CONVERSATIONS BY DESIGN

Talking to Children and Teens about
the Body, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

THE AUSTIN STONE
COUNSELING CENTER

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Conversations by Design: Talking to Children and Teens about the Body, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

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Note to Parents

Talking to your children about topics such as body image, sex, and sexuality is tough—likely in the top three conversations you and your children dread most. You may have questions about how much to talk about and when to start the conversation. You may fear sharing too much and scarring your kids, or sharing too little and leaving them vulnerable to situations they don't know how to handle. It feels like a double-edged sword. In our day and age, in a culture that is over-sexualized, it is even more confusing to know where to start the conversation and how. You are not alone.

The reality is, when we look at how we as the church have communicated about these topics historically, it has been inadequate. Our approaches to teaching children about sex has focused primarily on abstinence before marriage, with purity and virginity as the aim. In and of itself, abstinence before marriage and purity are God-honoring. But they do not tell the whole story of God's beautiful design in sexuality or the exquisite grace offered to the sexually broken (i.e., all of us). Our approach in many ways has leveraged shame, making conversations about sexuality more difficult. Shame naturally creates challenges to openness, dialogue, and vulnerability regarding sex. Although an intentional, significant, and beautiful part of God's design, sexuality has been inadequately addressed in the church, leaving parents like you and your children unprepared to address the topic.

We know now the impact of limited conversations and have an opportunity to equip our children better. The cultural climate requires a more robust and relevant response, with the speed and level of exposure children and teens are growing up with. Our hope is that what follows would serve as a guide as you reflect on and plan for conversations with your children.

Biblical Design

Throughout this guide you will see references to **biblical design.** For clarity, let's define that.

> **Revelation 4:11:** *Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*

By **biblical design,** we mean there is a perfect order with which the good, beautiful, and perfect God created things to work. He is the only being in all of history to not be created—He simply was and is (Genesis 1:1-3, Psalm 90:2, Hebrews 11:3, John 1:3). Out of His creative genius He designed the rest of creation for His good pleasure and our flourishing. As with all things that are created, it is the inventor, the designer, the originator that can best communicate how something works. As we look at our bodies, gender, and sexuality, we see all were created by God with intentionality, with purpose, and for our good.

Cultural Disorder

Just as we see evidence of a perfect biblical design, we also see and experience disorder. God ordered and designed all created things to work in perfect union, but we rebelled. We pushed away from God's ordering of things and chose our own way. In the garden, Adam and Eve ate from the one tree in all of the garden that God had commanded them not to (Genesis 3). His one "no" amid all the abundance of Eden was so tempting that they turned their backs on their Father. Adam and Eve chose to eat. That one act fractured all of creation, resulting in a no-longer perfectly ordered creation. Flourishing was and is minimized (Romans 5:12-21).

We all feel the depth of sin so much that it is impossible for us to choose good on our own. Toddlers naturally bite and hit when they don't get their way. Pre-schoolers develop a savvy charm to get what they want. With either cunning or aggression, we are bent from our earliest years to follow in the footsteps of our older brother and sister, Adam and Eve.

Knowing this helps us understand the predicament we find ourselves in culturally. It is in our nature to turn away from God (Romans 3:23, Romans 1:18-32), and it is the gift of faith alone that allows us to understand the depth of our sin and our need for a Savior (Romans 6:23, Romans 10:9).

> **Romans 8:20-21:** *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

Redemption

> **2 Corinthians 5:14-17:** *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Outside of God saving us, our natural bent remains. We pursue ungodly things. Once we are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17), even with a regenerated heart, we still wrestle with the old self (Romans 7:13-25). This should produce deep compassion for those who do not yet know the saving grace of Christ. It should also help us see our incredible reliance on the Lord for our growing faithfulness toward Him and for the teaching and gospel conversations we have with our children to take root.

As we dive into the topics of body, gender, sex, and sexuality, there are four key areas to focus on: (1) self-awareness, (2) prioritization of a biblical perspective on sexuality rather than a culturally informed one, (3) learning and re-learning your child at different ages and stages, and (4) open communication.

1. **Self-Awareness**
    - Without an honest assessment of our history with the topics, it is easy to allow our messy histories to dictate what we offer our kids. We do not want fear or messy pasts to shape any child's future. So, be honest with yourself, wrestle well with your story, and pray for wisdom as to what and when to share as you faithfully shepherd your kids.

2. **God's Culture**
    - Post Eden, we live in a broken world, with broken bodies, all smashed together to form a broken culture. Even with all the fractures, we are called to live in this world but to be different (1 Peter 2:11-12, Matthew 5:13-16).

- God calls us to personal holiness (Romans 6:22, Hebrews 12:14, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 4:20-24), He commands us to test what is good, beautiful, and true (Romans 12:1-2), and He calls us to disciple the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). These are difficult tasks. But our God is a good Father. He equips us for all of them (2 Peter 1:3, John 14:15-17 and 26, Romans 8:26).
- Let God teach you. Be honest enough to admit you don't always know best, and be open-handed, ready to be transformed by God's Word.
- Verses: Galatians 5:19-21 and 6:9, Matthew 5:13-16, Romans 12:1-2, James 4:17, Romans 7:15-18, 1 John 2:15-16, Colossians 3:5-6, 1 Corinthians 3:19, Proverbs 14:12, 1 Samuel 16:7

3. Learning and Re-Learning Your Child

- If your child were an infant, we would call learning and re-learning as reading their cues. Sounds simple enough, but an infant has a finite list of needs (usually food, sleep, and general biological functioning) of which you are not in charge.
- As children grow and develop, the complexity of their minds, hearts, and sin always changes. Keep pace with them. Do work at all ages and stages to know them and seek their good through prayer, provision, connection, correction, and pointing them to Jesus. Point them to Jesus when they do good and point them to Jesus when they make mistakes. Point them to Jesus when you do good and when you make mistakes, too.
- Knowing and understanding your child and their needs through all the ages and stages can be a complicated journey, with a lot of ups and downs. For additional support, we recommend scheduling a parent consult with a clinician from The Austin Stone Counseling Center (ASCC), joining the Child-Parent Relationship therapy group the next time it is offered, and/or other taking relevant equipping courses offered through The Austin Stone and The Austin Stone Counseling Center.

4. Open Communication

- Communication and understanding are the foundation of healthy relationships. This guide is meant to support you in building that vital foundation of communication between you and your child. Whether you have one child or seven children, each is unique, as is each relationship you have with your children. Fortunately, we are not alone on this journey. We have a faithful Father to turn to. The Lord will guide you as you guide your child.

Our team at The Austin Stone Counseling Center is committed to faithfully sharing what the Lord presses on our hearts and minds and learning and growing alongside you. Please let us know if you have questions or needs. We would love to journey with you in this process of fostering healthy relationships with your children and having conversations about body image, gender, sex, and sexuality.

Parent Self-Assessment

Before guiding children toward a biblical view of their body, gender, sex, and sexuality, we need to look inward. Each of us is broken—in our bodies, in our gendered being, in how we view and experience sex, and in how we view and engage our sexuality.

> **Romans 3:23**: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

We are broken. But because of the grace extended to us in Jesus, we no longer have to conceal those broken parts. We can bring our brokenness to Him.

The following assessment is a self-inventory. It offers an opportunity to explore your views and experience of your body, gender, sex, and sexuality. This process, though painful, will aid you as you gain a clearer understanding of what God says about these things. It will also help you guide your child more authentically and in such a way that honors God. Children don't need perfect parents. They need humble ones.

Instructions for Self-Assessment

The Parent Self-Assessment has four sections: Body, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality. Read the content, answer the questions, and follow the prompts. This is a tool for self-reflection and ought to be shared with a spouse or trusted friend as you seek to learn from the Lord about His design in you. God offers us opportunities for increased freedom and experiences of grace through reflection, confession, and repentance. Confession is for our good (James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13, Psalm 32:5).

> **1 John 1:9**: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

As you go through this inventory, please consider your support needs. It can be challenging to see your sin and weakness. But, with care and support, seeing your sin will allow you to experience Jesus more. Support resources include:

- Recovery Ministry
- A pastor, elder, or deacon
- Your Missional Community (MC) leader or Life Transformation Group (LTG)
- A counselor at The Austin Stone Counseling Center

Self-Assessment | Part 1: Body

Biblical View

In his book, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves*, Sam Alberry identifies our bodies being:

- Well made (Genesis 2),
- Handmade (Psalm 139:13-14),
- Fearfully made (Ephesians 2:10), and
- Purposefully made (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Scripture outlines that our bodies are important for how we image God, how we honor and obey God, and how we live the life He intended for us to live. Nothing about our design or lives is without purpose or will be wasted (Isaiah 46:9-10).

> **Ephesians 1:11-12:** *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

A healthy view of the body includes physical stewardship, as well as emotional and spiritual care (1 Timothy 4:8). Physical stewardship includes efforts to give your body what it needs for longevity, motivated by an awareness that every breath is a gift from God. You cannot fully control the physical abilities or disabilities bestowed to you or the outcome of your efforts; you are simply called to be a faithful steward of the body God has given you. Categories of physical stewardship include hydration, food, movement, sleep, and seeking support from physicians and other healthcare providers.

Emotional and spiritual stewardship includes efforts to see and experience your body as the Lord intended. We are emotionally prone to view our bodies in distorted ways. We either elevate its importance or minimize its importance. Growing to see yourself more and more through God's eye is key! Your value also must be rooted in the glorious and humbling truth that you were made in God's image. We must examine how positive and negative feedback regarding our bodies influences how we view them. We must *take every thought captive* (2 Corinthians 10:5) and evaluate it under the lens of how God sees us and what He says about us. Thieves to joy in this area are comparison and shame, among others.

Secular View

The word *dysmorphia* means a deformity or abnormality in the shape or size of a specific part of the body. We use this word to describe *body dysmorphia*, when someone hyper-fixates on a particular part of their body that they see as flawed. We also define *gender dysmorphia* as the feeling of comfort or distress someone might feel if they believe their gender is not reflective of who they are.

In both circumstances, individuals feel not at home in their body. This can lead to problematic behaviors such as eating disorders, self-injury, mutilation, obsessive exercise, and gender reassignment surgery. While *milder* in intensity, behaviors such as materialism, immodest dress, and efforts to preserve youth can fall under the umbrella category of dysmorphia.

Consider and reflect on the following questions:

1. **On a scale of 0-10, what is your current physical health?**
   (0=worst, 10=best)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. **On a scale of 0-10, what would be your average physical health over your lifetime?**
   (0=worst, 10=best)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. **What are your God-given strengths when it comes to your body (e.g., athleticism, health, good sleep, good hygiene, etc.)?**

4. **What are your weaknesses or limitations when it comes to your body**

5. **What positive influences have helped you with physical health and body image?**

6. **What negative influences have you faced regarding physical health and body image?**

Pause and Pray

Thank God for the gifts and capabilities He has provided, as well as positive influences you have had toward healthy stewardship of your body. Ask the Lord for help where you are weak and/or have limitations. Ask God to help you forgive and heal from negative influences in your physical health and body image.

1. **When trying to be healthy, what areas receive most of your time and effort (hydration, nutrition, movement, sleep, relationships, spiritual)? Why?**

2. **Are there other priorities that would allow you to live more holistically healthy?**

3. **Are there key behaviors getting in the way of a healthy lifestyle (e.g., comparison, shame, addiction, lack of budget, lack of tangible resources, vanity, never saying "no" to yourself, etc.)? What is a step toward faithfulness in this area of your life (e.g., confession, accountability, saying "no" in one area of your life, purchasing a resource, creating a budget, etc.)?**

4. **How do you spend money in relation to your body (consider food, alcohol, cosmetics, exercise, etc.)? In what ways is this God-honoring? In what ways is the Lord challenging you to modify your habits?**

5. **Are there key Scriptures that encourage and/or challenge you in this area of your life? Meditate on those Scriptures and ask the Lord to keep teaching you.**

6. **How is my relationship with my body influencing how I parent my child? In what ways is that helpful? In what ways may it be hindering my child's view of the Lord's perspective?**

7. **We have a perfect Father. One of the gifts of being His child is getting to learn from how He parents. As you consider God's parenting, do you believe you and the Lord would parent your child in a similar way related to their body? Why or why not?**

8. **What aspects of Jesus' character do you need to learn from to care for your child well?**

Self-Assessment | Part 2: Gender

Biblical View

Part of God's design for us as His image bearers is in our gender.

> **Genesis 1:27:** *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

God's design indicates that Adam without Eve was insufficient (Genesis 2:18). This was not a criticism of Adam or manhood in general; rather, God's design maximizes His glory. God wanted to show us something exquisite within His nature, and it required a complement for Adam. Enter Eve (Genesis 2:23). Eve, likewise, received her complement in Adam.

God had a purpose for creating two genders and their complementary relationship. It echoes the perfectly unified relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! But in addition to that beautiful design and reflection of God's image, God has specific purposes for you as male or female.

God numbered the hair on our heads (Luke 12:7), He knew what shade He wanted your skin to be, and He made your eyes the particular color they are (Psalm 139:13-16). Your gender is a part of the specificity with which God made you. This highlights the incredible value He has for you and bestows dignity on all humanity—both genders and all races and capabilities. You were made on purpose. He did not make a mistake (Matthew 5:48, Deuteronomy 32:4).

> **Psalm 18:30:** *This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.*

Besides trusting God's good design as Creator, a biblical view of gender acknowledges that God has the right to tell us what to do with our bodies. Some people struggle with God's authority more than others, and many are hypocritical—we say God can say "no" to us on some things, but not on all things. This kind of attitude reveals our sin. We are enslaved to whatever we deem as more worthy of our attention and loyalty than God.

Are you willing to receive a "no" from the Lord? In what areas of your life is it harder to accept a "no"? How hard is it say "no" to your child? How does fear play into your unwillingness to set limits with your children?

Secular View

In part one of this self-assessment, we said some individuals may experience *gender dysmorphia*, a feeling of distress with their gendered bodies. Some experience this feeling young (as early as age two). Others develop a sense of *wrongness* about their body as they grow up. Our culture can enhance this dysphoric feeling with generalizations about what it means to be a man or woman. Our culture has embraced a narrative, language, and script about this dysphoric feeling that says:

> If you are not happy with your body, *change it.*

This viewpoint elevates humans beyond their capability. It says we know what is good. It also minimizes the glorious gift our bodies are intended to be and the dignity embedded in them by our perfect heavenly Father.

Even Job, the man the Bible says did not sin even while enduring extreme suffering, was corrected by God when He questioned God's plan for him. God rebukes him for more than two chapters in Job 38-40.

Sometimes we may read these chapters and believe God is being harsh. Another perspective, though, is that He is being incredibly loving. Allowing Job to go on believing that the God of the universe had made a mistake would cause much more harm than the incredible pains he had already experienced. Below is a highlight, but it would be fruitful to read chapters 38-40 in their entirety. After reading them, consider what aspects of your life, body, and gender you think God made a mistake with. How do you need God to lovingly rebuke you?

Job 38:1-4: *The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding."*

It would be heartbreaking to believe we are somehow in plan B for our lives and wage war on our bodies due to a dysphoric feeling. What we need to wage war on is that feeling. *The heart is deceitful above all things*, the Bible says, and *desperately sick; who can understand it?* (Jeremiah 17:9). We should instead accept God's invitation to know Him—the God of the universe who does know all things. Where we lack understanding, He doesn't. Where we have limited capacity to hold all things together, we get to rest in Him, trusting that He knows what He is doing.

As we consider how to lovingly communicate these truths about gender to children and teens who are confused, we must look to Jesus' example throughout His ministry. He perfectly communicated both truth and love without compromising either. Our culture thinks choice is kind; however, it can alternatively affirm the lingo of self-hatred to a person who is confused, scared, and in pain. Rather than changing their body in response to gender dysphoria, the most God-honoring resolution is to manage the dysphoric feeling and learn how to embrace the unique design God has given them.

Consider and reflect on the following questions:

1. **What does the word "authority" mean to you? Who were authority figures in your life? Were they trustworthy?**

2. **How do you respond to authorities currently in your life (e.g., police, employer, etc.)?**

3. **On a scale of 0-10, how much do you value God as Creator and Designer? Are things He makes well-made? Does this extend to you and to your child?**
   (0=not at all, 10=ultimately, unwavering)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. **On a scale of 0-10, how good are you at saying no to yourself?**
   (0=not at all, 10=frequently)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. **How comfortable are you with setting limits for your child? What areas are most difficult for you? How has this impacted your relationship with your child?**

6. **How do you experience your gender? Have you always felt masculine or feminine? Why or why not?**

7. **What gender stereotypes were prevalent in your upbringing? Which are present currently?**

8. **How do you believe you uniquely reflect God's image as a man or a woman? How is this good?**

Pause and Pray

Thank God for being a perfect and trustworthy authority. Ask for healing where you have had imperfect authorities outside of Him. Thank God for how He has designed you and your child. Reflect on how God has made you as a man or woman and the unique ways He allows you to live out your femininity or masculinity. Ask God to affirm you in your gender. Ask God for wisdom in how to affirm the gender of your child.

