



**PARENT GUIDE**

K I C K  O F F F  
the Talk

**A SIX-STEP Parent Guide  
to Conversations About Sex**



In Taylor Tomlinson’s *Have It All* Netflix special, the comedian polls the crowd from the stage to see how many were given a “sex talk” by their parents. As the crowd claps to signal that yeah, they were given “the talk,” Tomlinson proceeds to question one of the female audience members in the front row about when and how this pivotal moment of adolescence took place.

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“I was nine,” the audience member responds. “My mom took me to the garden for a picnic to answer my questions.”

### **Tomlinson appears completely taken aback.**

“I’m having a visceral reaction,” she confesses (along with some other, more colorful remarks). “That’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard.”

Tomlinson went on to play her surprise for laughs, but the reason the joke works so well isn’t all that funny. In fact, it’s pretty sad. The reality is most people don’t get a deliberately planned, picturesque, and controlled celebration of puberty, sex, and God’s plan for our bodies. It seems so far out of what most of us actually experienced growing up that it’s almost comical to consider.

According to one survey, 55% of **American parents** said they *never* had a talk with their parents about sex or sexuality. Even in cases where these talks happened, they were often vague, rushed, and embarrassing—quickly covering the basics, discouraging questions, and giving the unspoken expectation that this topic never be brought up again.

### **So much for a conversation.**

At Axis, we believe that parents are the most important influence on their tween, teen, and young adult children’s lives. Decisions they make about so many things, their bodies included, are directly shaped by the conversations they have with us right now. That’s what makes kicking off the conversation about sex now so vital for the current and future decisions your kids make when it comes to the subject.

The truth is, if we don’t offer our kids answers about sex, they will search for them elsewhere. A survey in the UK found that **45% of teens** who consumed pornography said they did so, in part, to learn about sex. In a separate survey of British teens, over half of boys between 11 and 16 said that pornography offered a realistic depiction of sex while over a third of girls in that age range said the same.

### **If we aren’t talking to our kids about it, they’ll start talking to someone else.**

Contrary to what many parents may fear, **medical literature** suggests that talking to kids about sex doesn’t start them on a path toward promiscuity. It actually does the opposite.

Dr. Julia Sadusky, a licensed psychologist and author whose books include **Start Talking to Your Kids About Sex** and **Talking With Your Teen About Sex**, says teaching children about sex in a comprehensive way can postpone the onset of sexual activity, reduce risky behaviors, encourage better communication skills, and promote respect for others. Sadusky also points to the work of counselor and author Jay Stringer, whose research shows that the majority of adults who engage in compulsive sexual behaviors or experience sexual addictions did *not* have parents who talked with them about sex and sexuality.



**Children who have regular, age-appropriate conversations about sex with their parents are more likely to delay their first sexual experience. With that, teens who talk about sex with their parents are more likely to say they have healthier body image and higher self-esteem.**

And isn't that what we want for our kids? If it is, then we have to push past the potential awkwardness, worry, or fear that might be holding us back from starting the conversation.

Sex is a biological, emotional, and spiritual experience. While the physical realities of sex between a man and a woman may be easy enough for some kids to figure out, "figuring it out" doesn't equip them to have satisfying, uplifting, and God-honoring experiences in their bodies when they are adults. It's part of our sacred responsibility as parents to make sure that holiness, responsibility, trust, and love are built into their understanding of sex.

**It's time to learn how to talk about sex with our kids.**

## How to use this guide:

- **This printable PDF** is broken down into one starter activity for you, the parent, to do on your own and six subsequent essential conversations to have with your middle schooler about sex. These conversations are meant to happen in the sequence provided as they build on each other as you go.
- The timing of these conversations is up to you, but they should happen in low-pressure, comfortable environments. You can plan to have all of them over the span of a special weekend where most of the focus is on another activity, like camping, or a shopping trip, or checking out a new spot in your community. Or you can stretch them out intentionally during moments you know you'll have built-in time together with your child, like on drives home from school, or the trip home after an away game, or the ride to and from a sleepover.
- These conversations should happen one-on-one and should not take place at times when younger siblings or friends are present. In households with two parents or guardians, consider your child's personality and temperament to determine if one or both of you will take the lead in going through this guide. Some kids may respond well to an open conversation with both parents while others may feel more comfortable starting the conversation with only one of you. There's no right or wrong approach here, so consider what you think will work best for your child as you make your way through this guide.
- Each conversation we write about here starts with a biblical principle that applies to the theme, followed by some translation of what culture is telling young people about sex. There's also a section called "Good, Bad, Bible" that offers biblical insight combined with research and expert analysis. At the end of each conversation section is a starter script for you to use with your child, along with questions for conversation starters to open the floor to their own thoughts and feelings. You can use the scripts word-for-word or paraphrase them in your own way. The wording does matter, but your presence and engagement matter more.

Note that these conversations are not meant to cover every topic related to sex. They are meant to equip you with biblical guidance, expert insight, and more confidence as you introduce these concepts. While this resource is designed with what's age-appropriate for middle schoolers (11-14) in mind, it can be adapted to use with older teens who may be just starting to have these conversations, too.

**If you want a more in-depth resource that hits on these and other relevant topics for older teens, consider our [Sex Talk 2.0 30-day course!](#)**



# BEFORE YOU Begin:



## The point:

**B**efore you can really have shame-free and free-flowing conversations with your tween or teen about sex, it's important to evaluate talking to your kids about sex you got (or didn't get) from your family and culture growing up.

## Culture, translated:

In the mid-1990s, a little less than half of us got our sex education from our parents. But many of us— or at least a good portion of the ones who had cable—got our information from a Sunday night call-in show hosted by nurse-turned-sex-educator Sue Johanson called Sex with Sue.

Viewers were as transfixed by Johanson's frank, no-nonsense delivery style as they were by her research-backed answers to embarrassing or taboo questions from her callers. She talked about *everything* from sex toys to foot fetishes—topics that were considered firmly off-limits for polite society.

When Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation didn't give their offspring much to work with in terms of modeling "the talk," and the types of "sex talks" that *did* happen in public were received with equal parts fascination and revulsion, it's no wonder those of us who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s feel *totally weird* talking about sex with our kids.

"Most of us did not have role models who showed us a lot of ease in talking about sexuality," explains Sadusky. "If we didn't have people who showed us how to talk about it in a candid, appropriate, and respectful way, it could be difficult [to talk about sex with our children]."

Add in a heaping spoonful of shame around sex that came from many of our religious upbringings, and we have a recipe for... well, where most of us are now: completely intimidated by talking about sex with our kids.



## Good, Bad, Bible

Medical literature shows that when parents are **receptive, informal, and composed**, kids are less anxious and less avoidant when they are talking about sex. So the question is, as parents and guardians, how can we become more receptive, informal, and composed to kick off the conversation?

For starters, we have to reckon with the reasons we feel defensive, self-conscious, and squeamish about sex.

Sam Jolman, author of **The Sex Talk You Never Got**, recommends getting started by writing down the first 10 to 15 conversations about sex or sexual experiences that you can recall from your own adolescence. Some of these memories will be positive, some will be negative, and some may even be tied to trauma that you still carry. It might not feel *great*, but Jolman says it is essential to understand your own sexual history before you attempt to have conversations with your kids about honoring God with their sexuality.

Maybe dredging up your own past feels charged with emotions you'd rather not revisit. Maybe there is resentment, sadness, guilt, and shame that needs to be processed. Maybe this whole exercise feels like it could get messy, so you'd rather not do it, especially when you're already desperately trying not to mess this sex talk thing up yourself.

**If you don't get real with yourself about what talking about sex was like for you—and how it influenced decisions you made and situations you were in—it will be close to impossible to give your kids a shame-free, celebratory, and sacred view of sex.**

The good news? We aren't asked to do this deep dive into our own history without help. We can talk to God about how these conversations make us feel. We can ask for peace and poise in the midst of what might feel daunting. We can trust that God will meet us in the moment no matter how heavy the moment may be for us.

Philippians 4:5-7 says, "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The idea of not being anxious about anything sounds utterly delightful in the abstract. That's also what makes it feel nearly impossible in the concrete.

*Do not be anxious about reflecting upon your sexual past.*

*Do not be anxious about talking to your tween about consent.*

*Do not be anxious about telling your teenager that God made sex to be pleasurable.*



If your heart rate is up, you're not alone! But the peace of God that transcends all understanding is available to you in Christ. So, why not ask for it? Pray for the wisdom to help you believe that sex does not have to be a shameful topic in your heart, mind, or conversation with your child. The peace of God is the very thing that can empower us to break generational cycles of avoidance, granting us the calmness of spirit we need to broach a topic as tender and complex as sex with both ourselves and our tweens and teens.

