

A photograph of a diverse family of four—a father, a mother, and two children—huddled together and smiling warmly at the camera. They are outdoors, with a soft, hazy background suggesting a beach or park setting. The father is in the center, with a beard and a blue shirt. The mother is on the right, wearing a green and white striped shirt. The two children, a girl and a boy, are in the foreground, also smiling. The girl is wearing a plaid shirt, and the boy is wearing a blue shirt.

THE CHRISTIAN SEX EDUCATOR

Teaching Teens about Sex— The Parent Guidebook

FOR CHILDREN & TEENS AGES 10-18

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YOUR MAP TO SUCCESS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Alright, my friend. It's time to dive in!

In this first section, I am going to provide you with ten principles to guide you in these conversations with your children.

Now, before you review the list, remember that none of us will do all of these things perfectly. The good news is that every effort is a win. Give yourself all sorts of grace as you work to apply the principles outlined.

Let's get started.

1

REPLACE "THE TALK" WITH CONSISTENT, INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS.

Traditionally, parents have talked to their kids about sex in a single, long, serious conversation. It's time to shift from "the talk" model to a more **consistent, gradual approach to sex education** in the home.

Do your best to discuss things like bodies, consent, and sex **early and often**. (For children under 10, get the Teaching Kids guide [HERE](#)). **Continue these conversations throughout your child's life.**

Try to avoid making these conversations feel overly formal or serious, as that approach can both intimidate children and discourage them from coming to you with questions. Consider bringing up these topics during a car ride, on an ice-cream date, at the dinner table, or during bedtime. **Children may be more inclined to both listen and contribute** to these conversations if they occur in normal, everyday settings.

In two-parent homes, **both parents should be involved with the sex education of all of children, regardless of gender**. Your children need to know that it's ok to talk to both of you and that you are both comfortable discussing the development and experiences of all bodies.

2

TEACH HEALTHY SEXUALITY, NOT JUST WHAT TO AVOID.

Much of the sex education taught in homes, especially within religious families, is focused on what behaviors parents want children to avoid. While it is important to communicate family values around sex and sexuality (see [Family Values](#) section), **focusing solely on the “forbidden” behaviors leads to an unbalanced view of sexuality.**

It is just as important for children to understand the goodness and joy associated with their bodies and with sex as it is for them to understand risks, things to avoid, etc. Things like consent, puberty, healthy expressions of physical affection, and sex within the context that aligns with your family values **should be celebrated.**

Make *healthy* sexual development a focus of the conversations you have with your kids, in addition to discussing unhealthy or unwanted behaviors. Don't worry, I'll help you with this in later sections.

3

USE CORRECT TERMINOLOGY FOR BODY PARTS.

If your home growing up was anything like mine, you likely had little nicknames for private parts (e.g., pee-pee, fine china, downstairs). While these may seem relatively harmless, referring to genitals with nicknames **communicates to children that these body parts are “taboo”** and shouldn't really be talked about.

Using correct terminology promotes a healthy understanding and acceptance of one's body and helps children understand that their bodies are nothing to be ashamed of. It is also an important safeguard against abuse. **Your children should know the correct name for all body parts** (vulva, vagina, penis, testicles, scrotum, etc.).

Bonus tip: If your children are older and correct terminology hasn't been used in your home up to this point, I would encourage you to **address that directly** with your kids. Say something like, “I have recently learned how important it is to use correct terms for body parts. So, I want to review them together and start using correct terminology in our home.”



How to Respond

TO TEEN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Most, if not all, of us will experience times **when our children engage in sexual behaviors that we do not agree with** or want them to be involved in. The way that we respond in these situations can have a significant impact on our children's future behavior and whether they choose to share this kind of information with us moving forward or not.

When you learn of a child's engagement in sexual behaviors, **here are some guidelines for how to respond:**

1

Pause and take a deep breath before responding. It's natural to be hit with a wave of emotions in these situations. Try to get those emotions in check before discussing what happened. Responding in anger will not serve either of you.