1. **What does it mean to love others who you disagree with?**

2. **How can you demonstrate love and grace while holding boundaries the Lord calls you to?**

3. **What differences arise in conversations around gender when you are talking to believers versus non-believers?**

4. **What differences arise in conversations with a child who is gender nonconforming versus a parent who is gender nonconforming?**

5. **How do you feel about using gender pronouns requested by a child or family member who is gender nonconforming? How would you communicate that decision to the family member? To your child?**

Self-Assessment | Part 3: Sex

Biblical View

God designed humans sexually. The desire for sex is built into our bodies, and is a symbol of His passionate love for us (Hosea 2:14-20, Isaiah 43:1-7, Ezekiel 16:1-14, Song of Solomon).

> **Hosea 2:19-20:** *And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.*

Sexual expression is designed within the context of a lifelong covenant of marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:22-25, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, Song of Solomon 3:5, 8:4). We are invited to steward our sexuality as we do with other aspects of our lives—in a way that prioritizes the Giver of the gift as opposed to the gift itself. This requires faith, obedience, patience, and repentance.

Secular View

In our culture today, sex is pervasive. We see it in TV shows and movies and hear it in explicit song lyrics. They all beckon us with the message that sexual self-expression is the meaning of life. Early sexual experiences, the quantity of sexual experiences, and limited rules around sexual expression dominate our culture. To put parameters around sex is viewed as outdated and depriving a person of the fullest pleasure.

Talking to kids about sex is difficult in general, but our own experiences can often shape what we are fearful of, as well as what we prioritize.

Consider and reflect on the following questions:

1. **How much do you align with the biblical definition of sexual expression? What influences have impacted your answer?**

2. **How old were you when you were told about sex? Who told you? Was it a one-time conversation or multiple?**

3. **What topics were covered? (e.g., logistics, biblical design, sex is good in the right context, don't do it, negatives and/or risks of sex, normal desire, how to manage temptation, saying "no," accepting "no," etc.)**

4. **Was the conversation sufficient? If not, where else did you learn about sex? Was that a good or dangerous thing?**

5. **Were you comfortable asking questions of your parents? Why or why not?**

6. **Were you comfortable going to your family if you made a mistake? Why or why not?**

7. **What do you wish had been different in how you learned about sex?**

8. **What do you wish was different NOW in how you viewed sex?**

Pause and Pray

Ask God for help as you continue to learn how to honor Him in your sexual design. Ask God to help you forgive weaknesses and errors of your caregivers and identify areas you want to improve and address differently with your own children.

Evaluate Your Own History

In this portion of the self-assessment, explore the issues below and how they have impacted you. Consider if counseling support may be valuable as you navigate these issues and conversations with your children.

Abuse: *For parents or caregivers with a history of sexual abuse, the idea of talking about sex can feel challenging and triggering. There are a lot of ways to find support in this conversation. Consider partnering with a spouse, a friend, or other trusted person. Counseling may also be helpful, especially if you have not received counseling to process your initial abuse.*

Masturbation, Pornography, Infidelity: *Is masturbation, pornography, or infidelity a part of your history? If so, what is your current engagement? Is this struggle known to your community and spouse?*

Note: When parents have a particular sin struggle in this area, they tend either to squash the sin in their child's life so there is no opportunity for them to engage in it or to minimize the danger of the sin in an effort to normalize the sin and make it tolerable. But no amount of white-knuckling sin will meet God's call to holiness. While we were dead in our transgressions, Jesus came to and for us. He gave His life to rescue us from our sin (Ephesians 2:1-5). Is your response to your sin to draw near to the throne of Jesus and His grace or to retreat in shame? There is no shame for those who turn to Jesus. There is only grace. He willingly gave His life to purchase yours. He calls you to freedom, which requires faithfully fleeing sin, as His Holy Spirit enables you (1 Peter 2:1-5).

Kids don't need perfect parents. They need humble ones willing to introduce them to Jesus. Your obedient repentance shows your children what to do when they fall short of holiness. There is grace for your child, just as there is grace for you. Your goal as a parent is to model repentance and maintain trust with your kids. Ask God for help as you do this. Ask Him for the Holy Spirit to convict and reveal your sin. Ask for a soft heart willing to die to sin and live to Jesus. Ask for courage and humility to let your children see your weakness so that Jesus' strength shines. Ask for God to show your child their need for a Savior.

Self-Assessment | Part 4: Sexuality

Biblical View

Our identity first and foremost is a child of God. Our sexuality speaks to an aspect of our relationship with God. Merriam Webster defines sexuality as the quality or state of being sexual, sexual receptivity, or sexual interest. But what does God say? What does the One who made you say about who you are, and more specifically, about your sexuality?

> **Genesis 2:23:** *Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*

This was Adam's reaction to seeing Eve for the first time. Some might call it attraction; some might call it being horny. But he says more than a simple statement about attraction. Adam isn't just talking about Eve being beautiful. He isn't just talking about the physical consummation about to happen. He is talking about God's provision, God's design. Adam's words describe a quality of being made for community and for one another. Adam and Eve were made for one another in that they were made for communion. They are a picture that reminds us of our need for communion first and primarily with God. Our God is a good God. He tells us what sex is for and shows us the contexts in which it is good.

Verses: Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25, 3:16; Exodus 20:14; Song of Solomon; Proverbs 5:15-19; Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:24, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 20, 7:2-4; Ephesians 4:19, 5:33; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 4:3

Secular View

As with all aspects of our being, our sexuality is broken. Today's cultural climate promotes sexuality of all forms, without boundaries. Where our desires in Eden were good and ordered perfectly, following the fall when Adam and Eve sinned against God, our desires take turns not intended for us. Our desires lead us to use our sexuality in ways God would not want and in ways that hurt us. Sex outside of marriage, infidelity, homosexuality, bisexuality, and a myriad of other behaviors evidence a lack of understanding and an honoring of what God built our sexuality for (Romans 1:18-32). All these behaviors are rooted in God's good design. They chase after the good desires of community, affection, and connection but in ways that have been distorted and broken. This tangled mess of good-yet-distorted desires makes sexuality a difficult subject to wrestle through.

Pause and Pray

Ask God for clarity about His good purpose for sexuality. What is confusing to you about how sex is a picture of God's love toward us? Ask for wisdom as you sort out the broken distortions the world has given you. And ask for wisdom as you teach your child about God's good design.

Consider and reflect on the following questions:

1. **How do you experience sexual desire?**

2. **Would you consider your level of sexual desire low, medium, or high? What makes you say that?**

3. **When did you first experience sexual desire? How did you view it (good, bad, scared, confused, etc.)?**

4. **Where did you receive education regarding the context for sexuality (not just logistics)? Did this include information about sexuality being a picture of God's love for us? Would that have been helpful? Why or why not?**

5. **What is your view of sex before marriage? How is this consistent or inconsistent with God's Word? If you believe sex before marriage is acceptable, what makes you say that?**

6. **Do you believe God's grace extends to those who have sex before marriage? Why or why not?**

7. **What is your view of infidelity? How is this consistent or inconsistent with God's Word? If you believe sex outside of marriage is acceptable, what makes you say that?**

8. **Do you believe God's grace extends to those who engage in infidelity? Why or why not?**

9. **What is your view of homosexuality, bisexuality, and sexual fluidity? What experiences have informed your view? If you believe homosexuality, bisexuality, and sexual fluidity is acceptable, what makes you say that?**

10. **Do you believe God's grace extends to those who engage in a homosexual or bisexual lifestyle? Why or why not?**

11. **How do you view celibacy? What do you think about people who are same-sex attracted but choose to honor God in their celibacy?**

12. **How do you view abstinence within singleness?**

13. **How do you view cohabitation before marriage?**

Pause and Pray

Ask God to give you a humble heart and assertive confidence in faithfully stewarding your sexuality as you follow Jesus. Ask God to forgive your sexual brokenness. Identify people in your life to remain accountable to with your sexuality. Ask for wisdom as you prepare to teach your children about sexuality

Child Development: Ages, Stages, and Topics

There is no formula for when to talk to your child about body image, gender, sex, and sexuality. Generations of parents have waited to talk about issues *until it was needed*, often delaying until puberty. The challenge of that approach is that it leads to a one-time conversation that often occurs later than is helpful. For children, receiving little bits of information over time is usually better. Another challenge with waiting until it is needed is that parents may be tempted to wait until children ask questions. Children, however, do not typically have the language or emotional maturity to lead a conversation. They need parents to start the conversation and follow it with bits of information over time.

Our culture is over-sexualized. The prevalence for exposure to families with varying sexuality is increasing, as is children and teens wrestling with gender identity. Your children likely will be exposed to various forms of sexuality and gender issues as they grow up. At younger ages, children more readily accept what a parent says is right, which gives parents an opportunity to train a child in what God determines is best.

Below you will find suggested topics to consider as your child grows. These topics are not prescriptive; a thing to keep in mind as you introduce these topics is to *read your child's cues*. This involves paying attention to what they say, how they say it and their body language. Notice if your child turns away, blushes, covers their eyes or redirects to another topic of conversation. This is likely a cue that they are overwhelmed. You can validate their feelings (*Suzy, you seem a bit uncomfortable*), offer a pause (*let's take a break and re-visit this chat another time*), and come back to the conversation.

When you return, modify your approach or your environment. For example, you could give a young child something to play with while you talk. You also could try a book instead of a conversation. For a teen, perhaps go for a drive where they don't have to look at you while you talk. It is important to return to the conversation, but modifying your approach will allow you to test what best supports your child and help you develop your own language for talking about these topics with your child.

Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

1. **Body parts**
   - Use anatomical names (penis, vagina).
   - If using less direct names, something more general is advised (e.g., private parts) as opposed to a pet name (e.g., cookie, willy, etc.).
2. **Biblical design of body**
   - Delight in the body.
   - God designed and declared the body good.
   - Let your child know their body is well-made.

Ways to Approach

- Name private parts as you dress your child
- Name private parts as you bathe your child
- Name private parts as you wipe your child after toileting

Preschool (2-5)

1. **Differences between boys and girls**
2. **Biblical design of gender**
   - God as authority
   - God made humans male and female to more fully image Him
   - God's design says something uniquely beautiful about each gender
3. **Good touch vs. bad touch**
4. **Consent**
   - Model consent: permit a child NOT to be required to hug or kiss to appease an adult. If a caregiver wants affection from a child, offer choices and accept "no" if a child is uncomfortable.

     Example: *Okay, Susan, time to say goodbye to Uncle Joe. Would you like to give him a hug, a high five, or say "see you later"?*
5. **Masturbation**
   - Sometimes children will discover masturbation while exploring their bodies and continue the behavior because it feels good. If your child is engaging in masturbation, try to be curious about it.

     Example: *I wonder where you learned that. It seems like you've been doing that a lot—do you know why?*
   - You can re-direct or set limits, too, but aim to not react (or overreact) in a way that may promote shame or hiding.

     Example: *What you are doing involves your private parts, so it shouldn't be done in public. If you need to touch your privates, please go to your room or the bathroom.*

Ways to Approach

- Read a book together! Answer their questions and validate their curiosity and feelings.
- Continue having conversations at bath time, when changing into swimsuits, etc., that focus on appropriate names.
- Remind children about good touch versus bad touch.
- Promote consent in generalized touch, for example, when giving hugs and kisses.
- Promote play variety. Little boys can play with a toy kitchen or doll, and little girls can play t-ball and with a hammer and nails. **Play behaviors and color preferences are not gendered.**
- Correct misconceptions as they arise.
  - Sibling tells younger brother, "You can't play with that. It's a girl toy."

    Correction: *Your brother is interested in playing with you—– toys aren't just for boys or just for girls. They can be played with by boys and girls.*

- At the park, a child makes fun of your son for wearing a pink shirt.

  Correction: *Pink is a great color. Boys and girls can wear it.*

- After being made fun of, you notice your son throws away his pink shirt.

  Correction: *Hey Ethan, I noticed you threw away your shirt. You really liked that shirt. Did that kid at the park hurt your feelings? I'm sorry, buddy. I don't like it when people make fun of me, either.*

Young School Age (5-7)

1. **Where do babies come from?**
2. **Sex: Basics**
3. **Biblical design and context for sex**
4. **Different types of sexuality when appropriate** (**e.g., child has a friend whose parents are gay, sexuality is discussed at their school**)
5. **Gender dysphoria**

Ways to Approach

- Read books together and discuss them.
- When a child notices a pregnant woman or gets a puppy, discuss how babies are made.
- When your child has friends who have same-sex parents or a peer that is gender nonconforming, share a biblical view of marriage, sexuality, and gender. Also coach them on how to love people who think and believe differently than they do.
- As kids begin to grow, prepare them for not only their arms and legs to grow in length but also their body to grow from a child-like body to an adult-like body.
- Take opportunities with media to model restraint and protective behaviors (e.g., fast forward sex scenes on streaming services; choose non-explicit lyrics for music and tell them what that means; if you choose to watch a show that has a same-sex couple, dialogue about it).
- When having family devotional times, incorporate Scripture related to the body, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Memorize specific Scriptures together, too.

Older School Age (7-11)

1. **Body changes** (**boys and girls**)
2. **Puberty**
3. **Sex: Fuller explanation, logistics, attraction, desire**
4. **Consent: Revisit behaviors for this age group** (**e.g., pinching butts, kissing, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships**)
5. **Technology: good pics versus bad pics, solicitation**

Ways to Approach

- Read books together and discuss them.

- Play Jeopardy game together and discuss. (See Activities to Promote Conversations.)
- Start a question-and-answer jar or journal to pass back and forth between you and your child to routinely address questions related to body, gender, sex, and sexuality.
- Focus on body changes from an instrumental standpoint, making sure they have what they need and know how to use it (examples: pads/tampons, deodorant, razor, jock strap).
- Correct sexualized talk and behaviors (examples: boy bragging about pinching a girl's butt, kissing boys at the school park). Be curious to understand, but coach toward appropriate boundaries and behaviors.
- If child has access to a phone, tablet, or computer, discuss media safety.
- If identifying a boyfriend or girlfriend, engage in conversations about what they like about their friend, with a focus on friendship over romantic relationships.
- Take opportunities with media to model restraint and protective behaviors (e.g., fast forward sex scenes on streaming services; choose non-explicit lyrics for music and tell them what that means; if you choose to watch a show that has a same-sex couple, dialogue about it).
- When having family devotional times, incorporate Scripture related to the body, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Memorize specific Scriptures together, too.

Tweens (11-13)

1. **Sexual desire** (**biblical goodness, temptations, how to resist**)
2. **Body changes**
3. **Body image**
4. **Masturbation** (**discuss connection to sexual desire and need to resist to "not awaken love before it so desires"**)
5. **Threats to biblical design** (**e.g., eating disorders, abuse, pornography, STDs, pregnancy, abortion, etc.**)
6. **Worldly views of good** (**gender, sexuality continuum, "practice makes perfect" mindset**)
7. **Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships**
8. **Making mistakes**

Ways to Approach

- Listen to resources on axis.org together and discuss.
- Do media activities and other games that promote dialogue.
- Focus on body changes from an instrumental standpoint, making sure they have what they need and know how to use it (examples: pads/tampons, deodorant, razor, jock strap).
- If a child has access to a phone, tablet, or computer, discuss media safety. Be specific about the risk of pornography, solicitation, and the connection to masturbation, sexting, or other explicit behaviors you are concerned about.
- If identifying a boyfriend or girlfriend, engage in conversations about what they like about their friend, with a focus on friendship over romantic relationships. Normalize increasing desire, discuss limits (related to dating), etc.
- Take opportunities with media to model restraint and protective behaviors.

- When having family devotional times, incorporate Scripture related to the body, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Memorize specific Scriptures together, too.
- Utilize mistakes a child makes as an opportunity to encourage, challenge, and disciple.
- Share your own mistakes (with discretion based on age and sensitivity) as a means of modeling learning, growing, and sanctification.

Teens (13+)

1. **Sexual desire**
2. **Dating**
3. **Consent**
4. **Godly character: preparation for adulthood and possible marriage**

Ways to Approach

- Discuss media safety. Be specific about the risk of pornography, solicitation, and the connection to masturbation, sexting, and other explicit behaviors you are concerned about.
- If identifying a boyfriend or girlfriend, engage in conversations about what they like about this person. Promote the prioritization of godly characteristics as they choose who they spend time with.
- Discuss dating guidelines, how to pursue or receive pursuit, how to have fun in dating versus a hyper-focus on marriage, limits related to touch, etc.
- When having family devotional times, incorporate Scripture related to the body, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Memorize specific Scriptures together, too.
- Utilize mistakes a child makes as an opportunity to encourage, challenge, and disciple.
- Share your own mistakes (with discretion based on age and sensitivity) as a means of modeling learning, growing, and sanctification.

Proactive Conversations with Children

The following information is intended to be a guide as you engage in conversations with your child(ren) about body image, gender, sex, and sexuality. **The guide is not a script.** This document is built for parents preparing for **proactive, educational conversations** with their children as they navigate different milestones.