Sex is not a topic that you have to have handled or understood perfectly in order to be the absolute best mentor for your child in this specific area. God did not forget about the sex talk when he made you the parent of your child. He has called you to disciple your child in all areas of life, and that definitely includes their sexuality. Remember, God only calls His children to that which He equips them to do. That means His power is great enough to relieve you of shame—whether it be in the form of a general awkwardness around the topic or deeper regret and trauma. (For a deeper dive into shame, healing, and restoration, check out [this lesson from our Sex Talk 2.0](#) course.)

Jolman explains that when children grow up in homes where certain topics are avoided, the absence of discussion fills them with a sense of shame. When children feel unable to ask questions or learn about a topic like sex, they may quickly begin to associate it with shamefulness. Not only that, but they are more likely to seek information—or come by it inadvertently—from unsafe sources. Just as God offers his nearness to us, comforting our hearts in our anxieties, parents have an opportunity to draw near to their children with affection, openness, and clarity, helping them see their bodies and sexuality not as something shameful but as something wonderful. Jolman encourages parents to meet their kids in their curiosity, celebrating the goodness of God's creation and honoring their inquiries with age-appropriate, honest answers to their questions.

### QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION:

**What was talking about sex like in your family? What do you wish it had been like?**

**How do you see the consequences (good or bad) of your upbringing around sex playing out in your adult years?**

**How does the peace of God available to you in Christ help you step toward a healthier view of sexuality for your family?**

**What do you hope your children come to understand and believe about Christian sexuality? How can you start the conversation with that goal in mind?**



# Conversation:

# 1

## PUBERTY It's Not an Alarm. It's an Announcement.



### What does the Bible say?

As it says in Ecclesiastes 3:11, “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” Puberty is a complex experience, and many aspects of it can feel challenging (both to teens and to their parents). But it is part of God’s intentional process for humanity’s growth and development.

#### The point:

Puberty is the period of hormonal, biological, and physical changes that prepare a human body to reproduce. Conversations around these changes **help teens** develop what psychologists call “positive sexual self-concept,” which sets the stage for a healthy view of sex.

#### Culture, translated:

In Pixar’s *Inside Out 2*, protagonist Riley starts out as a peaceful and loving kid who is governed by her predictable, if sometimes intense, emotions. Over the course of the film, viewers watch as her inner world is completely transformed by brand new emotions triggered by “the puberty alarm.”

In one memorable scene just after the alarm goes off, a construction crew arrives and demolishes Riley’s peaceful emotional “headquarters,” only to quit for a lunch break before the reconstruction is done. Outwardly, Riley appears to crater, soar, and sputter between feelings, screaming at her mom one second before bursting into tears with guilt the next. She’s humiliated by her changing body and equally mortified when her mom tries to talk to her about it. Once Riley’s inner renovations are complete, she’ll figure out how to navigate the world with the new emotions that have taken up residence. But in the meantime, Riley and her family have a lot to figure out.

While the primary reason parents don’t talk about sex is that they aren’t comfortable with the subject matter themselves, the second is that they feel their teen won’t be receptive (or may even be downright hostile) to these discussions. Like Riley’s mom encounters, the conversation about sex, sexuality, and even puberty itself can feel like navigating a minefield with your kid.

The good news? **This is normal.**



In a small Canadian survey, a majority of teens **admitted** they just don't want to engage with their parents on the topic of sex. The researchers in that study concluded that 37% of adolescents were likely to be responsive to sexual communication with their mother, 34% were ambivalent, and 29% were unlikely to be responsive to these conversations. While we wish more teens were responsive, there's comfort to be found in knowing you're not alone!

The better news? **No matter how uncomfortable your kid may be with the conversation now, one day, they'll be glad you pushed forward with the talk regardless of their resistance.**

While middle schoolers might react negatively to conversations about sex *now*, a **survey** of college-aged adults found the majority wished their parents had spoken to them early, frequently, and on a wide range of sexual topics. Looking back, they wished their parents had been open, honest, and realistic in these conversations.

As parents, you have the chance to start the conversation in such a way that your kids will thank you for it when they look back one day. Puberty is an announcement from God that you have a young man or a young woman in your house, Jolman says. Some kids feel shy about changes to their bodies and don't want to talk about it. Some have more questions than adults could possibly answer in one sitting. Either way, getting prepared with what you want to say will make this conversation feel so much easier for you and your kid.

## Good, Bad, Bible:

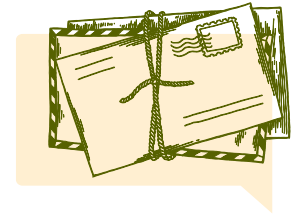
As beings created with a divine design for sex and sexuality, puberty is part of the journey. It's normal for young children to have questions about their bodies, and it's normal for older children to begin to wonder how their body might interact with others' bodies. Oftentimes, well before kids have experienced any type of sexual awakening in puberty, they ask questions that, to adult ears, sound sexual in nature. Often, these questions are simply *sensual*—a natural outflow of a child's bodily experiences and curiosities.

Kids are naturally sensual long before they are sexual, according to Jolman. Babies put objects in their mouths, and toddlers grab whatever their hands can reach. Little ones innately understand that they

will get to know themselves, others, and the world around them through their senses. They are image-bearers of the God who created all that they see and hear, all that they long to smell, touch, and taste.

Having said this, it's also important to note that seemingly sexual questions or actions from young children can be signs of exposure to sexual content or behaviors. This in no way means that parents should hear alarm bells in their minds when their child asks a question; it is very likely that kids are simply demonstrating natural curiosity. However, it's something to be aware of as you guide your kids in this conversation.

For middle schoolers who feel shy about the puberty conversation—particularly boys—Jolman says to get curious but stay gentle with your line of questioning. Ask your kid what they are feeling in their body when you bring up puberty. If they recoil the minute you broach the topic, give them a chance to describe what they are feeling the best way they can. Be willing to revisit the “biology” talk later if your kid continually voices their discomfort or resistance.



Keeping the tone lighthearted, encouraging, and positive is also essential. You may be feeling sad about the loss of the “little” version of your middle schooler and worried about whether your relationship with your child is about to change. This conversation is not an appropriate time for you to address those emotions. **The goal of this talk is to prepare your child for what's ahead and minimize their anxiety surrounding it.**

Sadusky encourages parents to avoid solely focusing on your child's specific experience around the subject of puberty. Rather, inform your kids about the changes their own bodies will experience as well as those occurring in their opposite-sex peers. Observe shared experiences between boys and girls, such as how puberty creates new hygiene needs or how hair growth under the arms and near the genitals is normal for all. Then, talk about the differences as well, such as how boys typically do not shave their underarm hair while girls may or how a boy's voice will lower while a girl's will not.

Explaining it all—menstruation, erections, acne, development of breasts, ejaculation, and more—to both boys and girls may seem overwhelming, but it's





important for tweens and teens to understand the changes occurring in themselves as well as others. Talking about these new changes creates opportunities to discuss so much more, like being a kind, respectful friend or navigating a dating relationship.

Understanding an appropriate level of detail around bodily changes—and grasping how normal they are—can also help reduce the impulse to call out someone’s voice crack or tease someone about their zits. While we want to empower kids with knowledge, understanding, and freedom around the topic of puberty, we also don’t want them to use that knowledge to criticize or embarrass others. By facilitating open, informative dialogue, parents can help their kids better love and care for themselves and others.

## Starter script:

The details of this conversation may vary according to the gender of your teen and their maturity level. We recommend using this script to get you started before opening up the floor to specific questions they may have about puberty:

“You’re at an age now where change is part of your everyday life.. I am so excited for all the things ahead for you. **What makes you feel excited about the future?**

You may have already noticed that one major thing that will change in this phase of your life is your body. You may feel a little different, smell a little different, or look a little different than you are used to. **What are some of the changes you have already noticed?**

These changes might feel awkward, but that’s only because new things usually do at first. These changes aren’t happening **to you**. They are happening **for you**. They are happening because of the future God has planned for you. These changes are the next step for you as you grow into an adult. While that may feel a long way away right now, trust me, you’ll grow and

mature faster than you even realized possible. The good news? That’s normal, too! And I will love you through all these changes and more!

These changes will affect more than just the way your body looks on the *outside*; they’ll affect how it feels *inside* your body, too. You may feel more tired, more irritable, and more emotional than you are used to feeling. You may notice that you’re starting to notice other people in new ways too. We might need to practice being more patient with each other in this season of your life, and that is something I am prepared to do. **What changes have you noticed in the way you feel lately?**

If all of this seems gross or embarrassing to you, I totally understand. But I want you to know I don’t think it’s gross, and I am definitely not embarrassed. I’m proud that you’re becoming an adult who can talk about these things with me. **No matter what, I want you to feel free to ask me any questions about sex and your changing body.”**

### ONE CONVERSATION:

**When it comes to puberty, what questions do you have? What do you wish you knew more about?**

**What are some of the changes to your body that you’re curious about? And what about changes in your feelings that you’re curious about?**

**Are there any changes that you are looking forward to? In what ways?**

**What questions do you have about the changes happening in your opposite-sex peers?**

**What can I do to help and support you in this phase of your life? How can I make you more comfortable so that we can keep talking about this together?**



# Conversation:

## 2

## Purity with Purpose



### What does the Bible say?

1 Corinthians 6:18–20 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

The word translated as “sexual immorality” here is the word *porneia*, which most theologians understand to refer to **any** sexual act outside of heterosexual marriage. In other words, sexual purity includes abstaining from lust, porn, and inviting sexual attention from others. Sex is an incredible, powerful gift from our Creator—and because *He* created it, living well means pursuing His created intention.