2

Seek first to understand. Try saying something like, "I'm worried about you and how this [specific behavior] might impact you. Can you help me understand how this happened?" In a calm, kind tone, ask your child questions

TEACHING AGES 10–12

A HOW-TO GUIDE



Overview of topics to cover during this stage

CHILDREN AGES 10 - 12



- 1 **Puberty:** What to expect and how to navigate it
- 2 **Hygiene:** How to care for their changing body
- 3 **Body Esteem:** How to view their body in healthy ways
- 4 **Anatomy:** Male & Female sexual and reproductive parts
- 5 **Sex Basics:** The mechanics of sex and reproduction
- 6 **Healthy Sex:** The characteristics of healthy sexual relationships
- 7 **Family Values:** Beliefs about bodies and sex
- 8 **Arousal:** How to recognize and manage physical arousal
- 9 **Consent:** How to give and receive consent for touch
- 10 **Pornography:** How to recognize and respond to it

DIVING DEEPER

WHAT TO TEACH

In this section, you will find specific ideas and principles that you can teach your children within the topics outlined above. You may choose to teach additional concepts that are not included or to teach your children differently than you see here. That is just fine! These are general guidelines, not scripts. Utilize them in whatever way is useful.

Let's dive in.

1

PUBERTY: WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO NAVIGATE IT

Most children will begin puberty during this stage. You can help them understand what to expect, how to navigate it, and how these changes are ultimately a very good thing (even though they might feel scary and unusual at first). **Puberty is something to be celebrated!**

Teach *all* children about what puberty means for both boys and girls. It's important that they understand what their siblings and peers are experiencing and how to be sensitive to that experience. **It's especially important for boys to understand menstruation**, including what they can do to help their menstruating siblings and peers (e.g., letting them know if there is blood on their clothing, standing up when teasing occurs, carrying menstrual products for emergencies).

Changes that girls will experience with puberty: menstruation, vaginal discharge, breast development, body hair growth (specifically pubic and armpit hair), widening hips, skin changes, hormonal fluctuations (that can result in emotional variations), a growth spurt.

Menstrual hygiene is an important part of puberty education for young girls. Help them to understand different ways that a period can be managed (pads, tampons, menstrual cup/disc, period underwear), how to clean their body while on their period, and how to clean blood-stained underwear and clothing (it happens to everyone!).

Changes that boys will experience with puberty: Deepening voice, facial and body hair growth, muscle development, skin changes, reproductive organ development (enlargement of the scrotum and testes, lengthening of the penis, testicles begin to produce sperm, ejaculation becomes possible, more frequent erections).

During this period, boys will also start to experience **nocturnal emissions** (wet dreams). Help your boys to understand that they are experiencing an orgasm while sleeping, which is totally normal, and that they have done nothing wrong when the nocturnal emissions do occur. Teach them how to clean bedding properly to avoid staining.

Note: Girls and women can also experience orgasms while sleeping. This can be a confusing experience for your daughters and may be something you want to discuss with them.

2

HYGIENE: HOW TO CARE FOR THEIR CHANGING BODY

At the onset of puberty, most individuals will experience a significant increase in body odor. Teach your children how to clean their bodies correctly and thoroughly and to manage body odor in healthy ways.

How to correctly clean the genitals for boys: Wash the penis, scrotum, and anus with a gentle, fragrance-free soap (Dove sensitive skin bar soap is a great, inexpensive option). On the head of the penis, it's best just to use warm water. If the foreskin is intact (aka they haven't been circumcised), make sure they know to pull back the foreskin and gently wash underneath it. It's also important to dry underneath the foreskin before getting dressed, as that can help avoid infection.

How to correctly clean the genitals for girls: Wash the outer labia, inner-thighs, and anus with a gentle fragrance-free soap. Wash the inner labia, clitoris, urethra, and vaginal opening with warm water. Soap shouldn't be used on these areas as it can disrupt the pH of the vagina, leading to odors and possible infection. The vaginal canal is self-cleaning and should never be washed. The white discharge that comes out of the vagina is a sign that it's successfully cleaning itself.