In her book *Rethinking Sexuality*, Juli Slattery uses the term **sexual discipleship** to frame ongoing, consistent conversations parents have with their children throughout their lifetime, focused on the sexual aspect of their identity as a child of God. Ongoing and consistent may feel more haphazard and chaotic to you as a parent, but the descriptors refer to your attempts to time information for your children's developmental stage. The world will consistently teach (disciple) your children about sex but will do so from a worldly and often dangerous perspective. Our hope is that you will view these conversations as a way of battling the enemy as you speak truth about God's design for sexuality with your children.

Concepts are for you. Scripture will orient you to God's design, allow you to pray with the Lord, and push you to seek His wisdom as you prepare for conversations with your children. Language can be modified based on what sounds normal coming out of your mouth and what is appropriate for your family, situation, and the age of your child. Put the language in your own words—your kids are used to the way you talk. The section "Responsive Conversations with Children" addresses how to respond to children's questions and situations in the moment they bring them to you. Proactively teaching kids about sexuality invites them to talk to you if they have experiences or conversations with peers that are confusing. Ideally, you are having both **proactive** and **responsive** conversations with your children as they grow into adulthood.

This document is not meant to make you feel guilty for what you have not yet done. You only know what you know when you know it. Faithfulness is stewarding what God teaches you. If you feel behind, seek the Lord in what proactive steps you can take to equip your child now. Let Him reset your pace and trust Him to fill the gaps. Consider your own story. There likely are things your parents could have done better. But God's grace fills in the gaps of your sin and mistakes with the precious blood of Jesus. You are here, now, seeking to faithfully love and raise your child.

Biblical Design of the Body

When you talk about the body, reflect God's good design. He built the body beautifully and functionally—in all types, shapes, sizes, and colors. But we often don't believe that. Kids hear and see it in how we talk about our own bodies, how we look at ourselves in the mirror, how we poke fun at others, and in what we prioritize and value as beautiful or hot. Men *and* women do this.

Model positive language so that your child is given a head start to grow up with a body positive mindset rather than body shame. Consider what aspects of your own body cause shame. Is it the gender, size, color, age, hair, or height? Do you and God agree about how you see yourself? What evidence do you have for that? Does your view hold up to Scripture? If not, start wrestling with the Lord about how you see the body.

Scripture

Genesis 1:27, Psalm 31:30, 139:13-15; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Proverbs 16:31; Proverbs 20:29; Matthew 10:30; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:20; 1 Peter 3:3-4; 1 Samuel 16:7; Ezekiel 28:17; Romans 8:23; Isaiah 40:30-31

Language

In infancy, delighting in a kid's body is easy. We can't help but hug them, blow raspberries on their tummies, etc. We may struggle with affirming typical body functions like poop, pee, and vomit, though. Body positive language sounds like this:

- You pooped again! Your body knows what to do with all that food you ate! God designed your body to work well.
- Oh no! Your tummy isn't feeling good. It didn't know what to do with your food today—your tummy sent it back. Let's clean you up.

For elementary and teenage years, body positive conversation and affection can be more difficult. The truth is, children of all ages need appropriate touch and affection, even and especially in their teen years. If hugs, kisses, and being tucked in at night stop during puberty, it can be confusing.

As parents, we can model healthy touch by continuing to offer hugs and kisses and providing choice around them. For example, if a teen shies away from you hugging them in public, still offer hugs at home. Notice what forms of physical touch your child enjoys and is accepting of most (examples: having their hair brushed, hand or foot massage while watching a movie, scratching their back while tucking them in at night).

A common mishap we can make as parents is making casual, but hurtful comments that are directed more at ourselves rather than our kids. Steer clear of things like the following:

- Comparing bodies
    - *Wow, you're five, but you're bigger than your sister (who is older).*
    - *Well, you're sturdy (picking a child up).*
    - *When are you going to get taller, Son? Your sister is about to pass you up.*
    - *Why are all your friends prettier than you (teasing)?*

- Talking about bodies in a vain way can elevate appearance over health and stewardship. Look at what you say to children when you greet them. Do you focus mostly on appearance or style versus their character?
- Healthy living is wonderful. Communication about stewarding your body for longevity and usefulness for the Lord is healthy. But extreme dieting and labeling certain foods as "bad" or "good" can create a negative relationship with food. If you abstain from certain foods, discuss why, especially if it applies to your child, too. Examples:
    - *All food is fuel. I know you heard about Susan's mom dieting. But I don't want you to go on a diet. Some adults choose to limit what they eat to lose weight if they feel their bodies would function more healthily at a lower weight. That can be God honoring. Others choose to go on a diet because they feel it will make them look better, even when they are already at a healthy weight. That is their choice, but it's not something I'd encourage due to their motivation.*
    - *I don't want you to go on a diet because you are still growing. Your body is growing exactly as it should—you grow in spurts, growing taller, and then wider...taller, and then wider. It's a natural progression. Your body needs fuel to keep growing healthy.*
    - *I'm choosing not to eat meat right now because my doctor said it's harder for my body to process. Every body is different, and mine does best with mostly fruits and veggies. I may occasionally eat steak with you though because, man oh man, it's my fav.*
    - *My body gets sick when I eat gluten, which is in a lot of bread. So I choose to get bread that is gluten free. If you want to try it, you can, but we will still get regular bread. I know how much you love toast for breakfast!*
    - *You know, I learned my body didn't handle gluten very well a few years ago. You've been really struggling with what you eat. Maybe your body is made like mine. I think it would be helpful to get you tested for food allergies and see if you have a gluten intolerance. Maybe that would help.*

At times, you will need to set limits around food with children. If a child has poor self-control or you're concerned about their weight, it may be fruitful to talk about the discipline of stewarding their body through healthy choices and exercises. Some ideas include:

- Acknowledging when they don't feel good after eating.
    - *Oh no! It looks like you ate too fast. Sometimes we don't give our tummies long enough to see when we are full. It's important to take time to see how much your body wants to feel good.*
    - *You've been having a difficult time sleeping. Lots of things can affect that. Stress, watching screens too late... Drinking caffeine or eating too late or foods that are harder to digest can make it hard to sleep, too. I wonder what is affecting you tonight.*
- Setting family goals with a balance of discipline and indulgence. Healthy, planned meals throughout the week, out-to-eat twice a week for soccer nights or gymnastic practice, and a once-a-week "feast" night (anything goes) can establish healthy rhythms.
- Talk directly with a child.
    - *I want to talk to you a little about your weight. It seems like you are not gaining weight the way other kids your age are. Are you doing anything to not gain weight (like dieting or exercising a lot)? I noticed you didn't eat most of your lunch all last week. Are there other foods you would prefer?*
    - *I'm a little worried about your weight. It's normal to gain weight in spurts, but for your age and height, the weight you are currently at can add extra stress to your body. How do you feel about your weight? I have some ideas for what we can do as a family to help, but I'd love your input. May I share? Do you have other ideas?*

- Resources for intuitive eating
    - *Soma Wellness | Simple Ways to Live Healthy... Every Day!*
    - *Health + Discovery (ambergentry.com)*

Encouragement for the Caregiver

The relationship you have with your body and your child has with their body may be less than ideal. You have opportunities to influence your child's relationship with their body, food, and exercise, but other influences are at play. We eat three times a day, and we are called to move our bodies daily. There is a natural rhythm that has to be cultivated for health to be enduring and sustainable. Teach your child, encourage and correct them, and pray for the Lord to allow your effort coupled with His grace to take root. Be encouraged by Scripture. It consistently identifies your job as one of faithfulness, and God's job as one that makes faith grow.

> **1 Corinthians 3:7-11:** *So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Gender Differences

Teaching kids about the difference between boys and girls is a natural conversation that typically occurs in the toddler-preschool age. It often happens because kids are fascinated by what the Lord gave them! This is a way to talk about God as the good Creator who made all things, including them. He delights in how they were created! Introducing God as Creator, Designer, and the best One at knowing how things work is ideal. This becomes more complicated if you have a child who is saying they want to be the opposite sex, or if a close friend or family member has a child who is expressing a wish to be a different gender.

About 1% of children ages 2-4 experience gender dysphoria. The rate of pre-teen and teens articulating a desire to be a different gender also is increasing. What some call *late onset gender dysphoria* is, in many ways, socially constructed. Pre-teens are at an age when a lot of change happens developmentally. Biologically, they are experiencing puberty, which can create confusion in and of itself regarding what they think and feel about their bodies. Developmentally, pre-teens are beginning to differentiate themselves from their parents. They are evaluating what they think and believe differently from their families as they form their own unique identities. Culturally, the liberty many individuals embrace in the you-do-you movement can create pressure and anxiety, too. Preteens and teens feel pressured to figure out their gender and sexuality, as opposed to simply enjoying the way God made them.

For those experiencing gender dysphoria, it must be incredibly painful to feel not at home in their bodies. However, the solutions offered through gender reassignment are not improving outcomes. For a child not feeling at home in their own body, support is encouraged. But from a biblical worldview, the support should aim at the feeling of dysphoria rather than at changing the body they have been given.

Scripture

Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18; 1 Peter 2:9, 3:7; Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 14:33; Psalm 139; Matthew 19:4; Romans 1:24-27

General Tips

If a child shows interest in opposite gender toys and activities, it does not necessarily mean they want to be the opposite sex. Rather, they have interest in a variety of activities. Exploratory behaviors may be driven as a means for connection, attentive responses, or opportunities to practice their gifting in God's design of them. Examples of developmentally appropriate explorative play include:

- A younger brother wants to play with older sisters (dolls or dress up)
- A little girl wants to play baseball with her dad and brothers
- A boy wants praise for how he looks, just like his sister receives praise for wearing a pretty dress
- A girl wants to be powerful and be the boss

Boys need nurturing toys and opportunities to learn gentleness, just as girls need toys that make them feel powerful and in control. Boys need to see us delight in their button-down shirts just as we delight in a little girl when she puts on a tutu. Boys can like the color pink without it threatening their masculinity, and girls can like blue or black without it being unladylike.

While what is happening culturally with gender may scare you, reacting out of that fear will likely only hinder the trust you want to maintain with your child and increase your child's potential for shame and shame-based behaviors. In addition, cultivating gender stereotypes can minimize God's good design in His children living out the fullness of how they have been created. Allowing exploration will not cause your child to struggle with their gender or sexuality. Rather, it will allow your child to explore the full range of emotional expression and roles with which they can demonstrate God's love for others as they grow into adulthood. We want young boys and girls to play together so that they grow into men and women who work and serve alongside each other. We want boys to have confidence in the way God designed their physical bodies and enjoy dressing up. Similarly, we want girls to grow into women who are capable of leadership that allows the glory of God to flourish in places of culture that might not otherwise experience it.

As children grow and explore, you are called and capable of continually teaching them about their sweet heavenly Father (Deuteronomy 6:5-9), the One who is both perfectly gentle and powerful.

> **Isaiah 40:11:** *He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.*
>
> **Jeremiah 10:12:** *It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.*

The One who nurtures us like a mom nurses her children also refines us as if by fire.

> **Isaiah 49:15:** *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.*
>
> **Jeremiah 23:29:** *Is not my word like fire, declare the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

Our heavenly Father wants the complimentary beauty of the Trinity to be displayed among the men and women He created. He also desires unity among His bride, the church.

> **Matthew 3:16-17:** *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*
>
> **Acts 4:32:** *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

Language

Example language and conversations follow. They will support you if your child communicates a desire to be the opposite sex. They will also support you if your child has questions due to a friend who is gender nonconforming or gender creative. In those moments, you will need to find ways to communicate how your family views gender from a biblical standpoint while also guiding them in how to be a kind friend.

- You WANT to be a boy. Oh, I can imagine certain things about boys that seem cool. They have shorter hair. They can pee easier when they go camping. Seems great. But God made you a girl. He designs things, and He gave you a vagina, which makes you a girl.
- There are cool things about being a girl, too. What do you like about being a girl? What do you wish you could do or be like a boy? Those things are awesome. Doing that doesn't make you a boy, though. It just means you like things that some boys like.
- Carter, you love taking care of that baby doll. You're taking care of that doll like Mommy and Daddy take care of you. No, you're NOT a mommy, but you've learned sweet ways to love like a mommy does.

Example Conversation 1: A Gender Nonconforming Peer

Parent (*picking up child from youth group*): Hi honey. How was your small group?

Child: It was good.

Parent: Who is that new kid?

Child: That's Summer. She isn't new; you met her last year. She is the one I rode down to camp with.

Parent: Oh, I didn't recognize her.

Child: Yeah.

Parent: That's a funky haircut.

Child: Mom, don't be rude.

Parent: I'm sorry; I wasn't trying to be rude.

Child: Summer is changing a lot.

Parent: In what ways?

Child: Well, she wants us to use they or them instead of her or she. And she is thinking about changing her name.

Parent: To a boy's name?

Child: They haven't decided yet. I have to practice...it's hard to remember.

Parent: Honey, I'm not sure you need to remember. Summer is a girl. It makes sense to call her "her" or "she."

Child: But she gets sad when I do...and sometimes angry.

Parent: She sounds confused.

Child: I am, too.

Parent: Me, three. It is a confusing time to be a teenager. And a parent of a teenager.

Child: I just...we are supposed to love people who think differently than us, right? So, do you think God would want me to use the name that she wants me to use?

Parent: I feel confident that God wants you to love your friend. And I feel confident God loves Summer more than she knows. But I am not sure it is loving to use a word that doesn't describe her.

Child: What do you mean?

Parent: Well, we believe God designed everything, right? The moon, the stars...oceans and farmland...and girls and boys. He is perfect and made everything, and when He did, He said it was good.

Child: Actually, He said it was "very good."

Parent (*smiling*): Okay, smarty pants—who's been reading Genesis? You're one hundred percent right. He said "very good." So, I think the most loving thing for Summer is to validate her feelings. It's okay for her to be confused—it's a confusing world we live in, and it's a confusing time of life. But I think as her friend, you can also help affirm what you see in how God made her to be as a girl. He is good and perfect and doesn't make mistakes.

Child: But she is going to get mad at me.

Parent: She might, but what do I always tell you when you're mad at me?

Child (*rolling eyes*): You'd rather me be mad and know that I am okay, than me not be okay and not be mad.

Parent: I know it's not what you want to hear. And it won't be easy. Are your other friends at small group calling her they and them?

Child: She just told us tonight. She cut her hair a couple of weeks ago, but this was the first time she said she wanted us to call her something different.

Parent: I see. I bet everyone is struggling.

Child: I'm just afraid people are going to think I'm being hateful.

Parent: It's not hateful to help someone see the beauty of who they are, is it? And she is a believer, right?

Child: Yes, she got saved at camp. She is trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus.

Parent: I think this is part of it. I think part of her obedience to God is living as He designed her to be.

Child: But she says she has never felt like a girl. She always was a tomboy. She loves sports and is really strong. She can arm wrestle any kid in our grade and win.

Parent: That's amazing! God made some girls to be strong and to love sports. He made some girls who love camping and burping.

Child *(smiling):* I totally beat Dad last week in our burping contest.

Parent: I know. He was impressed. But that doesn't make you a boy. It just means you can hang with the best of them. If you shared that with her, what would she say?

Child: She'd probably try to talk me into being a boy with her.

Parent: And what would you say to that?

Child: God gave me a vagina, so I'm a girl?

Parent: I mean sure. You can absolutely say that. Or you can say you believe God made girls to be capable of lots of different things and that you enjoy being all that He designed you to be…including a girl.

Child: This is going to be hard.

Parent: Yeah. But I can tell you I am already proud of you. I love that you are trying to figure out how to love God and love your friend. I'm here to help any way I can.

Example Conversation 2: A Gender Nonconforming Peer

Parent: I heard you use the word "she" when talking about your friend Ben. Was that a mistake? Or has Ben asked you to call him she and her?

Child: He, I mean she, asked me to.

Parent: You really care about Ben. But I bet that is confusing.

Child: Yeah. I mean, I don't really care. I'll call her whatever. I just care that we are friends. Ben is my favorite person to play soccer with.

Parent: I love that you care so much about Ben and enjoy time with him. I'm curious what you think about someone deciding if they're a boy or a girl. Do you think that's okay?

Child: I don't really understand why they would want to be different, but I heard another friend saying it's hateful to think it's wrong.

Parent: Do you think it's possible to disagree with someone and still love them or be their friend?

Child: I guess.

Parent: You and I disagree all the time. But you know I still love you, right?

Child: Yes, but this feels different.

Parent: Sure. I know. We can talk more about how to show care for Ben. But I want you to know what Dad and I believe about gender. We believe God is good and that God made us. He made everything down to the cells that make up our body! He is in charge of our body functioning the way it is supposed to. Because of that, we believe He is the expert and the best one to decide if we should be a boy or a girl. Ben was born with a penis, so we believe he should remain a boy. We believe that, somehow, God gets glory and honor by Ben being faithful to the way God made him. God made him well. Not all families believe the way we do, though. Many parents let their kids choose. Sometimes they choose things like whether to be called "he" or "she." Sometimes they let kids choose if they want to change their name or dress a certain way. And some will let kids make changes medically to look more like the other gender. But we would not recommend that if you or your sister ever felt like the opposite sex.