### The point:

If we want our kids to commit to sexual purity, we have to be clear about what sex is, what it’s designed for, and what purity actually means for their everyday lives.

### Culture, translated:

In the early 2000s, there was one noteworthy celebrity accessory that everyone was wearing: the purity ring. Everyone from Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears to Selena Gomez and Jordin Sparks were rocking these rings with pride. The point? To symbolize to themselves and the world around them that they’d made a commitment to wait until marriage to have sex.

The problem? Nobody explained what that actually meant.

Some took their purity ring and its implied commitment as a vow of “anything but sex,” dodging actual intercourse while still participating in other sexual acts. Others took it so seriously they limited contact with significant others to little more than a friendly side hug or a chaste handhold.

The Jonas Brothers would later say that they were confused by the concept, even as they participated themselves. “In theory, [the rings] aren’t a bad idea,” **Nick Jonas recalled in a recent interview**. “But you should know what you’re signing up for before you sign up for it.” He went on to explain, “It became a defining factor of who



we were... which was disappointing. I was just trying to navigate love, and romance, and what sex even meant to me at a sensitive age.”

While likely well-intended in nature, in some cases purity rings had an adverse effect on young teens and tweens, whose virginity was suddenly treated as a primary feature of who they were. For many young people, in both Christian circles and in culture at large, whether they were or weren't having sex came to be seen as a primary indicator of their value and worth.

Ultimately, while there are plenty of critiques given of so-called “purity culture” in hindsight, one of the biggest is the lack of clarity around its goal. Does purity simply mean being a virgin until marriage? Or is it something more?

## The foundation:

In Christian households, the sex talk has often been simplified to one takeaway: preserve virginity. In those conversations, virginity (or the more ambiguous “purity”) can be presented as the only thing that matters to God. Because of that, it's framed as the thing we should prioritize above all else.

Here's what makes this conversation so confusing: Abstaining from sexual intercourse outside of marriage is certainly a biblical mandate. That, in and of itself, is clear. But when the conversation starts and ends there, tweens and teens are left with very little understanding of what purity actually means for them now and as they grow up. In theory, it sounds great, but when they find themselves actually feeling those desires or having the opportunity to act on them, “the Bible told me so” just isn't enough.

When the practical meaning of concepts like “abstinence” and “purity” are left undefined and unexplained for young people who are starting to ask questions about or even have experiences with sex, they are often left with more confusion than answers—an experience that can have many negative outcomes, including searching for information in unsafe places, inadvertent exposure to explicit content, and shame around sexual curiosity.

That's why, as parents, it's important to be clear with your teens and tweens not just about the mechanics of sex but about God's design for it as well. After all, we can't encourage our kids toward purity if they don't know what that really means.

By **definition**, purity means “freedom from anything that debases, contaminates, or pollutes.” Other definitions include “freedom from any admixture or modifying addition,” “freedom from guilt,” or “freedom from inappropriate elements.”

The common denominator here? Freedom!

## **In both cultural and biblical contexts, purity isn't defined or designed to keep our desires and decisions locked up; it's ultimately meant to set us free.**

*Free to understand our desires and curiosities through God's lens.*

*Free to ask questions and have conversations about sex and sexuality.*

*Free to pursue God's best for us.*



“Purity in the Bible is always preparation for worship,” **Jolman told Axis**. “It was never the point in itself.” In other words, our call to purity isn’t only about what we do or don’t do with our bodies. It’s about finding the freedom in our hearts, minds, and lives to connect with and worship God in all we do.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul expanded on this concept more specifically in relation to sex:

*But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:17-20)*

This, ultimately, is one of the keys to connecting the dots between God’s design for sex and the why behind it. God is not asking us to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage for no reason. Rather, God’s calling us to do so out of honor—to ourselves, to others, and to God himself. Teaching our children how to honor their own bodies and the bodies of others—and why that matters in the context of their faith—is important to their understanding of sexuality. At the base level, it normalizes dignity, honor, respect, and yes, purity of heart above all else. When they have this knowledge from the outset, any sexual messaging that says otherwise will raise a red flag and ultimately ring false.

Helping tweens and teens understand their bodies and sexuality isn’t merely a task parents must undertake so that the world doesn’t shape their mindsets first, though that’s certainly important. We’re helping them grow increasingly, age-appropriately more familiar with what God says is good. And in doing so, we are sowing seeds of delight rather than shame.

A healthy sexual self-concept leads to **healthier self-esteem**, especially when it comes to negotiating relational dynamics and having positive feelings toward sexual experiences. This may sound concerning at first to Christian parents who want their children to delay sexual activity, but having positive feelings toward sexual pleasure does not have to mean that a young person is experiencing sexual pleasure. A healthy sexual self-concept can emerge for a young person who is simultaneously committed to abstinence and understanding who they are as a created sexual being.

*Having a healthy understanding of sex and sexual activity is a good and beautiful thing.*

*Pursuing purity as a means of freedom to connect with God’s best is a good and beautiful thing.*

*Developing a sexual relationship within the context of a marriage is a good and beautiful thing.*

But all of this is made all the more difficult when our kids haven’t been disciplined to understand who they are as a sexual creation in a positive, esteem-building, and God-honoring way.



## Starter script:

“You may already know some of what I’m about to tell you, and that’s okay! But it’s part of my job as your parent to make sure you understand this. **What do you already know about sex? Do you know how it works?**

Sex is designed to be both good and pleasurable for us but also to create new life when a man’s sperm meets a woman’s egg at the right moment in time. It’s how every person on earth got here, and it’s actually pretty incredible. **Do you have specific questions about sex that you feel comfortable asking?**

When people have sex the way God planned, it feels good emotionally and physically. So before we go on, **what do you think God’s plan for sex might be?**

In the Bible, God is really clear about His plan for sex. He wants one man and one woman to make a lifelong commitment to each other to have this kind of relationship. That’s a big part of what a marriage promise is—a commitment to having sex with one person of the opposite sex for as long as you live. And that’s a really beautiful and good thing. **What do you think about God’s plan for sex to be in marriage? What about that sounds like a good idea? And what about that might be challenging?**

Our family is committed to the belief that sex only belongs in marriage. It’s what God says honors Him, ourselves, and others, and that matters to us more than what other people think. That doesn’t mean we think we have been perfect examples who have never made a mistake. It also doesn’t mean that we expect everyone to agree with us or be perfect themselves. Remember, God doesn’t leave us to figure this out on our own, and God always offers grace and forgiveness when we need it.”



### ONE CONVERSATION:

**How does talking to me about this make you feel?**

**What do you want to ask me about sex? If you’re not ready now, you can always write questions down and share them with me later.**

**What do you understand about God’s design for sex? And what questions do you have about that?**

**What do you think it means to honor yourself, others, and God when it comes to sex? Why do you think that’s important?**

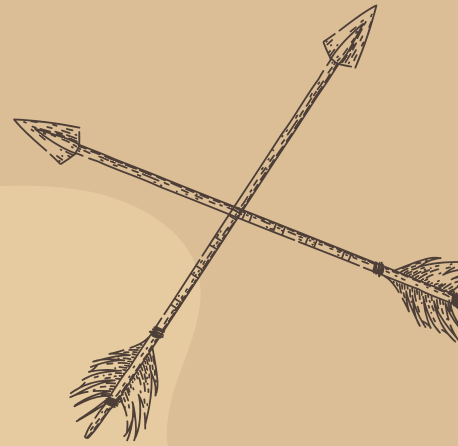
**What can I do to help you choose God’s best when it comes to sex and sexual activity in this phase of your life? How can we keep this conversation open in a way that makes you comfortable to keep talking about this together?**



# Conversation:

## 3

## Understanding Peer Pressure & Consent



### What does the Bible say?

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Part of what this means is that human beings have been given an incredible amount of dignity—even majesty. To engage with someone sexually apart from their consent is a violation of this dignity. Even though consent, on its own, is not enough to make a sexual interaction healthy, it is an essential aspect of healthy sexuality.

### The point:

In a culture that has normalized sexual activity at a young age, it's important to educate your kids on the concept of consent, talking to them about what it is, how they have the power to give and withhold it in any circumstance, and how to read, respond to, and respect the signs of consent from others.

