.
	Help my children accept and love others who are different from them.
	Develop and maintain just rules on activities that occur with friends.
	Instruct my children about the harm caused by bullying.

While my children are in middle school, how well do I...	
	Share the basic biological processes of physical maturation over several discussions.
	Teach the basic facts of human fertility and procreation.
	Expect that all sexual activity is to be saved for marriage.
	Answer questions on human sexuality and chastity with well-reasoned arguments that do not overburden the child.
	Know when and how to say "NO" to my children.
	Address the positive and negative issues associated with friendship and dating.
	Discuss the virtue of chastity with my children and develop actions that will lead to purity in thought, word and action.
	Address the abuse and misuse of the gift of human sexuality (e.g. the sins against chastity like masturbation, non-marital sexual activity, pornography).
	Monitor and discourage the development of risk-taking behaviors.
	Monitor and discourage the development of immoral behaviors.
	Speak up when the media portrays immorality as acceptable (gender neutrality, sex as recreational rather than sacred, cohabitation, verbal – sexual – physical abuse)

While my children are in high school, how well do I..	
	Present the Church's teachings on human love and life.
	Reassure my children that they have the capacity to love as well as be loved just as God intends.
	Defend life from the moment of conception to natural death.
	Talk about vocational choices with your young adult.
	Maintain a strong and faithful marriage and family life.
	Uphold the Catholic Church teachings that marriage is an institution created by God which unites one man and one woman together for life.
	Understand and share the teachings of the Church on contraception, natural family planning and cohabitation.

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