Child: Gosh, Mom. I don't think I am a girl!

Parent: I know. I just wanted you to be clear on what we believe about this, and I'd love for you to talk with me or your dad if you have questions or if you're confused about anything related to Ben. While we don't agree with Ben or his parents' choices, we will do our best—just like you are—to love him well.

Child: Will you call him "he" or "she" when Ben comes over to play?

Parent: I will call Ben "him" unless corrected by him or his mom. If they ask directly, I will modify to be kind. But if they ask my opinion about it, I will be clear about our views.

Child: Do you mind if I call Ben "her"? Ben asked me to.

Parent: I'll let you decide that. I understand wanting to call your friend what he has asked you to. Has Ben choosing to be called "her" and "she" changed anything in your friendship?

Child: It's just kind of strange that she is focused on girl stuff more. She keeps wanting to hang out with more girls. She has not changed clothes, but she painted her nails the other day and asked me if I wanted my nails painted. That was weird. I said "no," and she got offended.

Parent: You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. And if Ben is a good friend, he will allow you to choose what you participate in and what you don't.

Child: Okay, can we talk about something else now?

Parent: Sure. Of course.

Sex

Parents should have multiple, ongoing conversations with their kids about sex. It's not a one-and-done conversation or a check box. It is ongoing, and it is most helpful to start young versus waiting until puberty or after.

One, young children tend to receive information matter-of-factly, making conversations easier. Teaching your child about bodies, gender, and privacy is simply teaching them as you would teach them how to read and how to tie their shoes. Most young kids will receive information about sex as fact.

Two, talking about sex when kids are young helps protect them. Appropriate language for body parts, combined with empowering children to know when and how they are to show body parts, and how their bodies are to be touched safely, allows children to identify when something is not okay. While early education may not prevent victimization all together, knowing anatomical names does give children an advantage. If nothing else, they know they can talk to you about their body because you have initiated conversations about it.

Three, starting conversations early makes the gradual progression to more complicated topics easier. If you start with body parts and good touch versus bad touch, a conversation about where babies come from is a natural next step. Such topics also help kids understand and prepare for how their body will change in puberty. None of the conversations are easy, but having multiple, ongoing conversations normalizes the topics. It allows you to give little bits of information over time, too, which is how children process information best.

Conversations will need to be both responsive to a question or something a child says AND proactive, with you teaching them. Kids often don't know how to ask or say certain things, and they are naive to evil—until they experience it. Conversations may involve mostly talking, but books and props can make information more concrete. For example, teaching your daughter how to use a tampon without her seeing a tampon is difficult. And giving her a tampon without instructions on the day she starts her period makes for a messy and likely tearful time in the bathroom.

Scripture

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25, 3:16; Exodus 20:14; Song of Solomon; Proverbs 5:15-19; Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:24, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 20, 7:2-4; Ephesians 4:19, 5:33; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3; Hebrews 13:4

General Tips

Sex is complex. The most developmentally supportive and protective way to teach children about sex is to do so gradually, giving little bits of information over time. This method allows you to promote honest and open conversations, which fosters trust with your child. They know they can come to you when they need to talk about difficult things, awkward things, anything.

Sample conversations follow. They cover various aspects of teaching kids about sex, including where babies come from, puberty, inappropriate touch, and assault. Use discretion as you read; the sections that deal with inappropriate touch and assault are given a label to allow you to skip them, especially if you've had traumatic experiences. As always, reach out to the church staff or Counseling Center staff for further support as you process your experiences with sex and as you prepare to talk about sex with your children.

Example Conversation: Where Do Babies Come From?

(**This conversation is a good opportunity to review good touch and bad touch.**)

Parent: You look surprised when you saw Jennifer's tummy at the shower. Do you know why her tummy grew? There is a baby growing in there. We will get to meet the baby soon!

Child: How did it get in there?

Parent: You're wondering how the baby got in there. It's a great question! Seems impossible for a baby to fit in there. God made a woman's body to make room for that little one. The baby got in the mom's body through something called sex. Have you heard that word before?

Child *(shakes head no)*

Parent: No? Sex is a special way for moms and dads to show how much they love each other. You know how moms and dads show they love their kids with hugs and kisses? God made sex for men and women who are married to be loving in a way that is just for them. Sex allows a man's body and a woman's body to fit together like a puzzle. The man's penis can go inside the woman's vagina in a way that feels good and can make a baby. It's interesting, huh?

Child *(shakes head no)*

Parent: Your face tells me you think it sounds weird. It won't always seem weird, but it's normal for it to seem that way now.

Child: How old are you when you have sex?

Parent: There isn't a specific age. The way God designed sex, He made it for men and women who are married. There is something that happens as boys and girls grow up called puberty and that allows their bodies to be prepared to have sex. But God built sex to be within marriage. So, it isn't an age; it's within marriage.

Child: So kids don't have sex?

Parent: It seems like you are worried you will have to have sex. Is that right?

Child *(nods head)*

Parent: You do not have to have sex, honey. Because you're not married and nowhere close to old enough to make that decision, I would encourage you not to. Most kids are not thinking about having sex at your age, but they are curious about their bodies and other people's bodies. Do you remember when we talked about your private parts and talked about the rules for what parts of your body should remain covered and who was allowed to see and touch your body?

Child: Yes.

Parent: We told you that because there is a way that your body can be touched that feels good, but is not intended for you until you are married. We're not trying to keep you from knowing something that is good for you; we are trying to protect you from experiencing things you are not prepared for.

Child: Like when Tommy asked to see my vagina?

Parent: Exactly. He shouldn't have asked you that. And nobody outside of your doctor or me or your dad should see or touch your private parts. Even then, we only do so to help make sure you are healthy or cleaned up after you poop. What would you say if someone tried to touch your vagina?

Child: I'd say, "You're not supposed to do that."

Parent: And what if they kept trying?

Child: I could yell or try to get away?

Parent: Exactly. You do whatever you can to call for help and find an adult who can help you.

Parent: Exactly. He shouldn't have asked you that. And nobody outside of your doctor or me or your dad should see or touch your private parts. Even then, we only do so to help make sure you are healthy or cleaned up after you poop. What would you say if someone tried to touch your vagina?

Child: I'd say, "You're not supposed to do that."

Parent: And what if they kept trying?

Child: I could yell or try to get away?

Parent: Exactly. You do whatever you can to call for help and find an adult who can help you.

Example Conversation: Masturbation

Parent (*catches child masturbating*)**:** Whoa, hey!

Teen: Dad! Do you ever knock?

Parent: Bud, don't yell at me. I am going downstairs, but I need you to meet me on the porch in five minutes.

Teen: Da-aad.

Parent: Five minutes.

Teen (*meets Dad downstairs on porch as requested*)*:* You asked to see me.

Parent: Yes, thanks for joining me. I am sorry I didn't knock, but I do want to talk to you about what you were doing.

Teen: Dad, it's not a big deal. All my friends do it. They say it's normal.

Parent: The urge to masturbate is normal at your age; we've talked about that. But we have also talked about the downfalls of masturbation.

Teen: Dad, I'm not having sex. It seems like a ridiculously high bar to expect me not to masturbate, too.

Parent: Listen, I understand the urges. And I am proud of you for abstaining from sex with your girlfriend. But the habitual nature of masturbation is what I am concerned about, as well as your seeking of self-pleasure. That isn't God's design. God designed sexual expression to happen between one man and one woman who are married. They come together, giving themselves to one another. Masturbation is purely self-focused. It is a means of taking what you want. If you start this habit at 15, I just wonder what you will do when the urges increase—you will be in the habit of taking and doing what you want for your own pleasure, without consideration of what is good, God-honoring, and good for another person.

Teen: Are you really telling me that you expect me to never masturbate? Do you masturbate—or did you?

Parent: I want you to consider it, and yes, I did masturbate as a kid. I also looked at porn while I masturbated. I've masturbated as a married adult as well. This is a habit I don't want you to get stuck in, though. It created hurdles for your mom and I when we got married that I'd rather you not have to deal with. Are you looking at things while you masturbate? Or visualizing someone?

Teen: Sometimes… I don't watch porn, but I sometimes look at pictures.

Parent: What kind of pictures?

Teen: I mean, mild in comparison to what my friends do.

Parent: I'm not your friends' parent, son. Comparison is not a helpful barometer. There will always be someone doing more. That doesn't make it right or good. What are you looking at?

Teen: I mean, I've seen a Playboy before. But most of the time, I just scroll Joanna's Facebook and imagine her.

Parent: Okay, but both of those are adultery in the eyes of the Lord. It's not small.

Teen: Gosh, Dad. Fine. I suck. What do you want me to do?

Parent: Listen, I'm not trying to shame you. I just want you to understand the seriousness of what you are doing. It's easy to minimize; our culture wants you to take your sexuality and expression of it lightly. Your friends don't want a friend who doesn't masturbate—that might make them feel convicted, like what they are doing is wrong. It's easier for them to continue if you cave, too. But that is not

them wanting what is best for you. That is wanting you to stumble so that they can minimize their own sin.

Teen: I get that, and it's not the pressure I feel from friends that make me do this. I just don't know how else to handle these feelings.

Parent: Well, let's talk about that. You know those feelings are normal. And masturbation feels good.

Teen: It does! And it seems harmless. Like, who am I hurting by masturbating?

Parent: Well, if you were never viewing images or visualizing your girlfriend, I would say the people you are hurting are you, your future spouse, and the Lord. You, in that you are creating habits that are hard to break and can be addictive. It also can be a challenge for your future spouse. What if she cannot please you in the same way you do? I know for your mom, when she would find out I masturbated when we were married, she was so hurt. She felt like I was not satisfied with her. She internalized my sin and thought there was something wrong with her, as opposed to seeing that I was struggling with the sin I had cultivated for a really long time. And the Lord is hurt by what you are doing. You are not trusting that He can help you with those feelings. And, because you are viewing pictures or visualizing Joanna—you are not asking consent. Even in your mind, you do not have permission to think of someone in that way without their saying "yes."

Teen: The girls in the magazine are posing nude, Dad. Isn't that consent? And isn't it a compliment that I want to do those things to Joanna?

Parent: Those women posing nude likely feel they have no other choice. Either they are being forced to pose nude, or they have lived such hard lives that they feel using their body to earn an income is the only way they are valuable. Do you want to be the guy who supports that message? And, while Joanna may be glad you are sexually attracted to her, my guess is she would not want you to use her. Right now, you are using your memory of her body for your own gratification without any thought of how that might affect her.

Teen (*crying*): Dad, I just feel like nothing is ever good enough for you. You know I don't want women to feel used or for them to feel like their only worth is their bodies. Haven't I shown you that in the way I treat Joanna? I do love her. I just don't know what to do.

Parent: Okay, Son. You are growing into an incredible young man. I am so proud of you! The only way for you to continue moving in that direction is to deal honestly with your sin. Some would argue that masturbation is not a big deal because of all the reasons you have stated, but I do believe God is calling you to more. I want to help you think through how to manage those urges. Masturbation is the easy go-to when you have a sexual feeling, but there are other things you can do.

Teen: Dad, if you tell me to pray, I might lose it.

Parent (*laughing*): Okay. I won't say that first.

Teen (*rolls eyes*)

Parent: The feelings you are having are bodily. They're sensory in nature. Masturbation, like sex, is a physical outlet for those feelings.

Teen: Yes.

Parent: A solution might be to move your body or increase your exercise.

Teen: I already work out, Dad.

Parent: I know, but taking a 5-10-minute walk when you feel turned on might help alleviate those feelings. It changes the scenery. That can shift your mind to something else.

Teen: Okay, but what if I'm at school? I can't just go for a walk.

Parent: Sure, but what do you do now? You likely ask to go to the bathroom and tuck away in a stall to masturbate, right? Maybe instead take a walk to the water fountain and return to class. We brainstorm other strategies, too, not just physical ones.

Teen: Okay. Like what?

Parent: Well, changing your thoughts. I think gratitude almost always counteracts shame. We have already said your feelings and urges are normal and healthy, but not everything you do with them are. So, you could be grateful that you have a healthy body. You can be grateful that God designed you for pleasure and ask Him for help in waiting until that pleasure can be experienced the way He wants.

Teen: That sounds like praying.

Parent: I know, but I did say I wouldn't say it first! But the reality is, if you are not praying, this won't be feasible. The

only way you will be able to not masturbate is if you are leaning into the Lord for help.

Teen: Well, frankly, I'm annoyed by Him. Why should I talk with Him when He made me have these desires and hasn't given me a way to fulfill them?

Parent: Not yet He hasn't. And this might seem strange, but the longing you feel to have these physical desires met is a picture of our eternal longings being met by God. We crave things we cannot yet have because it reminds us we are not yet home with Him. It is good and right for us to be a longing people. If we were satisfied this side of heaven, we would not long for Him.

Teen: Dad, you lost me.

Parent: Okay, that part may not make sense yet, but we will revisit it. You can be annoyed with the Lord, you can be angry with Him, but I would say those are the times you need Him most. Don't turn away from Him when He is the only One who can truly help you.

Teen: Okay, so tell God I'm annoyed. Then what?

Parent: You may also have to change your thoughts. Thoughts will naturally shift to images in your head of Joanna or other women you have seen, and your mind is creative. So instead of focusing on those images, it may be helpful to shift your mind to other things, like school to football. Or, even if you stay in the lane of thinking about Joanna, try focusing on why you like her so much. Share why you are grateful for her to God and then ask Him to help you honor her in the way you think about her rather than using her. That's a real compliment—when you take your sexual desire for her and take it to the Lord so that He can teach you how to truly love her.

Teen: Okay, I can try that. I think the feelings will still be there, though.

Parent: Sure. None of this is magic. Obedience is day by day, and it is not easy. You are sacrificing something that feels good for something you trust will be better. You will likely make mistakes, but I hope you will make an effort.

Teen: I will.

Example Conversation: Puberty (Female)

Parent: I want to talk to you in the next week about something important for you to know at your age called puberty. Have you heard that word before?

Child *(eyes wide)***:** Yes.

Parent: You have—you look nervous. Have your friends been talking about it? Are you ready to talk about it now, or would you rather plan a time later this week?

Child: It's okay now.

Parent: Puberty is a time of growth for boys and girls where their bodies grow and develop at a more rapid rate. In the years called puberty, girls' bodies grow to be more like a woman's body, and a boy grows to be built more like a man. Do you know some of the big things that happen for a girl?

Child: Their period?

Parent: You're right! Girls get their first period. Do you know what that means?

Child: They bleed in their panties.

Parent: Yes, the uterus—the part of the body where a baby grows—routinely, about monthly, sheds the lining of the uterus. The lining is like a thin film or layer surrounding the inside of the wall of the uterus. When that happens, a mix of blood and other liquids come out of the girl's vagina.

Child: Ew.

Parent: It can be scary or gross the first time it happens, but it's normal. Your body is made in such a way that it knows when to begin to grow in different ways. It's actually pretty cool that your body knows to start your period so that your body can grow and eventually prepare to hold and nourish a baby when you're ready to be a mom. Do you have questions about what to do when that happens?

Child: I heard I will need pads or tampons? But what is that?

Parent: Pads and tampons are a way to collect the blood that comes out of your vagina in a way that

doesn't ruin your clothes or make it where you cannot go to school or do your normal activities. I can show you what they look like and how to put them in your underwear or how to insert the tampon into your vagina. It can be awkward at first, but you will get used to it. Some girls prefer pads because they don't like the way tampons feel. Other girls prefer to wear tampons because the pads can feel bulky in your panties and usually have a stronger smell. Either way, we can talk about it, and you can try both and see what works best for you.

Child: I also heard I'd get boobs. Cindy already wears a bra!

Parent: Yes, your breasts will grow. I think Cindy has already started puberty, so it makes sense that her chest is growing. It is best to wear a bra when that happens. Is that something you're excited about?

Child: I mean, her bra is pink and looks like a bathing suit. That's kind of fun.

Parent: There are fun parts to puberty. I also think it's neat that God shaped our bodies uniquely from boys. Your breasts growing prepares you to eventually be able to nurse a baby if you have children. But even if you don't, your growing body is evidence that God made you a woman. That's special.

Child: Nancy started shaving her legs and her underarms. Why? I don't have hair under my arms.

Parent: Nancy's body may just be developing faster than yours. All girls have hair on their legs, and once puberty starts, hair usually grows under your arms and on your private parts. When you feel ready to start shaving your legs, you can tell me, and I can show you how. That can be practice for when hair grows on other parts of your body.

Child: What else happens?

Parent: Well, your skin can become oilier and form zits sometimes. Because of an increase in hormones, your scent can change a bit.

Child: I'm going to smell?

Parent: Well, you will need to take more care in how you clean your body, specifically cleaning your armpits and private parts more thoroughly. You can also start using face cleansers and moisturizers, which may help prevent or manage zits. Most girls begin to wear deodorant to minimize the smell due to increased sweat. Do you remember that blue tube on my vanity? That's deodorant. You can pick the scent you like, kind of like choosing a shampoo.