You can also use these conversations as a chance to chat about things like deodorant and how to remove body hair (if they would like to). If they do, I recommend using a trimmer ([like this one](#)), rather than a razor to avoid razor burn and irritation.

FAMILY VALUES

ADDITIONAL TOPICS



IDENTIFYING AND TEACHING

Family Values

It is vital that children and teens develop a **sense of morality** around bodies, consent, and sex. However, because beliefs and opinions about sex and sexuality are **so personal and varied**, it is impossible for me to create a guide outlining *exactly* what you should teach children when it comes to sexual morality and values.

The information provided up to this point in this guide has been focused on what I consider to be **the must-haves of sex education**—things I believe everyone should be taught.

It will be up to you to determine what *additional* family values you wish to communicate to your children in this space. In this section, we will cover **several topics that parents should discuss** with tweens and teens, but **about which teachings will differ** based on personal and religious beliefs. Under each topic, I will provide information to help you decide what you want to teach and how to do so.

For example, in the section on masturbation, we will review ways to teach your child if you believe that masturbation is a healthy behavior at any age, or how to discuss it if you are hoping your child will avoid the behavior. **The values themselves are totally up to you.** I am here to help you to teach things that align with your values in a healthy way.

Remember that **our feelings about sex and sexuality will form the foundation for the sex education our children receive from us**—whether we realize it or not. If we view sex as a source of joy, strength, beauty, and love, our children will likely inherit those beliefs. If we believe that our personal sexuality is something to fear or repress, is a source of sin or shame, or that sex is a space where people take advantage of each other, those beliefs will color the sex education that we offer. **Investing in your own healthy beliefs** about sex will be such a blessing to your children.

TEACHING TEENS ABOUT WHEN TO HAVE SEX

If I asked 100 people about when the “right time” to have sex in a relationship is, the answers would range from “right from the start” to “never” and everything in between. Some of you believe in waiting for marriage, others believe that sex is an important part of a relationship prior to marriage. I want to help you teach your children in healthy ways, whatever your hopes are for them regarding the timing of sex.

Use the subsections below that best align with **your beliefs and values**.

DECIDING WHAT TO TEACH

It’s easy for us to fall into patterns of teaching our children exactly what we were taught about sex growing up, whatever that is. And while I will absolutely cheer you on if that is what you want to do, I am going to encourage you to spend some time exploring your beliefs on this topic and **purposefully choosing what you want to pass on**.

As a part of this exploration, I would also encourage you to consider if you have any shame attached to your own sexuality or sexual relationships that may impact how and what you teach your children. If you, like me, grew up in purity culture and need help **identifying and replacing negative beliefs about sex** with truth and hope, I highly recommend the book *[The Great Sex Rescue](#)* by Christian author Sheila Gregoire. It is a phenomenal read that is supportive of your faith without the sexual shame.

Regardless of what you teach about sexual timing, it’s important for all individuals to learn that **sex can and should be a very good, happy thing**. It should be enjoyable for both individuals involved and should never be painful, even the first time. And, of course, sex should only happen when both parties give their enthusiastic and ongoing consent.

If you’re curious about current **trends in beliefs about the timing of sex** in the United States, you can find U.S. data from 2020 in [this article](#) from the Pew Research Center.

Parents, take a few minutes to consider and record your personal beliefs about the timing of sex in relationships. If applicable, discuss these questions with your spouse, partner, or co-parent.

What were you taught about the timing of sex growing up? How did that impact you as a teenager? What about as an adult?

What do you currently believe about the timing of sex? How do those beliefs differ from what you were taught growing up?

How do you want your children to feel when you discuss this topic? What are ways you can help facilitate that experience for them?

What do you want your children to understand about the timing and purposes of sex? What role do you want sex to play in their lives?

TEACHING TO WAIT UNTIL THEY FEEL READY & SAFE

If your primary hope is that your teen will wait to have sex until they feel **ready, excited about it, and safe** with the person that they have chosen, express those feelings to them. Remind them of the characteristics of truly safe sexual relationships outlined in the section for teens ages 13–15.