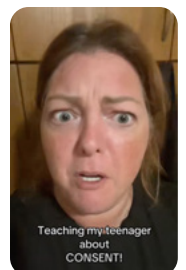
### Culture, translated:

When you think of people going viral on TikTok, you likely think of celebrities, athletes, influencers, and people generally engaging in all kinds of attention-grabbing activities for likes and followers. The last people you might think would become viral TikTok sensations? Parents!

Well, that's exactly what happened when **comedian and mom Mel Moon's recent TikTok conversation** with her teenage son, Riley, hit the internet. Rather than approach him with a traditional, harsh, or even unclear conversation about the concept of consent, Moon took a more creative approach to the conversation.

She simply asked her son if he'd like a cup of tea.

While perhaps strange at first glance, as the conversation unfolds, the point becomes clear. Riley initially declines the offer, telling his mom he doesn't want the tea she's offering. So, Moon turns up the heat, telling her son how good the cup of tea will be, how she's already started the work of making it, and how everyone else in the house is going to drink it so he should, too. Again, Riley declines, this time becoming more frustrated at his mom's insistence that he just drink the tea. Moon, however, doesn't relent. She continues to put the pressure on until finally, exasperated, Riley gives in.



“Just get me the tea,” he says, which Moon quickly does. She hands him the cup and sits down beside him, still pressuring him to take a sip even as he continues to protest.

“I told you 25 times I didn’t want it!” he exclaims.

“Am I making you uncomfortable?” Moon asks in response.

When Riley affirms his discomfort (“Why are you being so weird about tea?” he asks as any teen would), Moon cuts to the chase.

“This is consent,” she tells him. “If she says no, she doesn’t want to do it. And if you constantly try to convince her, even when she eventually says yes... she still doesn’t want to do it.”

While Moon’s approach may be slightly unorthodox, it gets the point across. And that’s good news because as parents raising teens and tweens in a sex-obsessed culture, there’s no better time to start talking about consent with your kids than right now.

A **2018 study** found that 81% of women and 43% of men have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime. Broken down more explicitly, the numbers revealed that...



**77% of women and 44% of men** experienced verbal sexual harassment.

**51% of women and 17% of men** experienced unwanted sexual touching.

**41% of women and 22% of men** experienced cybersexual harassment.

**30% of women and 12% of men** experienced unwanted exposure to another person’s body.

**27% of women and 7% of men** experienced sexual assault.

**16% of women and 14% of men** experienced their first unwanted sexual harassment, assault, or exposure from the ages of 11-13 years old.

**27% of women and 20% of men** experienced their first unwanted sexual harassment, assault, or exposure from the ages of 14-17 years old.

Those numbers likely only represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the violation of consent. While you certainly don’t want to strike fear in the heart of your child at the potential of unwanted sexual advances and activities, you do want to educate them on their right to consent for themselves and the need to respect that consent in others.

## Good, bad, Bible:

As Christine Emba writes in her book *Rethinking Sex*, consent “is a floor, not a ceiling.” In other words, consent is an essential part of healthy sexuality—but two people can consent to something that’s still unhealthy. It’s not the *only* conversation about healthy sexuality, but it’s still an important one to get right.

Defining consent in this phase of life is no simple task. By definition, **consent** is all about permission: permitting, approving, or agreeing to something. But in reality, it’s so much more than a simple “yes” or “no.” A conversation about consent should include everything from asking for and respecting verbal cues to recognizing and paying attention to body language, unspoken communication, and the context in which the experience is taking place. Even for adults, this isn’t always clear, meaning that for tweens and teens, it’s all the more difficult to grasp.

To start, it’s important to define consent in the framework of more than just sex and sexual activity. Because kids at this age are still developing an awareness of self and others, they may need this idea broken down into more digestible parts. Like Moon’s insistence that her son drink a cup of tea, think about smaller instances where your kid may have the chance to give or withhold consent and start the conversation there:

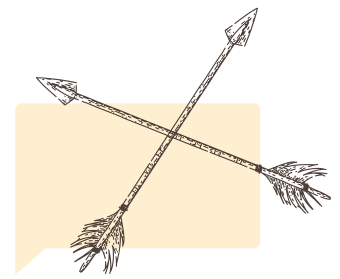


*When a friend asks for permission to sit next to them on the bus...*

*When a sibling asks to borrow something from their room...*

*When someone asks to follow them on social media channels...*

*When a person asks if they want to hold hands...*



These are all great examples of when and how kids in this phase of life might have the opportunity to practice giving consent. Jolman explains that kids understand the concept of consent as soon as they understand the question, “Hey, do you want to play?” So don’t be afraid to start simple and build on the conversation from there.

Just be sure to have the conversation! Even if it’s awkward, even if your kid has questions, even if you’re unsure how to spell out the complexities of the concept for them right away, it’s imperative that you have the conversation.

In a **2006 study** of over 1,000 young people, discussions about abstinence appeared to have had a lasting impact, but teens needed instruction about consent to make it work. The researchers concluded, “Having only one sexual partner was associated with having an adult role model who supports abstinence, being taught at home about birth control, and being taught at home how to say no.”

Did you catch that? The idea of “consent” is not enough. The idea of abstinence is not enough. **Kids have to be taught how to say no.**

*They need to be taught how to say “no” to a date rather than being told that the nice thing to do is to say “yes.”*

*They need to be taught how to say “no” to unwanted affection, even if it’s Grandma who wants the hug.*

*They need to be taught that they are allowed to say “no” even in a committed relationship.*

*They need to be taught that they can say “no” even if they’ve already said “yes.”*

*They need to be taught that consent means two people each saying an enthusiastic, confident “yes,” not one saying “yes” and the other giving in to avoid negative repercussions.*

For some, this practice of saying “no” will be easy. For those who are more timid or inclined to please others, this kind of practice is imperative in increasing their confidence to assert their own boundaries and desires. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Scripture tells us that “the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.” **In other words, our ability to say “no” to anything that isn’t God’s best for ourselves or someone else isn’t something we have to conjure up on our own. It’s something the Spirit of God empowers us to do with both love and self-discipline.**

And this goes both ways! Just as important as teaching our kids they have the power to say “no,” it’s incredibly valuable to teach them they also have the responsibility to listen to and respect a “no” from someone else. In the same way your kid wants their boundaries to be respected, they must understand their personal responsibility to respect the boundaries of others.

In the short-term, this conversation can help kids navigate anything from an awkward or unwanted conversation to an unwanted sexual encounter or experience. But it has significance over the long-term too. Christian marriage and sex blogger, podcaster, and author Sheila Wray Gregoire **says** she regularly receives emails from women who say they feel used by their husbands in regards to sex. She also gets messages from men asking for help as they’ve realized that they were coercing their wives into sex—not because they wanted to be abusive but because they were taught it was their natural, unstoppable desire as men and their wives’ natural responsibility as women. A lack of understanding of consent can wreak havoc, even in Christian marriages.





In an effort to help your tween or teen avoid this, start the conversation on consent by reminding them of our responsibility to honor the boundaries and bodies of all parties involved. As Jesus taught in Matthew 22:39, one of the greatest commandments for us as believers is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” This commandment asks us to evaluate our own boundaries and the way we want those to be respected, and then to show that same level of respect in honoring the boundaries of others.

## **Starter script:**

“Remember when we talked about how people aren’t always perfect when it comes to sex? Sometimes that means they aren’t kind to one another. It’s one of the hardest things that is true about this world. **Have you ever heard the word “consent”? What do you think it means?**

Consent is all about how we give others permission to treat us. It means that we say “yes” to what is okay with us, and “no” to what is not. We know that we should always ask before we put our hands on another person, but when it comes to sex, people don’t always follow this rule. **Why do you think it’s important to understand consent when it comes to something like sex?**

That’s why I’m telling you that you never have to say yes if someone wants to touch you—sexually or otherwise. If you’re in a situation with someone you really like, you’re allowed to say no to kissing, touching, sex—anything. No matter what you may have said or done that led to the situation where someone is asking for sex, no is still an option. Even if you’re in a situation with your husband or wife one day, you’re still allowed to say no! **Is saying no easy or difficult for you? What can I do to help you feel more confident saying no to something you don’t want to do?**

It’s also important to remember that if we want other people to respect our “yes” or “no,” we have to do the same for them. God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves, meaning we should treat other people the way we want to be treated. No matter how much you might want something, if someone else says “no,” the conversation should stop then and there. **What are some ways you can respect the boundaries of other people in your life right now?”**



### **ONE CONVERSATION:**

**Why do you think it’s important for us to talk about things like boundaries and consent?**

**What are some examples of boundaries you want to have when it comes to your body, or even sex and sexual activity?**

**Let’s practice how you’ll tell someone what those boundaries are and what you’ll say if you feel uncomfortable with someone else not respecting them. How would you say that?**

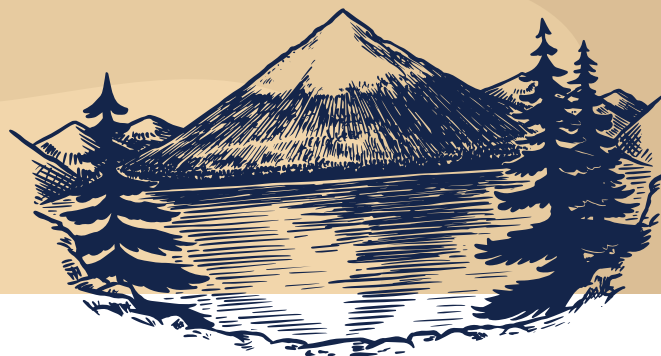
**Sometimes consent is more than just a “yes” or “no.” It’s in the way people respond with nonverbal cues or body language. What kinds of cues do you think someone might give you if they’re trying to say “no”?**

**If someone ignores your consent or doesn’t respect your boundaries, I want you to know that’s not your fault. If that happens, what can I do to make sure you’re comfortable to come to me and tell me about it so I can support you?**



# Conversation:

## 4 Teens and Porn



### What does the Bible say?

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Note that lust is not the same thing as sexual arousal or attraction. Sexual arousal is evidence that our bodies are responding to God’s world, whereas lust represents an act of the will. When sexual arousal is deliberately cultivated, inflamed, and turned into something possessive and objectifying, then we are in the realm of lust. The porn industry is inextricably connected to lust—and it is this impulse that Jesus asks us to put behind us.