Child: I want to pick that out next time we go to the store. I don't want to smell.

Parent: Okay, we can do that.

Child: And can I learn to shave?

Parent: Yes, but how about we wait until summer? Once you start, you cannot stop. It seems exciting now, but it may feel like a chore later. Deal?

Child: How about February?

Parent (*laughing*)**:** Sure. Deal. For Valentine's Day, we can have a leg shaving party.

Example Conversation: Puberty (Male)

Parent: Hi, Son. Your mom said you had a conversation at school today about puberty. Let's go throw a football outside and talk a little more.

Child: Dad!

Parent: There is nothing to be embarrassed about. I know it can be difficult to talk about this, so if you're uncomfortable after ten minutes of throwing, we can stop and come back to it. But this is something we should revisit from time to time.

Child: Okay.

Parent: Well, can you tell me the big things you learned today?

Child: They just made us watch a video that described how our bodies were growing.

Parent: Yeah, it's cool how God made our bodies to grow and change as we get older. For you, you will grow taller and wider, and you will begin to have more muscle mass.

Child: I want to look like the Hulk!

Parent: Okay, bud. He does have pretty cool muscles. However God allows you to grow, it'll be just right for how He designed you. Other things will change, too. Did they talk about your voice?

Child: Yeah, they said it would get deeper. But they said it would get squeaky first.

Parent: Yes, your vocal cords and voice box strengthen, but before it is consistently deep, it usually cracks and soars, going quickly from high to low voice. That can be embarrassing, but it is normal. Remind me to tell you a story about a time my voice cracked at school in front of the girl I liked. It was not fun, but I survived.

Child *(laughing)***:** I am gonna need to hear that story.

Parent: There are some other things, too. Due to hormonal changes happening in the body, you will grow more hair. You may notice it on your arms, legs, underarms, private areas, and face. Once you start to notice facial hair, I can teach you how to shave. I was quite a bit older than you before I needed to shave, but it's fun to learn!

Child: We should definitely practice shaving. I like the way that cream smells.

Parent: Speaking of smelling, hormones will cause you to sweat more. This makes it more important for you to wash thoroughly and frequently. You may notice pimples develop and more body odor, too. You can buy antiperspirants to help with body odor, and there are special facial cleansers and creams to help with acne.

Child: Okay.

Parent: Another thing that will happen is that your penis and scrotum will grow larger, up to two times what it looks like in elementary school. As that happens, we can talk about what underwear is most comfortable for you. When playing sports, you may need to wear a cup to protect your penis.

Child: Is that what that thing was that John was playing with the other day at practice?

Parent: Yes. He was not using it accurately, but that is a cup. Sometimes people call it a jock strap.

Child: Okay.

Parent: Your body is growing because God designed boys to grow to be men. Another thing that will change in puberty is that your body will start preparing to eventually be able to have sex.

Child: Dad, are we seriously going to talk about everything? You said 10 minutes.

Parent: One more topic, and then we will be done. We will talk more about sex later. A thing that happens in puberty as your hormones change is that you may get erections or have what we call wet dreams. An erection happens when your penis gets larger and stands up or becomes stiff. This can happen when your penis is touched in a way that feels good or if you are turned on. A wet dream usually happens at night. When this happens, a small amount of semen, fluid from your penis, will come out. This may be because you dreamt something that aroused you and turned you on. Sometimes it just happens. When you wake up, you may feel like you wet the bed, but it isn't pee, it is semen. You might feel embarrassed, but this is normal. It's just part of growing up.

Child: That's a lot of information.

Parent: Yes, you did well. Was it the worst?

Child: Not until you said erection. That was pretty terrible.

Parent: Okay, let's go inside and get ready for supper. And let's plan to talk again next week.

Example Conversation 1: Sex

Parent: I want to start a conversation with you about something important. I want to talk to you about sex. Do you remember talking about that when you were little?

Child: Kind of.

Parent: It was a long time ago, and we mostly talked about

how sex was the way a baby was formed. But we didn't talk about why people would have sex outside of making a baby. Have you heard about sex anywhere else? Are your friends talking about that at all?

Child: Yeah, I guess.

Parent: You seem a little uncomfortable.

Child: I mean, yeah.

Parent: Okay, we don't have to talk about it right this second, and we can talk about it a little bit at a time. But we do need to start talking about it, because you will start to hear more about it. I want you to know how sex can be good and safe. The best way for that to happen is for your mom and I to teach you.

Child: Dad, this is weird.

Parent: I know, we usually just goof around. Having a more serious conversation is new for both of us. But I think we can do it. What if we plan that every two weeks, we spend about twenty minutes talking about sex? You can write down questions you have, if you have any, and I will focus on one part of sex. And we can do something fun at the same time, either throw a football or get ice cream.

Child: Ice cream. Totally ice cream. And maybe football, too?

Parent: All right, let's figure out a plan and we will go from there.

Child: Don't tell Lucy. She is so nosy, and it's embarrassing.

Parent: For sure. I'll have Mom keep her busy when we do this together to keep that on the down low. Let's go look at the calendar.

Child: Okay, but I want a double scoop.

Parent: Deal.

Example Conversation 2: Sex

Child: Mom, what are "the birds and the bees"?

Mom: Oh—where did you hear that?

Child: Some kids at school were talking about it. Everybody laughed when I asked what it meant.

Mom: I'm sorry they made fun of you. That isn't very kind. I am happy to talk to you about the birds and the bees. That is a phrase some people use to talk about sex. Have you heard that word before?

Child *(blushing)***:** Yes.

Mom: I know, I get embarrassed sometimes talking about sex, too, but it's an okay thing for us to talk about. I am glad you asked. Do you mind me asking what you know about sex?

Child: It has to do with our private parts, I think.

Mom: Yep, it does. When you were little, we talked a little about sex, more so talking about how a baby was made. We didn't go into all the details, though. Specifically, we didn't talk about how moms and dad don't just have sex to make a baby; they have sex because it is a fun way to be close to one another.

Child: What happens?

Mom: Well, when a man and a woman want to have sex together, they usually start by kissing and touching one another. It's a different kind of kissing and touching than a parent kissing or hugging their kids.

Child: Like in the movies?

Mom: Yes, kind of. Do you remember that movie we watched the other day? That couple was kissing a lot. What do you remember about that?

Child: They kissed with their tongues, and they made weird noises.

Mom: Yes, that's when Dad and I fast-forwarded, huh?

Child: Were they having sex?

Mom: They were getting ready to. God made each type of relationship unique, with a different kind of love. For moms and dads, they have what I'd call a passionate kind of love, and sex is a way God designed for them to enjoy each other. Kissing and touching like that feels good and can make their bodies feel turned on, or kind of warm and tingly. It makes them want to be closer.

Child: I don't know how you get much closer than putting your tongue in each other's mouths.

Mom (*laughing*): Well... there is a way. And it does involve their private parts. Is it okay for me to talk about the changes that happen in the body?

Child: Okay.

Mom: If it is too much, tell me to stop and we can continue another day. Okay?

Child: Okay.

Mom: When a man gets turned on, his penis gets larger and sticks up. A woman's body also responds. Usually, her vagina gets moist or wet. These are normal ways God made their bodies respond to each other. When this happens, the man's penis can fit inside the woman's vagina. It just slides in.

Child: And then what?

Mom: The outside of the penis has nerves in it that, when touched, feels really good. So, when his penis goes inside the woman's vagina, it creates pleasure. Similarly, the outside and inside of a woman's vagina has nerves. It feels good when the penis goes inside.

Child: How long does he keep his penis inside the vagina?

Mom: It depends. Usually, the man and woman move in different ways to make the feeling last as long as it can. They will make a rocking motion back and forth, where the penis goes in and out multiple times, and again, each time, it feels good. This usually goes on sometimes for a really short time, like less than a minute, and other times it can go on for quite a while.

Child: It seems strange.

Mom: Sure. You haven't started puberty yet. When that happens, your body will change, and with those changes can come more curiosity and interest in things related to sex.

Child: I don't have to do that until I get married though, right?

Mom: My hope would be you wouldn't until you were married because that is how God designed it to be. But some people choose to have sex young.

Child: Why?

Mom: Well, when your body changes in puberty, sometimes you begin to look at boys differently. So rather than just being interested in playing sports or games with them, you may start to think they are cute or want to be more affectionate with them, like holding hands. And then if you do show new kinds of affection, it can progress to kissing, touching, and sex. This is one reason it's important to know what sex is and where God designed it to be best. Because He designed our bodies and sex, He is the best at telling us where it will be good for us. And He says in marriage with one man and one woman.

Child: I don't want to do that, probably ever.

Mom: I am pretty sure you will change your mind, but I am glad you feel that way now because you are not ready for sex.

Child: What happens if people have sex young?

Mom: Well, it just isn't the way God designed it. Marriage and sex are like symbols or pictures of how much God loves us and that love never stops. It goes on for eternity. Sex is for marriage, because there is a commitment to stay married forever. But young people are not ready to be married or to choose someone who they are prepared to love forever.

Child: Do bad things happen? Does God stop loving them if they have sex young?

Mom: There can be consequences, but God is always quick to forgive us when we make mistakes, and we tell Him and ask for forgiveness. But, yes, major life-changing things can happen, like a girl getting pregnant before she is ready to be a mom. Or the boy or girl may get diseases that spread through sex that could negatively impact them the rest of their lives. And having sex young can make it more difficult to wait until marriage with future boyfriends or girlfriends. Again, sex feels good, so it can be hard to stop at just kissing.

Child: Oh.

Mom: That was a lot of information. Do you have any other questions?

Child: Well, yes, but I think it's inappropriate.

Mom: That is okay. I'd rather you ask me than learn about this from your friends.

Child: Well, I heard sometimes boys have sex with boys and girls have sex with girls. But how does that work?

Mom: Oh, your friends were talking about a different kind. That's called homosexuality. Instead of a man and woman having sex, a man would rather show that kind of love to another man. Or a woman would rather show that kind of love to another woman.

Child: Yes, but I don't know how that would work with two penises or two vaginas.

Mom: Well, God designed sex to be between a man and a woman, which I believe is why He built our bodies the way He did. He built them to fit together. But some people think you can choose who you want to love like that. In our home, we believe God's design has our good in mind, so we do our best to live the way God wants us to live. We would not encourage a man to have sex with another man, or a woman to have sex with another woman.

Child: Should I tell my friends that is wrong?

Mom: Are your friends Christians? Do they believe in Jesus?

Child: I don't know.

Mom: A lot of people who don't believe in Jesus do not live their lives in a way that God says. Because we are Christians, we believe God is good and is our authority. He is our Lord! He tells us what is right and wrong, because He loves us and knows what is good and not good. But if your friends don't care what God thinks, they may be confused as to why you are telling them sex between two men or two women is wrong.

Child: But it is. You just said so.

Mom: I know, and it is okay to tell them what you believe about where sex is best. But it may be better to talk to them about why you believe in Jesus first before telling them they are wrong. Until they know Jesus and have the Holy Spirit living inside them, I don't think they will be very focused on listening to God. We can practice having some of those conversations together. I know it can be hard to disagree with your friends, and it can be hard to talk with friends about Jesus.

Child: Okay, but can we take a break?

Mom: Of course.

Child: I just have one more thing to ask.

Mom: Sure.

Child: How many times have you and Dad had sex? Like a lot?

Mom: Well, I like him a lot.

Child: Ew.

Mom (*laughing*): I know.

Example Conversation: Consent, Inappropriate Touch, Sexual Assault

Warning: The following example is graphic in nature, describing inappropriate touch. If you have a history of abuse, please seek counsel and support before reading.

Teen (*gets in car, crying and sniffling after a school dance*)

Dad: Honey, what's wrong?

Teen: Nothing.

Dad: You're crying. I feel like something must have happened to make you upset.

Teen: I don't want to talk about it, Dad.

Teen (*receives a text message and cries harder*)

Dad: Who is texting you?

Teen: Dad...

Dad: I don't want to annoy you, but I hate seeing you so sad. I want to help. (*pauses*) Would you feel more comfortable talking to Mom when we get home?

Teen: I don't know.

Dad: Well, let's just see how you're feeling when we get there. (pulls into driveway) You are calmer now. Do you want to tell me what happened at the dance, or would you rather talk to Mom?

Teen: It's probably not that big of a deal.

Dad: If it made you that upset, it's a big deal.

Teen: I just got embarrassed.

Dad: By something that happened at the dance.

Teen: Mmhmm.

Dad: Did you trip? Or step on someone's toes? I do that all the time when dancing.

Teen: Dad....

Dad: Okay, not that.

Teen: I was dancing with my friends and...

Dad: And...

Teen: You have to promise not to get mad.

Dad: I will be thankful you are sharing. I want to help—I promise to stay calm.

Teen: Well, I was dancing, and these two guys started dancing close to me.

Dad: Okay...how were they dancing?

Teen: Well, just normally at first. I was excited because I really like one of them.

Dad: When did it stop being fun?

Teen: Well, they kind of trapped me.

Dad: Trapped?

Teen: Yes. One was in front of me, one was in back. And then... *(starts crying)*

Dad: You are doing great, sweetie. Take your time.

Teen: And then, they started pressing up against me with their private parts. They were laughing and wouldn't stop. *(sobbing)*

Dad: Oh, honey. I am so sorry.

Teen: They just kept moving and wouldn't let me go. I started crying, and they still wouldn't stop.

Dad: That had to be scary.

Teen: And then a big circle of kids started laughing and pointing. It was humiliating. *(sobs more)*

Dad: Sweetie, that is awful. It is important. Nobody is allowed to treat you like that. What those boys did was wrong. And what your classmates did was wrong, too. How did you get away?

Teen: They eventually moved enough that I could run out. I ran to the bathroom. I just felt so gross.

Dad: Did anybody help you?

Teen: One of my friends came to check on me. But then... *(cries more)*

Dad (*listening*): ...

Teen: She told me my other friend hated me.

Dad: Who hates you?

Teen: My friend Suzie.

Dad: Why?

Teen: She liked Thomas, one of the boys who did that. She said I was a slut—

Dad: You did nothing wrong. Absolutely nothing.

Teen: But she was my friend.

Dad: She wasn't a very good one. She should see how they were treating you and stand up for you. Thomas isn't a good boy for her to like, either.

Teen: But now...

Dad (*listening*): ...

Teen: It's all over school.

Dad: What do you mean?

Teen: I keep getting text messages calling me a slut from random numbers. And someone posted a video on Snapchat.

Dad: Oh my. Okay.

Teen: How am I going to go to school on Monday?

Dad: We will figure that out. You don't need to worry about that right now. Honey, I do have a couple questions, though.

Teen: Okay...

Dad: When you said they pressed their private parts on you—were they fully clothed, or were their pants down or unzipped?

Teen: Dad!!

Dad: I know these are uncomfortable questions. But I am trying to get a sense of all that happened.

Teen: (*crying*)**:** Their pants were up.

Dad: Okay, so their penises never went in your private part? Or did they?

Teen: No, Dad. I just—I just felt them.

Dad: Okay—that doesn't make it better or less scary. I just needed to know how far it went.

Teen: You're not mad, right?

Dad: Sweetie, I am furious...but not at you. This should not have happened.

Teen: (*continues crying*)

Dad: Listen, I need to tell your mom.

Teen: I don't want to talk about it anymore. Please don't make me say it all again. (*sobbing*)

Dad: I can tell her. You can choose if you want to be with me when I tell her or if you'd rather get into PJs and get a snack.

Teen: I want to go to my room.

Dad: Okay. I cannot guarantee Mom won't have more questions than I had. She is a woman and thinks differently than I do, so she may need to ask a couple more things.

Teen: Do I have to answer more questions tonight?

Dad: If nothing went inside your vagina, we can stop talking about it tonight and talk more tomorrow. I do think your mom is going to want to give you a hug and comfort you. And I would like to take your phone so that you are not seeing messages you shouldn't see.

Teen: But you'll see the video. Dad, it's so embarrassing.

Dad: You did nothing wrong. I realize it's scary to show me and you're embarrassed, but it is the guys who should be embarrassed.

Teen: I can never go back to school.

Dad: Mom and I will figure out the school thing. We will need to talk to the school staff who were there.

Teen: Dad, no. Please, please don't.

Dad: Hey, hey. We don't have to figure it all out tonight. But this happened on school property. Your teachers and principal need to know how to keep kids safe at dances. We don't want this to happen again—to you or any other student.

Teen: I just want things to go back to normal.

Dad: I know, sweetie. Okay—listen, we are home. Why don't you get into your pajamas, and I will talk to Mom. Do you want me to bring you a snack or something to drink? And then once Mom knows, we will come to your room.

Teen: Okay, but no more talking about it.

Dad: I will tell Mom you don't want to talk about it.

Teen: Thanks, Dad.

Dad: I am so proud of you. May I give you a hug? It's okay if you don't want one.

Teen: (*hugs Dad and cries*)

Example Conversation: Abuse

Warning: The following example is graphic in nature, describing inappropriate touch. If you have a history of abuse, please seek counsel and support before reading.