Remind them of the risks associated with having sex and measures that they can take to mitigate those risks. You may also want to encourage them to **consider the potential for pregnancy**, if applicable, when choosing a sexual partner. Thinking about how that person might respond if a pregnancy occurs is an important step to take before engaging in sex.

TEACHING TO WAIT FOR A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

If you want to encourage your children to wait to have sex until they are within a committed, long-term relationship, here are some things to consider including in your conversations about sex and sexual timing.

Explain to your child **what sex can be**—that is has the potential to be one of the most exciting, connecting, meaningful parts of a relationship. When you have sex with someone that you truly care about and who cares about you, it contributes to how good sex can be.

Having sex within a committed relationship is also a good way to **mitigate some of the risks** associated with sex. The fewer sexual partners you have, the less likely you are to contract a sexually transmitted infection.

It's also always important to consider the risk of pregnancy, if applicable. Waiting until you are in a healthy, committed relationship to have sex means that, if pregnancy does occur, you will be navigating that experience **with someone you trust and care about** deeply. Encourage teens to consider what that experience would be like compared to navigating an unplanned pregnancy alone or with someone they are not in a relationship with.

Keep in mind as you discuss the risks associated with sex that **the goal is not to scare your child out of having sex**. Rather, it is to provide them with the information that they need to make an informed decision.

It may also be helpful to discuss with your child some of the potential benefits of waiting to have sex within a committed relationship. Several research studies have identified positive outcomes associated with a later transition into sexual activity.

For example, the researchers that conducted [this study](#) in 2010 found that the longer the couples waited to have sex, the better their sexual quality, communication and relationship satisfaction. [Another study](#) published in 2012 found that individuals who had sex for the first time after age 19 reported lower levels of relationship dissatisfaction in their marital or cohabiting relationship at the time of the study, compared to those who had sex for the first time during adolescence.

I am not suggesting that teens will be overly concerned with data about sexual timing. But providing them with some information about the benefits of waiting can help them develop a picture of **what they want sex to be like when they do have it**, rather than simply considering when they want to have it.

TEACHING TO WAIT UNTIL THEY ARE MARRIED

If you want to encourage your children to wait to have sex until they are married, here are some things to consider as you prepare for those conversations (in addition to information included in the committed relationship subsection above).

Note: Because I am Christian and most of the members of my community who are teaching their children to wait until marriage are Christian as well, **this section includes teachings from the Bible**. If you are not Christian but want to teach your children to wait for marriage, I hope that most of the info in this section will still be helpful and applicable for you.

Let's first discuss **messages to avoid** and then I will include information on **what you can teach instead**. The first thing I am going to encourage you to do is **throw out any of the "permanent damage" metaphors** that you may have heard or been taught growing up (e.g., the wilted rose, chewed gum, nails in a board). These metaphors are incredibly harmful and, within a Christian belief system, completely inaccurate.

Having sex before marriage does not make a person damaged goods. It does not make them unable to give their full selves to a future spouse. Consider those who are victims of sexual assault—many of these individuals have lived with overwhelming shame as a result of the permanent damage myth. **Please, parents, do not use these metaphors.**

The **second message I am going to discourage** you from including in these conversations is the idea that a person's virginity or "purity" is the greatest gift that they can offer a future spouse. We do our teens an incredible disservice when we teach this. The greatest gift that our child will offer a future spouse is the child *themselves*. All that they are—their goodness, personality, laughter, kindness, and quirks, not to mention their undying love and commitment. We can absolutely teach our children the importance of and purposes for sex without communicating that their virginity is the most important thing they can offer a spouse.

With those out of the way, **how do we encourage our children to wait until marriage?** My advice—tell them the truth and share your faith.

The truth is, we do not know exactly why God wants us to wait until marriage to have sex. But, we believe that sex within marriage is His way. We learn from 1 John 4:7&8 that **"God is love"** and that **"love is from God."** If our hope is to express and experience love in its truest, most joyful form, God's way is the surest way to make that happen.