### The point:

Pornographic content has never been more accessible than it is right now. Rather than wait for them to stumble upon it accidentally, be introduced to it by someone else, or seek it out themselves, be proactive in talking to your kid about what pornography is and the impacts it can have on their view of sex and relationships.

### Culture, translated:

From hosting *Saturday Night Live* and winning all kinds of awards to attending the Met gala and getting advice from the likes of Elton John, you’d probably think there’s little someone as famous as Billie Eilish might say that tweens and teens could actually relate to in their real, everyday lives.

Well, you’d be wrong.

In a 2021 interview with Howard Stern, Eilish was asked about her romantic life—and she decided to open up about her experiences with pornography. **She shared about** the ways in which she felt her frequent consumption of pornography at a young age impacted her.

“I used to watch a lot of porn, to be honest,” she told Stern. “I started watching it when I was like 11. I think it really destroyed my brain, and I feel incredibly devastated that I was exposed to so much porn.”

She went on to detail the ways in which her exposure to pornography prior to her own sexual activity or experience had a negative impact on her future relationships.



“I was not saying no to things that were not good,” Eilish explained. “It was because I thought that’s what I was supposed to be attracted to.”

At age twenty, Eilish was already looking back on that early exposure to sex and sexuality through pornography with regret and frustration. She said, “I’m so angry that porn is so loved, and I’m so angry at myself for thinking that it was okay.”

Eilish isn’t the only young celebrity to push back against porn. *Divergent* and *Big Little Lies* actress Shailene Woodley described the way that Americans portray sex on-screen as “like bacon hanging in front of a dog.” Describing the shallow, performance-based representations of sex as the equivalent of McDonald’s, **she said**, “If people knew what was possible with sex, they would look at porn and go, this is like junk food.”

And writer and actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt wrote an entire movie to illustrate this same sentiment. 2013’s *Don Jon* tells the story of a man whose preference for the mindless pleasures of pornography impact his real-life relationships. **Gordon-Levitt said** he wrote the film to “tell a story about how people objectify each other... especially when it comes to love and sex.” He went on to say, “We learn a lot of expectations from movies, or TV shows, or commercials, or magazines, or pornography, and those expectations are unrealistic and maybe not so healthy. And if we’re busy comparing our own lives and our partners to those expectations, we’re doomed.”

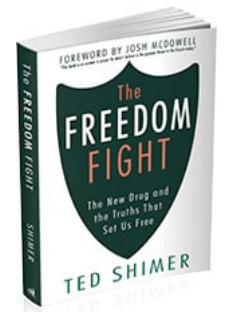
While it might be easy to see the conversation about pornography as irrelevant at this young age, the statistics tell us that it is, in fact, incredibly relevant for tweens and teens alike. **Data suggests** the age of a child’s first exposure to porn is around their tween years, with the majority of kids having seen some form of pornographic material by age 13.

So, what’s the best time to start talking about pornography with your kids?

**As they say, there’s no time like the present.**

## What to know:

Ted Shimer, founder of **The Freedom Fight**, a porn recovery program that blends brain science, clinical practices, and biblical wisdom, has unique insight into the experiences of people exposed and addicted to pornography. Thousands of people from all over the world participate in the organization’s online community where people in recovery share stories, find accountability partners, and try to better understand the root of their addictions.



“One of the very common themes is ‘man, I had no idea what sex was when I was exposed to it as an eight-year-old. I had no category to put it in. So [they felt] a combination of guilt, shame, and excitement.”

Shimer explains that the lack of a prior category for sex or sexual content leads many to keep their discovery a secret, never talking to their parents (or any other trusted adult) about it.

“You would be surprised at how many people get hooked with just one exposure because it’s a secret,” Shimer says.

When Shimer speaks to groups of college men, he often asks them how many of them had a conversation with their fathers about sex. Usually, he says, very few will raise their hands.

“That’s the norm, unfortunately,” says Shimer. “Somebody is going to fill in the vacuum. Somebody is going to fill in the blanks. And the porn industry is very happy to step into that space.”

In a 2022 **“Teens and Pornography”** survey by Common Sense Media, 15% of teens said they first saw porn when they were ten or younger. The average age of first exposure to pornography was just 12 years old. **45% of teens** felt that online pornography offered



helpful information about sex. Additionally, a **2023 analysis** of three Swedish surveys found that watching pornography featuring “deviant” sexual behavior correlated to poor mental health in adolescent boys.

What’s making the struggle with pornography all the more difficult are the advances in technology this generation is growing up with right now. Shimer notes that the evolution of pornography has been rapid over the past twenty years. Even as recently as 2005, the majority of pornographic content—even online—was still photographs. When high-speed internet changed the game in 2006, videos became widespread. Then came the iPhone with its ability to store pornography in your pocket.

Relatedly, artificial intelligence is poised to shape sexual experiences for the next generation. As AI produces increasingly true-to-life images, videos, and virtual reality experiences, the potential for people to experience a sense of intimacy through pornography is only increasing. Understanding the devious roots of pornography is vital here. Because AI and other forms of technology aren’t just offering sexually explicit images that appeal to one’s desires. They’re offering an ultimately false but temporarily satisfying feeling of comfort.

“A porn addiction isn’t mostly about sex as much as it’s about how a person has learned to cope and medicate the pain and discomforts of life,” says Shimer. “So I think it’s important for parents to help their kids process their emotions instead of medicating them with media—even if it’s not pornographic.”

Shimer encourages parents to realize that, as difficult as it is to accept, **it’s not a matter of if their children will be exposed to sexually explicit material, it’s when.** So conversations about sex and pornography (even if it’s not time to use that term yet) are essential. If looking for a good starting spot, Shimer recommends *Good Pictures Bad Pictures* by Kristen A. Jenson, a read-aloud book designed to help parents open up an ongoing conversation. Once teens are older, strongly consider installing porn-blocking software on any device they will have access to.

**The point is not to explain everything about pornography and the potential for negativity around it in one discussion. The point is to open a door for shame-free, destigmatized conversations about sexual content so that when children come across it, they know their parents are safe people to tell.**

As children move into their teen years, parents may need to explain some of the damage that pornography can do to their developing brains. Shimer regularly has men tell him that they can no longer get excited about their old hobbies—things like sports and music—because their brain is so used to the dopamine high that pornography provides. For the tween or teen who is ready to process that information, this cautionary tale may open up an important dialogue.

In this (and all!) conversations about sex and sexuality, the point isn’t to scare our kids. Rather, it’s to educate them on what pornography is and why it’s something we want them to avoid. At the least, they’ll be better able to understand why the adults in their lives may seem overprotective about screens or hyper-vigilant about the content they consume.

In John 10:10, Jesus tells us, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” In James 1:17, it says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” Ultimately, this is the point of a conversation on something like pornography with your kids. You’re not trying to withhold goodness from them; you’re trying to help them experience the abundant life Jesus came to give them.



While we may wish our kids would never come across or seek out pornography, that's somewhere between extremely unlikely and impossible. Instead of waiting for it to happen before opening the floor to the conversation, we can join with God in resisting Satan's desire to bring about suffering and loss through pornography by cultivating the good gift of relationships with our children where they know they are safe to share what they're curious about or seeing.