Teen has been more withdrawn for about six weeks. She isn't eating as much and has lost weight. She has fallen behind in schoolwork, and her teacher has expressed concern. She also dropped out of the dance team she loved. After a parent-teacher conference, parent initiates conversation.

Parent (*entering teen's room*)**:** Hi Sara.

Teen: (*sits up from napping*)

Parent: I wanted to talk to you about something.

Teen: Okay.

Parent: We talked to Ms. Wallace today.

Teen: I know I am behind. I will catch up.

Parent: I trust you will. I want to talk about school, but I am worried about you in general.

Teen: Why?

Parent: Well, you haven't been yourself lately.

Teen: I am just tired.

Parent: Okay, but it feels like something is wrong.

Teen: Like what?

Parent: I don't know...I just feel like you're not okay. You haven't been eating much. You quit dance. You seem sad.

Teen: Well, since I quit dance, I shouldn't eat as much—not as much exercise.

Parent: Sara. You are hardly eating anything.

Teen: Okay, I will eat more. Happy?

Parent (*sighs*)**:** No. I am not trying to control you. I just want to make sure you are okay. (*starts to cry*)

Teen: Mom, I am fine.

Parent: You can talk to me. You know that, right?

Teen: Yes. (*hesitates*)

Parent: You can say anything.

Teen: Okay.

Parent: It just seems like something changed after football season.

Teen: (*looks surprised*)

Parent: Maybe I am crazy...

Teen (*starts to cry*)**:** You're not crazy.

Parent (*pauses*): What happened?

Teen: You cannot tell anyone. Not even Dad.

Parent: I won't share what doesn't need to be shared.

Teen: No, Mom. You cannot say anything. (*sobbing*)

Parent: Sara, please tell me what's going on.

Teen: Ugh... I cannot believe this is happening.

Parent (*listens*): ...

Teen: Do you remember that away game?

Parent: The one in Dallas? You were so excited—you got to perform your solo.

Teen: Yeah... Well, I got a lot of attention that night.

Parent: Your dance coach said you did awesome.

Teen: Yes... (*crying*) Well, after my performance, this upper-class student congratulated me. He told me he worked for the school paper and asked if he could interview me. I am so stupid. I should have known better.

Parent: You are not stupid. What did he do?

Teen: He told me we needed to go someplace where he could hear me better. I looked around for Kara, but he put his arm around my waist and ushered me to a bus, saying it would only take a few minutes.

Parent: Take your time, Sara.

Teen: At first, when we got to the bus, he was nice. He complimented my performance and asked me some questions. He kept touching my leg and brushed the hair out of my face. It seemed sweet. I liked it—I had never had an older guy show me attention like that.

Parent: It feels good to be noticed.

Teen: But— (*sobs*)

Parent (*listens*): ...

Teen: I don't know how—it happened so fast...but he grabbed my legs and pulled me to the ground. I tried to scream, but it's like my voice didn't work.

Parent (*listening, crying*)

Teen: He started kissing and touching me. He said he knew I wanted him. I cried and asked him to stop, but he wouldn't.

Parent: Oh, Sara. I am so sorry.

Teen: It was awful.

Parent: It sounds awful.... I know it's painful, but what happened after you asked him to stop?

Teen: He took off my underwear. I tried to kick him, but he just pinned me to the ground harder. And then...

Parent: You can say it.

Teen: He did everything.

Parent: I am sorry to ask, but can you be specific?

Teen: He raped me.

Parent (*hugs daughter, cry together*)

Teen: You won't tell anyone, right?

Parent: Sara...

Teen: You can't—you promised.

Parent: Sara, what happened to you was a crime. I know you don't want people to know—and we can be as discreet as possible, but we cannot keep this just between us. Your Dad needs to know.

Teen: He will kill him.

Parent: He will want to. But he can stay in control of himself.

Teen: He won't be able to look at me.

Parent: Sara, you did nothing wrong. Your dad will be sad. And he doesn't like for you to see him cry. So you're right—he might look away. But that is because of him, not you. We will figure all this out together.

Teen: But nobody else....

Parent: Not tonight. But at some point, we need to talk to the police.

Teen: Mom, no. I knew I shouldn't have told you.

Parent: You were so brave. You shouldn't be dealing with this alone. I know it is hard to talk about, but it will help for it not to be hidden. For you. And for him—we don't want him to do this to other girls.

Teen: Mom, I just can't. I can't do this.

Parent: We don't have to do anymore tonight. You're right, tonight is too much. You need to rest. And we can talk more tomorrow.

Teen: (*still crying*)

Parent: What can I do to help tonight? Do you want food? A bath? I can stay with you 'til you fall asleep.

Teen: I want a bath.

Parent: Okay. I will go start the water for you.

Encouragement for the Caregiver

This section contained difficult and weighty topics. It is not surprising we want to avoid them. Sex was designed to be beautiful, but it is highly destructive outside the contexts in which it is intended to happen. As a good parent, you want to protect your child from the dangers of sex and preserve their innocence. We hope the examples have given you tangible language and guidance to navigate conversations. At the same time, we hope you will never need some of these conversation guides. But we provide them so that you have some exposure to be able to love and care for the children in your world.

Sexuality

Sexuality from a biblical worldview is a good and godly expression of covenantal love between one man and one woman who are married. This expression of love occurs physically through sex, but it is a picture of something much broader. Specifically, it points us to see how deeply and intimately God loves us. Within this worldview, desire, attraction, intimacy, pleasure, commitment, and love all exist within the safe context of marriage between one man and one woman.

From a worldly perspective, sexuality purely deals with who you are attracted to. It promotes what feels good and how attraction plays out physically in sex. The focus is on the physical act of sex and what will provide the most physical pleasure.

Where a biblical worldview prioritizes what's good in God's design—namely, the context of safety within marriage and with the opposite sex—a worldly view prioritizes what feels good through personal expression and physical fulfillment. Performance and lack of boundaries dominate in the world perspective. It removes God as the good Designer of sex and disregards boundary lines in exchange for personal freedom.

As we teach our kids about sexuality, key aspects for the conversation to fall in line with God's best for them include the following: God's design, good and healthy desire, complementary relationship with the opposite sex, symbolism within the physical act of sex, physical pleasure, emotional and spiritual intimacy, covenant and commitment, consent, and safety. This is a weighty conversation. If you feel overwhelmed or unprepared for it, it may be because you never had this conversation with your parents. But neither your past experiences nor your parent's abilities or inabilities determine the shape of this conversation. God is able to guide you through it. He is our Teacher and Guide.

Scripture

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25, 3:16; Exodus 20:14, Song of Solomon; Proverbs 5:15-19; Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:24, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 20, 7:2-4; Ephesians 4:19, 5:33; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3; Hebrews 13:4

Example Conversation: Sexual Desire

A child confesses during nighttime prayers about having an erection at school after seeing a girl he liked.

Parent: I'm so thankful you can tell me about that.

Child (*crying*)**:** It was so embarrassing.

Parent: I know, but it's very normal.

Child: All the guys on the basketball team were laughing at me.

Parent: Guys can really stink. But the truth is, they will all experience it. There is nothing to feel ashamed of. Your body is changing, and an erection simply shows your body works the way it is designed to.

Child: What do you mean?

Parent: Well, as you get older, your body is growing from a boy's body to a man's body. One part of being a man is being sexual. God designed both men and women to have sexual desire for one another. It is normal and good.

Child: Girls don't deal with this.

Parent: Well, they don't get erections, but they have sexual desire, too. You just cannot see it.

Child: I wish it would go away.

Parent: I know you want to have more control over your feelings so you don't get embarrassed again, but you won't always want the desire to go away.

Child: You told me I can't have sex 'til I'm an adult, so why is this good?

Parent: I know it probably seems strange, but the desire we have for the opposite sex somehow is a symbol of God's deep affection for us. The passionate love we find with sexual desire is a picture of waiting and anticipating Jesus' return and the fulfillment of His promises to His kids.

Child: Dad, that doesn't make any sense.

Parent (*laughing*): Okay. Well, it may not make sense now, but I want you to know your body is made well, and your feelings are normal. And, while you may want to pray away your desires, they are a good thing. The Lord will teach you that in time. I also don't want you to have shame about your sexuality. When you describe being embarrassed, I get that. You were made fun of—that stinks. But your sexual desire is not a sin to confess. There may be things you do with that sexual desire that requires confession, but the desire itself and how your body feels in response to that desire is not a sin.

Child: Okay, thanks, Dad.

Parent: Let's pray. The next time we read the Bible together, I want to show you some Scriptures that show desire is normal and okay. It's not sinful.

Child: That's in the Bible?

Parent: Yep.

Example Conversation: Homosexuality, Bisexuality

A parent sees a text message on a daughter's phone about kissing a girl.

Parent: Sally, I want to talk to you about something.

Child: Okay.

Parent: You know how when we bought you your phone, we told you we would have parental monitors on it?

Child: Yeah.

Parent: Well, I saw a text message yesterday to your friend Jackson. You told him you kissed your friend Hannah.

Child: Mom, that was private.

Child (*getting angry, then crying*)

Parent: Hey, I know it's hard to feel like you got caught. I'm not mad; I am concerned.

Child: That's like reading my diary!

Parent: Honey, that was a part of our agreement before we got you the phone. I know you may not have been thinking about that when you shared about the kiss with your friend, but to have a phone, Dad and I need to know what you're sharing to protect you.

Child: That's the opposite of protection!

Parent: Are you upset because you're embarrassed, because you think you're in trouble, or because you are mad about getting caught?

Child: Gosh, Mom, I don't know. All of it.

Parent: Okay. You're not in trouble, but I do want to talk to you.

Child: Why? Geez, this is so embarrassing. Are you sad because I am gay?

Parent: I'm just trying to understand. And part of my job as your parent is to tell you about sex and sexuality at different times. I know we have talked a little before, but we didn't talk about homosexuality. I'm sorry if I should have talked with you sooner. I didn't think you would learn about that this young.

Child: You always think I'm a baby.

Parent: You're probably right—you're my youngest. I do sometimes think of you as much younger than you are. I have to get used to you being a teenager. I know I've already raised a teenager, but each kid is always different. I'm still learning about how to be the best parent. When would you like to talk? Do you want to rest tonight and talk tomorrow, or are you comfortable talking now?

Child: I guess tonight. But I want to change.

Parent: Sure, why don't you change into pajamas, and I'll get us a snack while we talk.

Child *(returns)*: You should know Hannah doesn't love me back. You don't have to worry about me kissing her again.

Parent: Well, I'm sorry if you're disappointed. It hurts to care about someone and not have them care in return. Can you walk me through when all this started? I'm curious about when you started thinking about girls in this way.

Child: Last summer.

Parent: Okay, was it because you thought Hannah was pretty and enjoyed spending time with her?

Child: Hannah is my best friend. Well, she was.

Parent: Right.

Child: And last summer, Hannah, Grace, and Shelby all hung out together with me, remember?

Parent: Yes.

Child: Grace and Shelby started dating last summer ,and they kept telling us about their relationship.

Parent: I bet that was confusing.

Child: Yes, but it was also kind of great. You know when we first started talking about puberty and sex, I was so grossed out. I just couldn't imagine you and Dad having sex, and the idea of doing that with a boy...no thanks.

Parent: Yes, I remember it being really strange for you when we talked about it.

Child: When Grace and Shelby got together, it made me realize that I must like girls. I have lots of girl friends and don't really enjoy guys. They're super annoying.

Parent: I mean, guys are super annoying sometimes.

Child: Hannah felt the same way, and we decided since we spend so much time together already, we should date.

Parent: So you were exploring.

Child: Yes. And last week, Hannah and I caught Grace and Shelby kissing. They were embarrassed, but they told us other stuff they were doing, too. They seemed really happy.

Parent: What kind of other stuff did they tell you about?

Child: Just touching and stuff.

Parent: Did you and Hannah try that, too?

Child: No. We were both nervous about even kissing, but everybody is doing that kind of thing.

Parent: I know there is a lot of pressure to try things at your age.

Child: So we decided we would kiss, and we did, yesterday, when we walked home from school. Jackson saw us and ran off, so I needed to explain.

Parent: I see. I'm curious what it was like to kiss her?

Child: It was kind of weird. It wasn't bad; it just felt strange.

Parent: Did Hannah feel the same way?

Child (*crying*)**:** I don't know. I got to school today, and she ignored me.

Parent: I see.

Child: I love her!

Parent: Oh, honey, I know you care about her.

Child: I LOVE her. Don't put words in my mouth, Mom.

Parent: I'm sorry. You love her.

Child: My friends told me you wouldn't get it.

Parent: I'm trying to. What I hear is you miss Hannah. You shared something with her, and now she is ignoring you. That's painful.

Child (*crying*)

Parent (*consoles daughter*)

Child: Was I a bad kisser? Is that why? But how do you know if you're good at kissing?

Parent: Kissing really isn't about being bad or good. It's about the person you are with. I'm curious if Hannah felt similar to you. It wasn't bad, but it felt strange. Maybe she just doesn't know how to talk about it?

Child: Maybe...

Parent: It can be scary to kiss for the first time. It can stir up a lot of emotions.

Child: Yeah. I wish we hadn't done it.

Parent: You miss your friend. You want her back.

Child: Yes.

Parent: I hope she will talk to you tomorrow. I wonder if you could text her. Would you like to?

Child: I'm not grounded from my phone?

Parent: No. You're handling this conversation pretty responsibly. I DO want to talk more, though. You should go to bed. We'll plan to talk more about you saying you are gay.

Child: I don't want to talk.

Parent: We can take a break. You can sleep, but we need to talk about this.

Child: You're just going to tell me it's wrong.

Parent: I wish you trusted me to do more than judge you. I love you. And you're right, I may not agree with you, but I want to understand where you're coming from, and I want to share what I think about sexuality.

Child: Well, I don't have a choice.

Parent: Not on this one. Let's sleep and talk more in the morning.

Child: I'm going to need pancakes.

Parent: I can do that.

Responsive Conversations with Children

Responsive conversations are responding to a question, statement, or observation your child makes and/or a situation you find them in. By having ongoing proactive conversations, the hope is that children will come to you with their thoughts, questions, and perceptions about body image, gender, sex and sexuality, and invite you to continue to teach them.

When you respond to a child's questions or statements, the topics and questions sometimes will catch you off guard. It is okay to tell your child you need time to be able to answer them. But always circle back within a relatively short time, about 48 hours. Children's sense of time differs from adults. When they are brave enough to ask a question, you want to make sure they are not left alone wondering. You also have the freedom to not answer certain questions, but be sure to share why you are not answering and when you would feel more comfortable doing so.

Below is a possible way to share why you are not telling your child everything or why you think certain topics of discussion should be delayed:

> Remember when you were little? We gave you a tiny suitcase that you were in charge of. You needed more stuff than what the suitcase could carry, but we put the extra stuff in our bigger suitcase and carried it. As you've gotten older, we have bought you new suitcases, because we know you can handle carrying more and being responsible for more things.
>
> Talking about puberty, sex, and sexuality is kind of like that. There is a lot to talk about, but Dad and I are timing those conversations for what we believe you can handle at your age. There may be times we only share so much and stop because we think continuing will introduce you to things too big for you. However, we know the world and your peers are talking to you about these things, so we need to work as a team to figure out the right timing. I hope you will trust us when we choose to not share everything. We trust you to ask questions or share areas of confusion we need to address, based on what you are seeing or hearing from your friends and the world.

Parents also choose to not answer questions because they concern their own sexual history. Some parents feel shame about that history. If or when this happens, reference the self-assessment. Process your history more fully with the Lord. Prayerfully and mindfully choose a wise response for where you are and how much detail is good for you and for your child.

Below are a few principles to consider and apply when having conversations with your children about their bodies, gender, and sexuality:

- Always point to God's design for gender and sexuality
- Listen to their questions, their highs, and their lows and prayerfully consider how you can communicate the good news of the gospel rather than focusing on the not bad news of what they "can't do"
- Remember that talking about the body and sexuality is always an opportunity to remind people of the gospel, because the body and sexuality were designed by God for our good

- Remind children who struggle to love their body and/or gender that God made them well. Regardless of whether they have a body that is celebrated by our culture or not, Jesus can empathize with not feeling truly seen (Isaiah 53:2-5)
- Teach children to pray for wisdom and understanding of God's design and plan for the flourishing of their gender and sexuality

Nuance is always needed when engaging in conversations. No two children are the same. We see Jesus responding to different people in different ways throughout His ministry. The following model may be helpful as you determine how to best respond to your child.