As humans, we want to experience **love, attention, and belonging**. These desires may be especially salient for teenagers. Sex can seem to some like a way to experience those things. The draw is absolutely understandable. You can help your children to recognize that their desire to feel loved and accepted is completely normal. Help them fulfill that need in healthy ways, including developing a relationship with God that is overflowing with unconditional love rather than shame.

Someday, sex can be something that helps your child **experience and express love more deeply** than ever before. It can be joyful, fun, connecting, pleasurable, and vulnerable. But for sex to be all that it can be, it needs to be experienced with someone who loves them and has committed their life to them. And, it needs to be something that they work on together, prioritizing the experience and joy of both individuals.

Share with your children your **personal experiences and faith** about waiting for marriage. If you didn't wait and wish you would have, consider sharing that with them. If you did wait and are glad you did, that can also be a powerful message. Express your hopes for them and for their future. Absolutely no shame needed.

PREVENTING ASSAULT

A HOW-TO GUIDE



A STEP-BY-STEP

PREVENTION GUIDE

1

ESTABLISH OPEN COMMUNICATION

This is something that we have discussed several times in this guide, I know. It's just *that* important. Do what you can to help your children understand that you are a safe place to come with questions and concerns. **Create a safe and supportive environment.** Remind your children often that you love to listen to what they are feeling, thinking, and learning.

One thing that can encourage openness in your family is to **discourage secrets**. There will be some things (like birthday presents) that won't be shared for a time. Try to refer to those types of things as **surprises rather than secrets**. Help your children distinguish between the two things. Surprises are always good, happy things that we keep to ourselves just for a short amount of time. Eventually everyone will find out! Secrets are not always happy and never get to be shared. Help your children understand that **adults should never ask children to keep secrets**. If they do, teach your child to tell a parent or safe adult as soon as possible.

Help your children understand that **abusers will say all kinds of things** to stop a victim from telling a trusted adult. No matter what a person says, **you should always tell a parent!** Even if the abuser says something like:

- Your mom or dad won't love you anymore if they find out.
- You made me do that; you're the naughty one.
- If you tell on me, I'll get in SO much trouble. You don't want that to happen, do you?
- If you tell, I'll do something bad to you/your family.
- If you tell, I won't ever be your friend again/give you anymore gifts/hang out with you anymore.

When a child comes to you to tell you something difficult (even if it's not sexual in nature), commend them for doing so. Example: "I am so glad that you told me that. It took a lot of courage to say something." If applicable, **please vocalize to your child that you believe what they are telling you**—especially in cases of assault.

10

HELP YOUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THAT
ASSAULT IS NEVER THEIR FAULT

One of the best things you can do for your children in this space is to help them understand that if anything has happened or ever does happen to them, **they are not to blame**. Reassure children often that abuse and assault are never the fault of the victim. In religious families, teach that victims *never* need to repent or be forgiven for assault.

Help teen understand that **nothing they can do or wear or say** makes assault their fault or responsibility. Assault is not their fault if they were showing a lot of skin. Assault is not their fault if they were drinking or using drugs. Assault is not their fault if they were hanging out with people that they knew were dangerous. Assault is not their fault if they didn't fight back. It is never, ever their fault. **They need to hear this.**

Another thing you will want to address is that victims often feel guilty about experiencing sexual arousal or pleasure during a non-consensual sexual encounter. **Predators will often use this as a manipulation tactic** to keep the victim quiet. For example, they might say something like, "You obviously wanted it just as much as I did."

This is something that I would address with your teen directly. Our bodies are created to respond to sexual cues. **Sometimes our body and our mind are not on the same page.** Your body can experience arousal (e.g., an erection, pleasure, orgasm) even when what's happening is not something that you want or agreed to. That does not mean that you wanted it to happen and it does not mean that what happened was in any way your fault.

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thank you

Thank you so much for prioritizing this part of the lives and development of your children. They are lucky to have you, my friend. None of us will do this perfectly, but your efforts will absolutely make a difference.

I hope this guidebook has been helpful for you! If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm here to help.

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