## Starter script:

"We've talked about how God's design for sex is what's best for us. But even when we know and believe that to be true, it isn't always easy to stick to in our lives. Sometimes it feels like the opposite of God's design for sex is everywhere we look. **What kinds of things on TV, in movies, in books, or on social media have you seen or heard about that might take you away from God's best?**

When we see images, videos, or other kinds of content that shows us versions of sex and sexuality that aren't God's best for us, it can leave us feeling a lot of confusing and complicated feelings. In fact, that's one of the ways we can know what we're seeing isn't good for us! Sometimes we find the content because we're looking for it ourselves, sometimes other people show it to us without permission, and sometimes we just find it by accident. **Have you ever seen something or heard something about sex that made you feel confused or not good inside? If so, you're not in trouble. I'd actually love for you to tell me about it if you're comfortable.**

Sometimes we seek out images, videos, or other kinds of content about sex because we're curious. And I want you to know that your curiosity is okay! It's normal to have questions or want to know more about something like sex. The problem comes when that curiosity takes you down a path away from what's good, true, and right about sex and sexuality. Not only can it impact you, but it can change the way you see or think about dating, relationships, and sex. **In what ways do you think looking at sexual images or videos can impact the way you treat other people?**

If you have questions about anything you see or have been told about sex or if you've been shown something that makes you uncomfortable, I want you to talk to me about it. You won't be in trouble; I just want to be here to help you find healthy ways to understand what you've seen."

### ONE CONVERSATION:

**Have you ever heard the term "pornography"? If so, what do you think it means?**

**Why do you think people might seek out images, videos, or other kinds of content that might be considered pornography?**

**How do you think looking at pornography now might impact your relationships in life later?**

**In what ways do you think pornography doesn't represent God's best for us when it comes to sex?**

**If you come across content like this or someone else shows it to you, I don't want you to feel like you have to be embarrassed or keep it a secret. How can we make sure you feel safe and comfortable to talk to me about something like that if it happens?**



# Conversation:

## 5

## Starting the Conversation on Gender & Sexuality



### What does the Bible say?

In Mark 10:6-8, Jesus says, “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ *For this reason* a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh (emphasis ours).” In other words, marriage exists specifically because males exist and females exist. Man and woman were created for each other. And the duality of male and female wasn’t just a random choice about sex and marriage; it’s the final culmination of the complementary duality that runs throughout the entire creation narrative in Genesis—including Heaven and Earth, the sea and the land, night and day, and which eventually also points to Christ and his church.

### The point:

In a time where conversation about exploring and expanding our understanding of gender and sexuality is ongoing, giving your kids the foundational knowledge of how God designed both will provide them a reference point to come back to as they learn about, grapple with, or observe other perspectives on the topic.

### Culture, translated:

One of Netflix’s most popular new shows in the last two years is the groundbreaking teen series *Heartstopper*. Based on a graphic novel series of the same name, the show follows a group of British teens as they navigate life, love, friendship, and identity against the backdrop of an all-boys private school. Creator of the graphic novels, Alice Oseman, **describes the series this way** on her website: “Boy meets boy. Boys become friends. Boys fall in love. A bestselling LGBTQ+ graphic novel about life, love, and everything that happens in between.”

In the same way that Netflix’s *13 Reasons Why* offered a hyper-realized exploration of topics like suicide and assault and HBO’s *Euphoria* gave viewers a dramatic look at drug addiction and sex amongst high schoolers, *Heartstopper* is this generation’s softer look at what it means for teenagers to grapple with gender identity and sexuality.



To start, we meet our protagonist, Charlie: a kind, sensitive high schooler navigating the ups and downs of being one of the only openly gay students at school. He's seated next to the school's resident rugby star, Nick, during class and quickly develops a crush on him. The series follows the two as a friendship turned romance turned relationship takes shape.

The two are supported by their friends and fellow members of the LGBTQ+ community who round out the cast. There's Elle, a transgender girl who recently moved to the neighboring all-girls school after transitioning, and Tao, Charlie's best friend who is exploring a new attraction to Elle. There's Tara, a lesbian high school student, and her romantic interest, Darcy, who identifies as nonbinary. And finally, there's Isaac, the quiet, shy, and self-proclaimed asexual and aromantic friend who rounds out their group.

Critics **describe the show** as “half issues drama, half PSA,” inviting viewers to both deep dive into the conversation about gender and sexuality while also learning about what it all means to teenagers in this specific moment in time and culture. **The show carries with it** an “intense interest in mental health and identity (particularly with regards to gender and sexuality)” wrapped in a sensitive and approachable package. Now three seasons in, the show continues to tackle some seemingly ever-present questions about identity, sexuality, and the complicated exploration of both.

### **They're big questions that young people already ask themselves, like:**

*What if he doesn't like me?*

*Why is being who I am so complicated?*

*How do I stop liking someone?*

*Will they love me if they know who I really am?*

*Do I even know who I really am?*

The fictional friend group we follow in *Heartstopper* isn't representative of all teens and tweens, but it is representative of many who are hearing about or even exploring questions of gender and sexual identity with more freedom in a culture where the conversation about both is more welcomed than ever.

## **Good, bad, Bible:**

Our culture tells us that discussions about gender identity and sexual preferences are supposed to be complicated ones. A **recent survey** showed that as 22% of Gen Z identifies as something other than heterosexual. **With that**, some 1.4% of teens between 13-17 years old (about 300,000 people) identify as transgender.

Dr. Amy Green, vice president of research for the Trevor Project, a nationwide organization providing crisis intervention for non-heterosexual youth, **suggests** that perhaps these numbers are a reflection of the fact that “young people today have greater access to information and language that can help them understand their identity.”

Green is right that the conversation about gender and sexuality is happening all around your tween and teen in culture. The information is out there, and it's easy to find. So rather than let them explore it on their own, why not open the door to the conversation together before they dive in somewhere else?

Sadusky points out that children begin to understand themselves as sexed beings—simply meaning as boys or girls based on their body parts—between the ages of two and five. At those ages, conversations around gender identity likely will not use terms like “sex” and “gender”. Instead, parents are simply helping their child orient themselves to who they are in their bodies as the children themselves make observations.



For children who display gender nonconformity, it may be important to have more in-depth conversations at a younger age, certainly by the time a child is ten or twelve. Sadusky notes that such children are often picked on or alienated as peers tell them that the way they behave is outside the boundaries of their gender.

As author Ryan Anderson puts it in his book *When Harry Became Sally*, “We needn’t adopt the overly rigid stereotypes that might lead a boy to think he should be a girl because he is sensitive and artistic, or a girl to think she might really be a boy because she prefers sports over dolls. Acknowledging the richly diverse ways of being male and female can help children more readily identify with and accept their own embodiment.”

This is not to say that gender dysphoria should be dismissed or that gender confusion isn’t something that happens. Instead, it’s to say that we should root our understanding of gender in the body, recognizing that doing so can be challenging for some and anchoring for others.

If your child, tween, or teen discloses information about their gender or sexual identity to you, first, they’re paying you a compliment. By trusting you with that vulnerable, intimate information, your child is revealing that they want to be in communication with you and believe that you want the same.

Rather than minimizing the disclosure or blowing it out of proportion, Sadusky encourages parents to say something like, “I am so proud of you for sharing with me a little bit more about your experience. I’m really impressed that you’re picking up on attractions, and that you’re willing to talk about them, because attractions are part of our experience of the world. They’re the kind of thing that can be confusing, so I

want to know about that and talk about it with you and I’m so grateful that you trusted me with this.”

From there, you might ask your child what they’ve heard about what it means to experience attraction.. Some kids may feel panicked about their experiences and wonder what it means for their future. Whether your child is nervous or not, it’s important as parents to stay in the moment and simply focus on the questions a child has about what their attractions mean. Do they feel confused? Scared? Curious? Excited? It can be very tempting to overreact to these disclosures—whether with fear or with labeling a child’s attraction as their permanent sexual identity. Instead, try to stay present to their current experience and facilitate ongoing, trust-based dialogue.

While culture doesn’t offer a clear answer on gender and sexuality, God has been clear that sex should be between one man and one woman. You can be compassionate and curious about anything your child is describing while at the same time, holding firmly to God’s design for sex.

Biblically, we can find our starting place all the way back at the beginning with God’s creation of men and women. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Here, we find the core of our creation and the beginning of a conversation on identity for your tween and teen. Regardless of what they hear or experience in culture, who they are is ultimately a person designed with care and intention by God.



**All individuals find their identity in being a creation of God—designed to bear His image to the world first and foremost. This is who we were made to be above all else. And this is a truth we can always return to when culture attempts to pull our perspective elsewhere.**

Remind your kid that, while discussions on gender and sexuality are open topics of conversation with you, the thing they can always remember and return to is that they’re ultimately God’s children—humans created to bear His likeness just as they are. No matter how your child receives or responds to their own experiences with or questions about gender identity and sexuality, the foundation you’re laying now will give them a stable ground to stand on as they continue to grow up amidst this part of the cultural conversation on sex and dating.