Consider if your child is:

- Permission-seeking
- Wisdom-seeking
- Non-seeking

For permission-seeking children and teens:

- Typically, their mind is made up, and they're just looking for permission
- Telling them "don't" generally is unhelpful
- Focus on their identity, which often is rooted in seeking and trusting self, rather than Christ, to achieve the happiness they long for
- Remind them of their adoption as a son or daughter who wants to please their heavenly Father
- Communicate your desire to not want to presume upon God's grace and power

For wisdom-seeking children and teens:

- They are typically soft-hearted and want to learn
- Don't just tell them right and wrong; rather, paint the full picture of what God intended for their bodies, gender, and sexuality, and how the Bible speaks into their circumstance
- Remind them of their identity and the fact that their circumstance is a gift from God

For non-seeking children and teens:

- They may not know what they are doing is wrong
- Discern whether they are soft- or hard-hearted by asking questions, not making statements
- When helpful, share pieces of your own story. It can be helpful for children to hear your humanity and your desires for them. If they become uncomfortable, pull back and share stories in smaller doses
- Point back to the Scriptures and what they teach holistically about the body, gender, and sexuality
- Sometimes you need to deliver a hard word to your children. These moments may be challenging as you recognize the state of your child's heart. However, seeing with clarity will allow you to pray earnestly for them and provide opportunities for continued presentations of the gospel

Example questions and sample responses follow on the subsequent pages. They are meant to give an idea of how to respond in different situations. View the examples less as the right answer or a script and more as a lens to help you think through and prepare for questions you may need to field.

Q & A: Common Questions and Open-Door Statements about Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

All my friends are girls and I think they are pretty. I don't think boys are cute like my girl friends are. Does that mean I am gay?

Topics embedded in question: attraction, beauty, goodness of God's design, comparison, sexual desire

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- It seems like you're equating seeing someone as beautiful as the same as sexual attraction. Do you think that is always the same?
- You say you think your friends are pretty. Typically, when you are sexually attracted to someone, you also want to hold their hand or kiss them. Do you want to do those things?
- Statistically, girls and women look at other girls' bodies more than they do at boys' and men's bodies. A lot of times, that is because they are comparing. Women are designed beautiful by God, but we often feel or are told that is the most important thing about us. W naturally look at girls more than we do guys. Do you think looking at your friends has more to do with noticing how they are beautiful? Or is it because you like them (i.e., have a crush on them)?

Example responses:

- I don't think noticing a girl's beauty is the same as being sexually attracted to someone. Tell me more about what you notice in your friends.
- Tell me what made you think you were gay?
- I know there is a lot of pressure right now to form relationships with the opposite sex. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend can feel like something you are supposed to be doing because your friends are. And, with more and more teens identifying as gay, it can make you feel like you have to have all your attraction stuff figured out. But you have plenty of time to do that. What would it be like to just enjoy your friendships with girls and boys, and figure out later who you want to hold hands with
  and kiss?

My friend recently said he liked boys, not girls. He keeps asking me if I think other boys are hot. I don't know what to say. I don't want to make him feel bad, but I am uncomfortable.

Topics embedded in question: friendship, sexuality, pressure to respond, comfort and discomfort, finding your voice

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What would it be like to say, "I don't want to talk about that right now"?
- What are you worried would happen if you tell your friend how his behavior makes you feel?

Example responses:

- I bet that is tough! You just want to hang with your buddy. Have you ever told him you don't look at boys that way? I wonder how he would respond if you told him you were uncomfortable talking about those kinds of things.
- I know you are worried about offending him—but stating you are uncomfortable is not a judgment of him. It is simply stating how you feel. My hope is because he cares for you as a friend, he would adjust how he is behaving out of respect for you.

Is it wrong to use gender pronouns if my friends ask me to?

Topics embedded in question: gender fluidity, friendship, morality

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What do you think would be helpful about using the pronouns your friend asked you to use?
- What do you think would be unhelpful about using the pronouns your friend asked you to use?

Example responses:

- I love that you want to do what is right. This is tough. I am figuring out what that means in my friendships with other parents, too. I want them to know I love them, but I also disagree with them about what makes someone a boy or a girl.
- You have two challenges ahead of you as you decide whether to use the pronouns or not. One, it seems like doing what is right is important to you. How do you determine what is right? Your mom and I look to the Bible first. We believe God is the perfect Creator, so when it comes to how we are made, we take our cues from Scripture and ask Him to guide us. Two, you want to be a good friend. We know Jesus spent time with people who didn't do what was "right." Jesus did it the best. He never sacrificed the truth while being kind to people who believed differently than He did.
- Could it be fun to read Scripture together and see how Jesus' responded to people who thought differently than He did? Would you want to do that together?

My friend says he is gender creative and is making changes to himself. He goes by her and she, has started wearing makeup, and goes by a different name. He says because I am more emotional, I am probably a girl, too. What makes you a boy or a girl?

Topics embedded in question: friendship, emotionality, gender

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What is gender creative? How did your friend describe that? What do you think about that term?
- I am curious. What do you think makes you a boy or a girl?
- Have you ever felt less like a boy because you are emotional?

Example responses:

- I love how thoughtfully you are responding to this. I'm curious what you think about what makes you a boy or a girl. Your Mom and I believe God is the Creator and Designer of all things, including humans and gender. I believe you are a boy because you have the biology of a boy—-you have a penis. You are also beautifully emotional. But you are emotional because you reflect God, and God is emotional. Your emotions do not make you a specific gender. They make you an awesome reflection of God.

Is masturbation wrong?

Topics embedded in questions: morality, sexuality, emotionality, pornography, self-disclosure

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What could be unhelpful about masturbation?
- What makes you think masturbation may NOT be wrong?
- When are you most prone to want to masturbate? Is there a particular emotion it is tied to (i.e., loneliness, boredom, stress, excitement)?
- Sometimes masturbation and pornography are connected. When you masturbate, are you watching pornography? Are you viewing, listening, or thinking about something or someone in particular when you masturbate?
- How do you feel after you masturbate?

Example responses:

- I am curious what is making you ask that question. Is that something you have done before? Have you friends been talking about it?
- I think masturbation can start out innocently. Specifically, when you are young, you explore your body and discover that touching yourself in certain ways feels good. It's natural to want to repeat things that feel good.
- What I believe makes masturbation wrong is it is tied to your sexuality. God gave you a way to feel sexual pleasure, but He intended that to be done with another person and for that to be done within marriage. When we masturbate, we are taking something intended to be for mutual pleasure and using it for self-pleasure.

- Masturbation can be tricky because it often involves other people, even if it is through our imagination. But they haven't consented to have sex. So, for example, if you ever imagine a person when you masturbate, you are using them for your own pleasure without their consent. If you watch pornography, you do the same thing. And both masturbation and pornography can turn into a habit very quickly.
- Do you remember when I used to go to that Bible study on Monday nights called Recovery? Part Recovery is acknowledging patterns of sin and seeking to repent—to turn away from sin and turn to God. The major thing I was seeking support for in that Bible study was lust. I had developed a negative pattern of masturbating when I was young, and that turned into using pornography. Even after meeting your mom, I continued that pattern of sin. It was wrong—it was like I was cheating on your mom when God had given me someone to enjoy sexual experiences with. I share that with you because the habits you form now will impact you later. I just want you to learn how to make healthy choices about sex now so that you can enjoy it
  fully later.

What if I want to have sex with my boyfriend before marriage? I am just not sure sex is just for marriage.

Topics embedded in question: sex, contexts for sex, relationships, morality, faith, safe sex

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What is making you rethink when sex should happen?
- What benefits do you see for having sex outside of marriage? What about within marriage?
- Are you being pressured to have sex?
- What other things are you and your boyfriend doing sexually outside of intercourse? Is this making it hard to stop?
- Can we brainstorm things to do when you are turned on, outside of having sex?

Example responses:

- I am glad you asked. It's normal to want to have sex with your boyfriend. You have a healthy body that has desire and attraction. That desire is a good thing.
- I am surprised you're rethinking when sex is best. What, outside of your desire, is making you rethink that?
- You know Dad and I want you to wait—we believe sex is designed for marriage. We believe it is best within the marriage covenant because you are committed to one another and promising to love each other forever. We want you to be loved like that. I know Robert is a sweet boy, and you love him a lot. But I think you both will love each other best if you wait.
- If you do decide you are going to have sex, will you tell me? There are things you need to do to protect yourself if you choose to have sex before you are married.

What is oral sex?

Topics embedded in question: sex, consent, boundaries, peer pressure, coercion

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Where did you hear about oral sex?
- Is that something you have tried? Has someone asked you to do it?

Example responses:

- I am curious what prompted your question. Where did you hear about oral sex? I am happy to teach you more about sex, but I am curious about where you heard about it.
- Oral sex is another way to experience sexual pleasure, but instead of using your private parts alone, you also use your mouth. Another word for it is genital kissing. So, for a girl, the boy would not use his penis to turn her on. He would kiss her private parts or use his tongue instead. For a boy, a girl would give him what is sometimes called a blow job. He puts his penis in her mouth, and she uses her lips and tongue to make him feel good or turn him on.
- Has anyone asked you to have oral sex? How did you feel when he/she asked you to do that? Did you feel comfortable saying no? Why/why not?

Does sex hurt? If sex hurts, is there something wrong with me?

Topics embedded in question: sex, consent, body integrity

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Have you had sex that has been painful?
- Why would you think something is wrong with you?

Example responses:

- Where have you heard about sex being painful? Has that ever happened to you?
- Common reasons sex may be painful are if it is your first time and you are getting used to sex, or if the sex is rough. There are also biological and emotional reasons sex can be more painful.
- If you are having sex, and it is painful, it is important to tell your partner to stop as soon as it hurts.

What if I think both boys and girls are attractive? I know homosexuality is wrong, so I plan to marry a girl, but does God hate me? I just think some of my guy friends are attractive.

Topics embedded in question: sexuality, morality, God's love, attraction

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What is attraction?
- What makes you think God would hate you?

Example responses:

- Attraction is complicated. Attraction can be physical, but it is much more than that. We are attracted to people we enjoy. My guess is you enjoy your guy friends and feel close to them. Intimacy, or that feeling of closeness, can be mistaken for sexual attraction. Some guys do have same-sex attraction. If you want to hold hands, kiss, or touch your guy friends in a sexual way, you may have same-sex attraction. Is that what you are talking about?
- I'm glad you are committed to what God thinks. He doesn't hate you. I bet He is proud of you for wanting to honor Him.

Is pornography really bad for you? A lot of my friends watch it to learn about having sex.

Topics embedded in question: pornography, sex, consent, sexual discipleship, safe ways to learn about sex

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What do you know about pornography? Have you ever watched it?
- Can you think of safer ways to learn about sex?
- Have your friends pressured you to watch pornography? Or are you curious?

Example responses:

- I will answer, but I am curious what you already know about pornography. What aspects of it seem unhealthy to you?
- Yes, you're smart. Those are a few reasons I believe pornography is not good for you. Research continues to prove that pornography can lead to things like negative views of women, increased risk of sexual assault (for women), and decreased sexual satisfaction. I know your friends are curious about sex—you are, too. That's why you are asking these questions. I really love that you are choosing to learn in this way.
- Have you looked at porn before? I love that you can tell me. Porn is tempting. It's everywhere, and there can be a lot of pressure to know a lot about sex, even though there are so many other things for you to be learning about and experiencing right now. I'm going to ask for you to not view porn anymore. I've been meaning to put some pop-up blockers on our computer and just haven't gotten around to it. I'm sorry you saw something and then you kept clicking. I'll put the barrier on there, but you will need to manage your behaviors. My guess is you're MORE curious now. That's how porn works. It activates parts of your brain, similar to what drugs do to the brain—so, it is addictive. You'll have to work hard to stay away from it. The fact that it has happened a few times makes me hopeful it will be easier for you than for a friend who is watching it a lot.
- Keep sharing your questions. I am thankful you feel comfortable talking with me. I also want to encourage you to talk with God about your sexuality and your desires. HE is the best help to you. He will help you fight temptation when it entices you to keep clicking or do things that you are not ready for. I'd love to pray for you now—is that okay?

A friend on my online game asked me to send him a picture of my private parts. I didn't, but a part of me wanted to. Is that awful?

Topics embedded in question: consent, peer pressure, media, sexual desire, morality

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What made you decide not to share?
- How did he respond to your "no"?
- Is this the first time he has asked to see naked pictures of you? Has he asked you to do anything else that makes you uncomfortable?

- How did you meet him? Do you know him in real life or online only?
- Has he shown you naked pictures of himself?

Example responses:

- First, I'm so thankful you didn't. And second, I am grateful you can be honest about your curiosity. It's normal to be curious, and its normal to want to be seen and desired.
- I am thankful you didn't share a picture, because it isn't safe. When you share pictures like that, they become public and not private instantly. You don't know how they will be used. Showing others your body or seeing people's naked bodies can make that curiosity you described earlier even bigger—it can often make you want to do more.
- Can you tell if your desire to share a picture was because you wanted to see what they would say about your body? Or because you wanted them to show you their body, too?
- I do have some questions about your friend. I'm a little concerned about the things he is asking you to do. Are you comfortable sharing how you met him?

A friend on my online game sent me a picture of her boobs and asked me to send a picture of my penis. I did, and then she started saying things that made me feel different. I was uncomfortable, but it also felt kind of good. How can something feel good and bad at the same time?

Topics embedded in question: media, sexting, consent, pressure, sexual desire, morality

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What made you want to share the picture of your penis?
- What kinds of things did she say after she saw it?
- Can you describe what made you feel uncomfortable?
- What made you feel good?

Example responses:

- I bet that is confusing. First, I am proud of you for telling me. I want to answer your question first, and then I have a couple of questions for you too.
- What your friend did by showing you her boobs was what the Bible talks about as awakening sexual desire in Song of Solomon 8:4. It's like a light switch turns on in a part of you that is good and beautiful, but when it is done outside the context in which the desire was designed for good, it is confusing. She showed you her boobs. For a teen boy, that's exciting. A woman's body is interesting and exciting. For her to let you see a part of her that is normally kept private is enticing. So, the feeling of enjoyment is normal. What makes it wrong and dangerous is that it is not happening within the safety of marriage, which is where God designed it to happen.
- Do you mind me asking what she said that felt good to hear? Okay. Again, she is enticing you. She knows her body is beautiful to you. Her words make you want to know, see, and do more—like showing her your penis.

- You've been raised to know sexual experiences are built for marriage. I think that is what makes you feel uncomfortable or experience shame when doing something sexual outside of marriage. God doesn't want you to feel shame related to your body or sex. He designed both, and they are good. But when we do things outside of God's design, we naturally feel shame. That is the Holy Spirit working in you to draw you back to God.
- Do you know your friend in real life or only online? Did she say how old she was or anything else more specific? The reason I ask this is that a lot of people online can pretend to be someone they are not. They can lure young teens into sexual experiences they are not ready for. This can create a cycle of victimization that is unsafe for you and others online. We need to establish some new guidelines for your gaming. This isn't a punishment, but a protection.

What if my boyfriend wants to have sex and I don't? What do I do? He might break up with me if I don't.

Topics embedded in question: sex, consent, relationships, peer pressure

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Is it healthy to do something just to please someone else?
- If he did break up with you, what does that tell you?
- How have you resisted pressure to do things you have not wanted to in other situations (i.e., drinking, doing drugs)? What makes this one more challenging to resist?
- Why do you not want to have sex?

Example responses:

- Is your boyfriend asking you to have sex?
- I know we have taught you sex is for marriage, but I am curious what makes you not want to have sex. Is it your faith or something else?
- I know there is a lot of curiosity about sex, and when you are with someone you care about, it can be tempting to want to have sex or to want to cave to the pressure they may be putting on you. My hope is you would not have sex until you are ready to. Consenting—saying "yes" to sex is important. It isn't okay for your boyfriend to be trying to talk you into doing something you don't want to do. And my fear is, if you cave, the sexual experience will not be good because you don't really want to do it. I want sex to be a good experience for you—not pressured.

The last couple of times I was kissing my girlfriend, she kept touching me in ways that turned me on. It was hard to stop at just kissing. I don't want to embarrass her, but I also don't want to make a mistake.

Topics embedded in questions: sex, relationships, boundaries, consent, peer pressure

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Have you shared your concerns with her?
- What are ways you can show affection for her without it prompting you to go too far?
- Does she view sex the way you do? Is she a Christian?

Example responses:

- I'm proud of you for telling me, and I'm thankful you are trying to create healthy boundaries with your girlfriend. It is hard to stop at just kissing, especially if she is touching you in a sexual way. You can't control how she feels—she may be embarrassed, but I think it's important to talk with her. And, while I understand that it feels good, what is happening is not good for either of you. Talking with her will allow you to re-establish healthy boundaries and give you an opportunity to affirm her. She may have never had a guy like her for more than her body. What a beautiful thing for her to hear you like her and are attracted to her so much that you want her. BUT you want more than her body. You respect her so much that you want to wait until sex can be good and beautiful, the way God designed it.
- Also, mistakes happen. But you are doing a good job of trying to pause, trying to think before you act. It's so hard when it comes to these things, but you are doing a really good job of trying to honor the Lord.

What if I don't like having sex? All my friends keep talking about it, and I'm not interested at all. In fact, it kind of grosses me out. I feel like there's something wrong with me. My friend said "no," that I was asexual. I don't know what that means.

Topics embedded in question: sexuality, sexual identity development, peer pressure

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What was it like for her to label you like that?
- Do you think you should be having sexual feelings at this age?

