

## **“The Talk”**

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The mere thought of having “the talk” about sexuality with their children often makes parents shudder and want to head for the hills. Parents often feel ill-equipped, unprepared and fear saying something “wrong.” However, in truth, parents are the best sources of information and sources for imparting values to their children. Recently, I was asked about this topic and the concerned and brave parent who was preparing for “the talk” asked, “Can I talk about my values about sexuality?” My answer was, “absolutely.” I encourage and recommend to parents that their values about sexuality be taught along with providing information.

“The talk” does not need to be a single event but can be done slowly over the years as children grow and are ready for more information. Parents can use the following outline as a general guide:

**Ages 2-4 years:**

During this stage, children often begin to spend more time away from parents. It can be beneficial to have a quiet non-threatening discussion with children about private areas and appropriate and inappropriate touching. Children should be informed that if someone does touch him or her in a private area then the parents should be told. This discussion can be done in a simple, straight-forward manner, without fear, anxiety or shame

**Ages 4-6 years:**

During this stage, it is normal for children to explore their bodies or the bodies of other children their age. This exploration should be gently redirected without shame or guilt. Although this may be uncomfortable for parents, this is an opportunity for parents to teach appropriate boundaries.

**Ages 5-9 years:**

During this stage, children often become fascinated by “where babies come from.” Parents can answer this question by giving information about conception and pregnancy as a matter of biological facts. This may be an opportunity to simply mention “when married, a husband and wife...” At this stage it is not necessary to harp on abstinence before marriage. A simple mention of values will do.

**Ages 10-13 years:**

During this stage, children will begin to experience drastic changes in their bodies, hormones and emotions. Children often appreciate it when parents give them a road map and explain the changes before they occur. They need to hear that these changes are normal. The changes can be discussed over time in a

non-threatening, informative way. Parents may want to share their own experiences and how they negotiated this stage.

#### Ages 12-15 years

During this stage, parents may want to discuss with their children more in-depth their idea of appropriate behavior with someone of the opposite sex. Guidelines for contact with friends of the opposite sex should be discussed and established. It is appropriate for parents to be clear on their values around sexuality. If adolescents are allowed to date then parents may want to discuss expectations the adolescent should have regarding how they are treated by their dates.

The above is simply an outline for parents. Sometimes exposure to television or friends that are more progressive may force some issues to be discussed earlier. Parents can still address issues in a calm manner without guilt or shame and revisit issues if necessary. "The talk" can be a process instead of an event.

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