## Starter script:

"In this phase of your life, I know you're still figuring out who you are and what kind of person you want to be. I think that's actually a really cool journey for you to go on. **Do you have any thoughts about the kind of person you want to be as you get older?**

For a lot of people, part of that journey is to think about who they're attracted to or want to date. For some people this just means having more crushes or starting to explore dating with members of the opposite sex, but for other people, they begin to experience attraction or desire to date people of the same sex. **Do you hear or see a lot about same-sex attraction at your school or with your friends? What questions do you have about that?**

At the same time, there are also people who start to lean into experimenting with how they see themselves or how they want others to see them. Sometimes, that even means exploring the idea that they, as girls, might feel like boys or they, as boys, might feel more like girls. Those are questions about

gender identity. **Do you know or have heard about anyone who sees themselves as different from the gender they appear to be? What kinds of questions do you have about that?**

These are big topics that even I have questions about myself. For now, I want you to remember that your identity is about so much more than just who you are or even who you like. And there's nothing you can't come to me about in conversation about this topic.

**How can I make sure you feel comfortable to talk to me about things you hear or experience like this that may bring up questions or confusion for you?**

As a family, we believe that God created you just the way you are. We know that God created both men and women uniquely, even if culture may tell us otherwise. We also know that all people were created to display God's image to the world around them. So no matter what, I want you to see yourself and others as image bearers of God's character to the world.

That is who you are!"



### ONE CONVERSATION:

**Have you heard people talk about identity? What do you think that word means? What kinds of things make up a person's identity?**

**Why do you think it's important to learn more about how God made you in this phase of your life?**

**While we believe that God's design is for dating and relationships to be between people of the opposite sex (men and women), sometimes people experience attraction to people of the same sex. How have you heard people talk about that at school, with your friends, online, or in TV shows or books?**

**While we believe that God created you exactly the way you are, sometimes people believe they can choose to be someone else, specifically when it comes to their gender. How have you heard people talk about exploring their gender at school, with your friends, online, or in TV shows or books?**

**What do you think it means to be made in the image of God? How can we reflect that image to the people around us?**



# Conversation:

## 6

## Diving into Dating and Understanding God's Redeeming Love



### What does the Bible say?

1 Corinthians 13 was not originally written about romantic love, but was part of Paul's encouragement to the Corinthian church to foster unity. However, when Paul writes that love "does not dishonor others" and "is not self-seeking," there are clear connections to the topic of dating. Some teens may want to get into romantic relationships simply for the status boost it gives them—or to pursue certain romantic experiences for their own sake—but Christian love is about learning to see others as full humans too, and learning to put others' needs above our own.

### The point:

Though your tweens and young teens may not be dating just yet, they are standing on the verge of entering the complex world of relationships and growing increasingly curious about what that might mean for them. Talking to them now about the basics of self-esteem and healthy relationships means healthy attitudes toward dating and even sexual pleasure **are likely** to follow.

### Culture, translated:

Philip Lindsay is the Internet's favorite middle school teacher. A special education math instructor by day, Mr. Lindsay has turned his TikTok series that breaks down all the Gen Alpha slang he hears in the classroom into a lucrative side hustle. Now, he's become a middle school translator of sorts in a regular feature on the *Today Show* called "What the Kids Are Saying."

One of his most watched appearances? A quick breakdown of one of **2023's word of year**: rizz.

What does it mean? By definition (yes, even **Merriam Webster** is in on the conversation), rizz means having romantic appeal or charm. It's a new take on the

concept of charisma that's got tweens and teens talking about their ability to flirt, spit game, and woo another person with your charm.

**As Mr. Lindsay explains**, the word comes with all kinds of fun iterations:

**The Rizzler**

**The Rizzly Bear**

**The Rizzard of Oz**

**Rizzosaurus Rex**

**A Phd in Quantum Rizzics**

**A Professor of Rizzonomics**



Yes, the list of ways tweens and teens talk about their ability to turn on the charm—particularly in regards to dating—is long. What’s especially interesting about the phenomenon of rizz is that while kids in this phase may talk a big talk about dating, the reality is few of them are actually ready to walk the walk.

While they may be curious about relationships or even interested in dating, the reality is most middle schoolers aren’t actively engaged in dating. In fact, **research shows** that this generation of teenagers are dating less than any generation before them. While that downshift could be the result of all kinds of things, **experts suspect** it’s primarily because of the uptick in the use of immersive technology, an increase in parental supervision, and a change in social norms surrounding dating and marriage.

Those who are dating—or at least attempting to put their personal rizz to practice—are dating in a very loose sense of the word. In a review of the 2019 Hulu series *Pen15* (a show which features two adults playing middle school versions of themselves), **the reviewer describes** how the characters are interested in dating but “in the almost theoretical way that middle school encourages, where getting a boyfriend or girlfriend can seem like the most important thing in the entire world, but once you have one, you don’t necessarily want to see them all that much, except when you’re broadcasting your status to everyone else or working your way through whatever your interest in sex happens to be.”

And as parents of tweens and teens, you likely know this to be true. For middle schoolers, dating is more of a theoretical idea than an actual component of their everyday lives. The good news? That means diving into a conversation about dating and sex now while they’re still on the cusp of real-life relationships means you’re ahead of the game. You’re being proactive rather than reactive, and that will equip your child to do the same when they really are ready to date.

## Good, Bad, Bible:

Contrary to what some people might believe, healthy conversations about sex and dating now help develop healthy attitudes toward the subject matter as they grow up. More importantly, they help kids to approach sex in a way that is actually *less* high-risk. One **study** concluded, “Youth who have positive attitudes toward sexual pleasure and are well acquainted with their sexual desires are less likely to engage in undesired sexual activity or risky sexual behaviors.”

As a clinician, Sadusky observes that people who have gradual, developmentally appropriate conversations about sex in childhood are able to develop sexually in ways that are more sustainable. “They learn boundaries,” she says, “and they learn more complex conversation skills because their parents haven’t just talked them through what sex is or [explained] the benefits of delaying sexual activity, but they’ve also given their kid concrete skills about how to put these things into practice.”

*How do I actually delay sexual intercourse as a teenager?*

*How do I set boundaries with a romantic interest?*

*What do I do if somebody kisses me without my consent?*

Early conversations about bodies and bodily changes are what lay the foundation for meaningful discussions about these types of questions as children become teens and tweens, says Sadusky. And those complex topics like dating and sexual activity are where our young people need a lot of help, wisdom, and support.



Madison Fergerstrom, a licensed mental health counselor, encourages parents to take an active approach in **initiating conversations** with adolescents about dating. When it comes to talking about standards and expectations, Fergerstrom recommends asking questions such as:

**What age do you think is appropriate for dating?**

*How do you feel about kissing?*

*Does the person you're interested in express strong values?*

*Does this person pursue the things of God or the things of this world?*

Questions like these, Fergerstrom explains, can help families collaboratively pursue Scripture's descriptions of God's desires for relationships. In fact, she says, talking about some of these verses together by asking what they mean and could look like in any young person's given situation could be a great conversation starter:

- "So, flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." – 2 Timothy 2:22
- "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." – 1 Corinthians 6:18
- "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" – 2 Corinthians 6:14

**By describing the biblical standard for romantic relationships while making clear that your home is a safe place for your son or daughter to tell you anything, parents can build a firm foundation for their tweens and teens to stand upon.**

They're going to fall—whether through the heartbreak of unrequited love, the choice to engage in sinful behavior, or a relationship gone bad. While continual, open conversations can go a long way in helping our children avoid unnecessary heartache, they also create safety and support for when that heartache comes.

There's a really good side to all of this early talk about sex and dating for you, the parent, as well. It creates an opportunity for you to step into the world your middle schooler is living in and share the joys of early attraction and newfound romance with them. No, this isn't permission to become the "cool parent" or try to take the place of the best friend forever. Rather, it's a chance for you to share the highs and lows of dating with them in real time.

If a tween admits a crush, ask what qualities they like in that person. If your kid shares a story about someone having a crush on them, respond by asking them to tell you more about that person or how they feel about the crush. As teens grow older and step into dating relationships, make an effort to be hospitable toward your child's boyfriend or girlfriend by including them in occasional family dinners or outings.



The goal? To help your kids keep their dating lives from becoming isolated and secretive and instead to help them see the value of opening up to safe, trusted people (like you!) about the positive and negative aspects and experiences of dating and relationships.

## Starter script:

“At your age, I know you may not be all that interested in dating or relationships yet. It’s probably something you and your friends are talking about already, and maybe even curious about in this phase of your life.

**What kinds of things do you and your friends think about dating right now?**

If you are interested in dating, both now and as you get older, that’s something I’d love for us to talk about together. **What kind of rules do you think we should have around dating for you?**

There’s probably a lot you’ve seen or heard about on TV, online, in books, or even from older siblings and friends about dating that could leave you feeling anywhere from really excited to really nervous about the idea of it. That’s totally okay! It’s all part of the deal with dating. We have to take the good and the bad!

**What questions do you have about dating? What makes you nervous about the idea of it?**

One of the biggest things I want you to know about dating is that it can actually be a really fun part of life. It’s a great way to get to know new people, learn how to have good conversations, take an interest in someone else, and navigate how to share your feelings and thoughts with someone you care about.

**What’s one thing you’re looking forward to when it comes time to date?**

What’s cool is that God has a good plan for us in all areas of our lives, dating included! Does that mean it will always be simple and easy to date? Unfortunately not! People are always going to be people, and that means we’re always going to get it wrong at times. But it does mean we can look to God to remind us what’s true about who we are and what’s good for us. And we can be sure that, no matter what we feel—lonely, excited, heartbroken, curious, left out, or eager—there’s a good plan for our dating lives that we trust God has under control.”

### ONE CONVERSATION:

**What is dating? What is the purpose of dating?**

**How do you think most people your age feel about dating right now?**

**What are some potential positives that might come from dating? And what about some not so good things?**

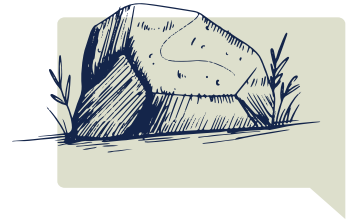
**What do you think God thinks about dating?**

**What’s one way that your faith might impact the way you date when you’re ready to date?**

**When you do get interested in or start dating, what can I do to support you? How can we be sure we keep talking about it together?**



# Where to go from here?



“When do you plan to have ‘the talk’?”  
a fellow playground mom asked Sam Milam.

At the time, Milam’s kids were barely pushing four and eight years old. For many parents of young kids, the question alone would’ve felt too much too soon. Perhaps that’s why Milam’s answer surprised those other playground parents.

“Oh, you mean talking to my kids about sex?” she replied. “We’ve been having conversations in that realm since they were infants.”

For Milam, the choice to engage the topic of anatomy, sex, and all that encompasses both with her kids at such ages was born out of her own experience. Or, we should say, lack thereof. While she’s been talking to her children about their bodies, their feelings, and more since they were old enough to understand, her parents gave her what she describes as the “exact opposite.”

“I didn’t know how sex worked... All I knew was that sex was a taboo topic... ‘Don’t have sex before marriage...’ That was the end of it. The full extent of my sexual education: abstinence.”

Like many others who grew up the way she did, it took Milam a long time as an adult to shake off the shame, restrictions, and confusion she experienced around sex. So, when she became a parent herself, she chose a different approach to talking to her kids about it.

“I’ve decided to keep the one-and-done ‘talk’ out of my house, and instead have open discussions with my children about consent, properly identifying body parts, mechanics of making a baby, how they’re formed, and all the different types of relationships and identities there are.”

These days, more and more parents are asking the very same question Milam was asked on the playground that day:

## When should I talk to my kids about sex?

One Google search alone will show you the answers are quite literally all over the place. What does that tell us? That as parents, we’re not alone in it. We’re all desperately trying to make sure our kids are educated and clear about sex before it’s too late.

The good news is you’re already ahead of the game. That fact that you’ve made it this far in our little Sex Talk Kickoff is reason enough to give yourself a pat on the back for taking on the hard work of talking about sex with your kids right now.

The bad news (that isn’t really all that bad!) is that we tend to agree with parents like Milam on this one. This is really just the starting point. When it comes to the conversation about sex with your kids, this is just the beginning, and the end point doesn’t really exist. In

fact, there’s an entire new movement of parents like Milam who aren’t just having the talk; they’re having the conversation. **They’re dropping talking to your kids about sex in favor of an ongoing dialogue and continuous conversation on the subject.**

And that’s exactly what we hope you’ll do, too!

You’ve done the hard work of opening the door and starting the dialogue with your tweens and teens. But you don’t want to quit here! Your best next step is to simply keep talking to your kid. To stay curious about their experiences and perspectives, lean in with interest when they share, and continue to educate yourself as the landscape of dating, sex, and relationships changes for them.



## In specific, here are a few ways to do just that:

- **Practice your responses ahead of time.** Think about what you'll say if your child comes to you with a question, experience, or concern about sex and dating that you weren't ready for just yet. Your response will make or break their level of comfort to return to you and keep the conversation open. So, think through how you hope to react in a calm, open, and clear manner if and when that might happen.
- **Ask questions and take an interest in their answers.** As your kids get older, they may start naturally pulling away from sharing with you at times. That's to be expected! Still, it's your responsibility to keep the conversation open. So, keep asking questions. Even if they don't answer right away or at all, keep asking so they know you care. And when they do come to you to share their thoughts, lean in with interest no matter what else is going on around you at the time.
- **Set boundaries and show grace.** While you want the open, honest dialogue to continue, you have to remember you're still the parent in this scenario. That means setting boundaries and establishing rules for your kids around sex and dating as they get older is imperative. Be clear with your kid on what your family's boundaries are for them. But remember, your kid is still human (just like you!). When they misstep or make a mistake, it's your job to show them grace even amidst the consequences.
- **Stay educated.** The conversation surrounding sex and dating in our culture is rapidly changing. The way kids get their information changes almost on the daily! What's in the news, what people are talking about on TikTok, the stories they hear at school, what their older siblings might be doing—it all adds up to a constantly changing landscape of sex and sexuality for your kids. As the parent, stay up to date and connected with all that culture is saying to your kids about sex so that you can engage in the conversation with them in a way they understand.
- **Ask other parents.** We know the struggle is most definitely real! But we also know that, as parents, you don't have to struggle alone. Remember, everyone is asking how and when to talk to their kids about sex. So lean on other parents, both those in the same phase of parenting as you and those who are a little ahead of you on the journey. Learn from each other, pray for each other, share with each other, and encourage each other to keep talking to your kids.

*Will it be awkward? Sometimes.*

*Will your kids always be honest? Probably not.*

*Will you have to engage in some pretty tough conversations with grace? Definitely.*

*Will your kid resist opening up? At times.*

*But will your kid look back and know without a doubt that you were a safe, secure, and healthy place for them to go with all their questions, concerns, and experiences about this and more? Yes.*

That's what dialogue does! Rather than talk about it once and move on like it never happened, leave the door open for the conversation to continue in this phase and beyond.

For parents like Milam, this is the ultimate goal.

**“As they grow, the conversations will evolve,” she expects. “I imagine when they become teenagers they’ll have a full mental toolbox on what sex can be like... And they’ll know that they can always have an open, safe discussion with their mother about their sexual experiences.”**



# Resources

## A Culture Translator On:

[Beyond Consent](#)

[Sextortion on the Rise](#)

[Situationships and Sam Smith At The Grammys](#)

## A Parent's Guide To:

[Body Positivity](#)

[Gender Identity](#)

[Modesty](#)

[Purity](#)

[Sexual Assault](#)

[Sexting](#)

[Talking About Masturbation](#)

[Talking To Your Teen About Pornography](#)

[Teen Dating](#)

[The Sex Talk](#)

## A 7 Minute Video On:

[How Should Christians Think About Pride Month?](#)

[Is AI Dangerous? Things Christians Should Consider About AI](#)

[Olivia Rodrigo \(and the Cultural Sexualization of Women\)](#)

[Sam Jolman on The Sex Talk You Never Got](#)  
(The Culture Translator Podcast)

[Sex Talk 2.0 30-day course](#)

["Shame, Healing, and Restoration"](#)

## Additional Resources

["11 Tips for Helping Your Teen Navigate Dating Relationships"](#)

["Adolescents' Perception of Their Sexual Self, Relational Capacities, Attitudes Towards Sexual Pleasure and Sexual Practices: a Descriptive Analysis"](#)

["Associations between adolescents watching pornography and poor mental health in three Swedish surveys"](#)

["Big Rise in U.S. Teens Identifying As Gay, Bisexual"](#)

[Good Pictures Bad Pictures](#) by Kristen A. Jenson

[Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.](#) by Kristen A. Jenson

["New estimates show 300,000 youth ages 13-17 identify as transgender in the US"](#)

["A New Survey Finds 81 Percent Of Women Have Experienced Sexual Harassment"](#)

["Parental communication and youth sexual behaviour"](#)

["Parents' perspectives on talk with their adolescent and emerging adult children about sex: A longitudinal analysis"](#)

["Porn and the Threat to Virility"](#)

["Relationships Between Adolescent Sexual Outcomes and Exposure to Sex in Media: Robustness to Propensity-Based Analysis"](#)

[Start Talking to Your Kids About Sex](#) by Julia Sadusky

[Talking with Your Teen About Sex](#) by Julia Sadusky

["Teens and Pornography"](#)

["Teens Watch Porn to Learn About Sex—This Is What Porn Teaches Them"](#)

[The Freedom Fight](#)

[The Sex Talk You Never Got](#) by Sam Jolman

["The Talk" Survey: A Sex Education Map | Future Method](#)

[Unwanted](#) by Jay Stringer

["What's the Average Age of a Child's First Exposure to Porn?"](#)

["Why Can't We Just Talk About It?: An Observational Study of Parents' and Adolescents' Conversations About Sex"](#)

["Young adolescents' responsiveness to sexual communication with their mother: Distinguishing diverse intentions"](#)