Example responses:

- Everyone develops interest for sex at different ages. And a lot of that has to do with what they are exposed to. If you watch a lot of sexual experiences in movies, or talk about sexuality a lot, it will naturally be a greater point of interest. We've been careful with you and your sister to focus on friendships—to get to enjoy relationships with both boys and girls because those are the eternal relationships you are built for. That doesn't diminish the beauty of marriage or sex. But we want you to have a chance to be a kid and to enjoy the types of relationships you will have forever before focusing so much on sexuality.
- I don't think there is anything wrong with you. I think you simply are not ready for sex. Your lack of interest is letting you know that. You can pay attention to that without putting a label on it. Your friend is likely aware of our culture's trend and tendency to put labels on every kind of sexual or nonsexual inclination, but I don't think you need that label. Asexual simply means someone who is not interested in sex. But that label indicates it's something you will never want, and you simply don't know that yet.

Every time my boyfriend and I make out lately, he touches me more. I told him to stop, but he called me a tease. I mean, I guess I did make out with him, so I should let him do more, but I am not sure I am ready.

Topics embedded in questions: consent, sexuality, sexual desire, boundaries

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Do you think making out is a guarantee for more?

- Is a “no” reasonable whenever? If he asked you to stop, would you?
- What do you believe consent means? Why is it important?

Example responses:

- If you are not sure you are ready, you should be able to say no. It concerns me your boyfriend is not listening to you. When we talk about sex, there is something called consent that needs to happen. Do you know what consent is?
- Consent is when both people are saying yes to what is happening and enjoy what is happening. Not being sure about it doesn’t make you a tease. If he is unable to accept a no, that puts you in a position where I’d be concerned about your safety. What does he do or say when you say no, or you want to stop? What is your plan if he persists in treating you like this?

Everybody on my soccer team says they have had sex—at least oral sex. They say until I have sex, I am a wimp. No girl will want me. I want to do what God says, but part of me really wants to just have sex so people will leave me alone.

Topics embedded in questions: peer pressure, friendship, virginity

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Do you believe sexual experience is something that should be a status symbol?
- What do you believe makes you a man?
- Are there other ways to relieve the pressure of your peers other than having sex?

Example responses:

- I imagine that is tough. What makes you a man, though? I know you know being a man is more than your sexual experience. Endurance is hard when you have pressure like this. I can remember being pressured when I was a kid, but I also know it’s much higher now. What I will tell you is when I did cave—I hit on a girl in a way that was not respectful of her. When I went too far to make myself feel good, I regretted it. Every time. I hope you will be more of a man than I was at sixteen—be the guy that treats every woman like a whole person and doesn’t use her. Be that guy!

How far is too far?

Topics embedded in question: virginity, pressure, sexual desire, faithfulness, purity, lust, integrity

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- At what point are you turned on? (e.g., kissing, making out, touching)
- At what point is it difficult to stop?
- What is the purpose of physical affection within dating relationships?
- What makes physical intimacy safer in marriage?
- What are okay things to do with a boyfriend/girlfriend that I would be comfortable with my future spouse knowing? What makes those things okay?

Example responses:

- This is such a tricky question. When I hear it, I think you want a firm line. You want an answer or formula for how far is too far when it gets dangerous for you—i.e., I won't be able to stop and will end up having sex.
- This question can be about how far is too far before God will be disappointed or disapprove of me. I'm curious if you know which lines up with your motivation for the question? I will answer both as best I can, but I think tuning into your heart will help you know what faithfulness to God means.
- The reality is, you don't know how far is too far. Sexual experiences are like a slide. It's so easy to start down the slide, but hard to catch yourself in the middle—there's too much momentum behind you. And we are all so unique. What turns you on may be different than what turns your girlfriend on. To care for one another well, how far is too far is really a question of how much affection can we show one another that is consistent with our level of relationship. If sex is for marriage, then I need to stop at the point that I or my significant other go beyond what our level of relationship is. So, what would I do with someone and still call okay if we did not get married? What do you think that is?
- "How far is too far" can reveal what we think about God and what we think about ourselves. Is God perpetually looking to catch us at something? Is He a killjoy? Is He withholding from me? Is there ever a point God would not accept me? How do you view God when it comes to making mistakes? When it comes to your sin?
- What happens when you tune into your heart? Is faithfulness and obedience to God just what you can get away with? I view obedience as an act of love. It's an act of trusting another, specifically, trusting God.
- When I read "do not awaken love until it pleases" in Song of Solomon, I read it as cautionary. It indicates there is a time when awakening love is good, and there is a time when awakening it could be harmful. God designed sex to be good—good for you, good for your girlfriend, AND somehow honoring to God, meaning it brings glory to Him. But the matter of good versus bad is ultimately based on what God says about sex and when He says it is good. Some might read that verse in Song of Solomon and say it has to do with their own feelings, but our feelings are not always true or accurate. My feelings lie to me every day. But God is always true. He is always trustworthy and doesn't change. Sex is best when and where God designed it to be.

I was told oral sex wasn't really sex and I'd still be a virgin if I just gave my boyfriend a blow job. Is that true?

Topics embedded in question: virginity, purity, oral sex, peer pressure, consent, coercion

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Do you know what oral sex is?
- Are you interested in having oral sex? If so, why?
- Are you most interested in stopping pressure (from your boyfriend or friends) to have sex? Or being the only one who isn't?
- Do you think God cares more about your virginity status or something else (i.e., the heart, desire to obey, desire to think like Him, etc.)?
- What do you think God calls oral sex (sex or not sex)?
- Why do you think God would want you to abstain from oral sex?

Example responses:

- This feels like a question looking for a technicality. I think God cares less about your virginity status and more about your heart toward Him. I'm not diminishing the beauty of waiting until marriage; I do believe that is what God calls us to. BUT your question reveals a just trying to get by kind of attitude. God wants more—for you and of you.
- I believe sex is anything that involves body parts created for sex (penis, vagina) in a way that arouses you. That is intercourse. I believe it is also oral sex. I believe certain types of touching is sexual activity, such as touching genitals or breasts. You are engaging in those behaviors to elicit a sexual response from yourself and your significant other. I believe that qualifies as sex.

My friends said it was fine to wait to have sex until marriage, but if I was still a virgin at 30, nobody would want to sleep with me. I want to be a doctor, though, and it seems like it would be better to wait to get married until I finish school. But that is REALLY close to 30…

Topics embedded in question: virginity, coercion, pressure, desirability

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Does not having sex make someone less desirable? If so, why?
- What makes someone desirable, based on what Scripture says?
- Is there an age when we stop believing the Lord and start believing the world?
- How can you respond to friends who question your faithfulness to the Lord?

Example responses:

- I'm curious if you think having sex makes you more desirable? That's what it sounds like your friend thinks.
- I don't think there is a defined age or expiration date for honoring God with your body. We are called to do that when we are young and when we are old. We are called to do that when we are single and when we are married. We often think the rules change at certain ages, but believing that has more to do with thinking that God changes when we turn a certain age—does He call me to do something different when I am 29 versus 30, 39 versus 40? I don't believe He does.
- I LOVE that you want to be a doctor. You feel called to care for people in that way. And you are right. Honoring God with what you choose in school and work may require different things from you than it does for your friends who will be done with school at 22. You may have to wait longer for marriage and sex. But you can. And you don't have to have all of that figured out right now. You can decide about med school now and trust God to give you the endurance you need. There are plenty of doctors who get married in med school, too, if you meet someone you love. You don't know those parts of your story yet. You are simply called to trust God today. He will give you faith to trust Him tomorrow for whatever life brings you.

What if I never get married? I don't think it's realistic to never have sex.

Topics embedded in question: virginity, sexuality in singleness

Additional questions to Invite more sharing:

- Would you prefer to be single?

- What do you think is valuable about marriage? What is valuable about singleness?
- Is it possible to be sexual in our design but for God to not allow full expression of that sexuality? What makes you think so?
- What makes abstaining from sex difficult for you?
- How would having sex outside of marriage impact you (physically, emotionally, spiritually)?
- When you say realistic, do you mean impossible, or are you fearful of having an unsatisfying life if you are celibate?

Example responses:

- You're right. Not everyone gets married. But singleness is a God-honoring way to live, just as marriage is. Scripture says it is a gift (1 Corinthians 7), and some of our heroes of faith were single (Jesus, Paul).
- I'm curious if you are struggling with waiting to have sex. If so, tell me what makes it difficult for you?
- If you're not struggling currently, but have a hard time understanding how you could live celibately, part of that struggle is we don't have enough grace for tomorrow (Matthew 6:34). We only have enough for today. God will give us more tomorrow. Our brains are so smart—they are constantly trying to prepare. But living by faith means trusting God will show you how to abstain, if that is what He has called you to (2 Peter 1:3).
- Psalm 16 says pleasures forevermore are at God's right hand. When we think about celibacy as being a life of lack, we do not fully comprehend the depth of God and His ability to satisfy. When we remember marriage and sex are temporary things (we will not be married in heaven), it helps us see sex is a symbol of the good and lasting things we will have with God forever. We won't have sex with God; He will satisfy us far more than the best sexual experience ever could. Pleasures forevermore are available for all children of God—married or single.

A friend of mine said no guy would wait to have sex with me...even Christian guys. Is that true?

Topics embedded in question: virginity, coercion, pressure, faithfulness, love

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- Do you know any Christian guys who are waiting to have sex?
- What does it communicate if a guy is unwilling to wait to have sex with you?
- Are you afraid your virginity will be a turn off to guys? If so, what makes you think that?

Example responses:

- I believe there are men who will wait. I believe there are men who love Jesus enough to honor God sexually. What does it communicate to you if a guy is not willing to wait? If they broke up with you because you were not ready to have sex?
- Anyone who broke up with me because I wanted to wait to have sex would say to me, "You don't love me very much." A man who says that to you or does that is more focused on what pleases him than on what is good for you and what God is calling him to. I would love for you to wait for a man who loves you and loves God so much, he waits. That he WANTS to wait. And he is willing to partner with you in the waiting—it isn't just your job to maintain purity in the relationship. Men are supposed to do that, too.

My friends say girls like a guy who knows what he is doing sexually, and that is why you sleep with a lot of girls...to get better. That makes sense to me, but I also was told to wait until marriage.

Topics embedded in question: sex, pressure, compatibility, faithfulness

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What do you think about your friend's advice?
- What are the benefits of waiting until marriage to have sex?
- How could your friend's advice be wrong?
- What qualities do you think are important to a girl?

Example responses:

- Practice makes perfect—that is the mentality, right? What do you think about that?
- Can you see any problems with your friends' kind of thinking when it comes to sex?
- My problem with it is that it makes sex purely about performance—like playing a basketball game. It is about acquiring skills that allow you to perform in a particular way. But sex is more than that. It is more than a physical act. Sex is emotional, relational, and spiritual, too.
- Sexual compatibility, or feeling made for someone, is in some ways overcomplicated and, in some ways, oversimplified. It is overcomplicated because any man with a penis and any woman with a vagina are compatible sexually—their bodies fit together. It is oversimplified, because compatibility has less to do with skills and more to do with two people loving each other in a committed and sacrificial way. Compatibility is a process of learning each another—what each person likes and dislikes, and finding ways to have fun together. But in a broken world, self-sacrifice and putting the needs of your sexual partner above yourself is looked down upon. In our world, it is much easier to just find a new partner.
- Sexuality is a way of worshipping God. When I do things His way, I am saying, "I trust You. I trust You will allow my body to work the way it is supposed to and will teach me how to please my significant other and allow them to please me without practice." And even if my body doesn't work the way it is supposed to—or hers doesn't—we will figure it out together. We will figure out how to care for one another sexually in a way that honors God first and one another second. You want to wait for a girl who wants you to care for her soul, not just her body. I hope you will choose to be that kind of man.

A friend told me they slept with 10 guys—what is a normal number of sexual partners?

Topics embedded in question: sexuality, biblical sexuality versus worldly sexuality

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What do you think is a normal number? How do you define "normal"?
- Who should define what is normal for sexuality?

Example responses:

- Are we talking about what is normal based on the Bible or based on culture? They say different things.

- According to God, one partner is what is best. He says committing to someone in marriage is the context for where sex is best. Culturally, the world says "you do you." Whatever you feel is what you should do. That opens up an infinite number of possibilities for what is normal; it is based on each individual person. Your friend may say 15 partners is normal if she gets married at 22 or 30 if she gets married at 30, but that is just based on what she thinks, not on what is right or good. My hope is you wait until you find a guy who loves you so much that he is willing to wait, and that you love him so much you are willing to wait. Together, you will get to enjoy sex beautifully for a lifetime.

A friend of mine told me her boyfriend forced her to have sex. She seemed really scared, but she is staying with him. I hate him. I don't want to lose her as a friend, but I am worried about her.

Topics embedded in question: sexual assault, abuse, coercion, safe sex, friendship, secrets

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What was it like to hear about someone being forced to have sex? How are you handling what you heard?
- It sounds like you disagree with her staying with him—what do you think she should do?
- What are important priorities in friendship (e.g., honesty, safety, etc.)?
- Do her mom and dad know?
- What would you like me to do to support you?
- What would you do if you ever found yourself in a situation where someone was trying to make you do something sexually you didn't want to do? Have you ever been in a situation like that?

Example responses:

- I am so sorry. I imagine you are worried about her. You should be. She is staying in a relationship that is unsafe. It is never okay to force someone to have sex or to do anything sexually they don't want to do.
- What do you think she should do?
- Your hatred toward him...you are angry. He hurt her. You want it to stop. I think God can agree with you in your desire to protect her and in your desire to want more for her.
- Does anyone else know about this? Has she told a parent?
- I am so thankful she told you, but that is a lot to carry. And I am so thankful you told me so that you don't have to carry that alone. We need to talk about how to protect her. I know you probably don't want to share more than she wants you to, but we need to prioritize her safety. Her mom (or dad) needs to know.

If we get engaged, is it okay to have sex since we are almost married anyway?

Topics embedded in question: faithfulness, virginity, covenant

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What do you think?
- How is marriage different from engagement?
- Why do you think so many people dilute the value of sexuality within marriage?

Example responses:

- The reality is engagements still break up. Waiting until marriage is waiting until you have committed to each other before God and according to the law. There are rights and responsibilities when it is a lawful agreement; and in a spiritual covenant, there is even more commitment because it acknowledges a union of your souls, not just your lives and bodies. Marriage is where sex is safest because you are waiting until someone says, "I am never leaving you (and vice versa)." Outside of marriage, that covenant and commitment does not exist. It is too easy to leave.
- You're right. People do get divorced. But God hates divorce because of what that symbolizes. It signifies a breaking of a covenant—a spiritual union. That covenant is a picture of His love toward us. So, sex before marriage AND divorce images God poorly. God's love is unending. It is a committed kind of love. Committed to the point of death. Both sex before marriage and divorce taint the picture of what God wants us to demonstrate through sex and marriage.
- That doesn't mean God hates people who get divorced or hates people who have sex early. There are so many circumstances that lead to divorce. But if you are asking me what choices you should make, waiting until you are committed to one another in a spiritual covenant is best—it's where the Lord wants it to happen.

Someone told me you are less likely to get divorced if you live together before marriage. My parents' divorce was awful, so it feels like the best idea to make sure my boyfriend and I are compatible.

Topics embedded in question: cohabitation, divorce, heartbreak, compatibility

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What is the best way(s) to guard against divorce? Is there a way to do that?
- What is the best way(s) to guard against heartbreak? Is there a way to do that?
- Do you believe husbands and wives hurt each other even when they love each other and are committed to one another?
- What do you think living with someone will tell you that dating someone will not?
- What does being compatible mean? Do you have examples of compatibility? Non-compatibility?

Example responses:

- I am so sorry about your parents' divorce. I imagine that was incredibly painful. And I can imagine you want to do everything in your power to prevent that kind of pain in the future—for yourself, your spouse, and your future children.
- You're right to some degree. We adopt this phrase of "practice makes perfect." Common sense would say, "If we cohabitate, living life as close to the way we would do it married, we will see all the potential red flags." The problem is that you are committing to a conditional kind of love. I will love you if... And equally, I will not love you if....
- With cohabitation, you would both be waiting for someone to show the ugliest parts of themselves before deciding to leave. It would be a constant testing—and a constant hiding. Even from a worldly standpoint, statistically, what you are saying doesn't hold up. Couples who cohabitate are MORE likely to divorce. The commitment is too flimsy. That standard gets set early in the relationship.

- Marriage requires faith. It acknowledges you don't know everything, but you feel called to that person. You feel like God is calling you to that person, no matter what. And you are committed to loving that person, no matter what. It images the forever kind of love God shows us.
- I know not living together feels reckless. But I believe it is safer. It is trusting God even more than the person you are marrying. Because even if the worst happens and the guy leaves, you've believed in a forever kind of love. You hold onto and cling to the true forever kind of love—with God. He will take care of you if your husband leaves. He will take care of you if your husband stays. He will take care of you if you leave. He will take care of you if you stay. God is always in the practice of keeping you, even in the worst of circumstances.

My friend who just got married said she and her husband are incompatible sexually. She says she is miserable and told me I should have sex before marriage to make sure my boyfriend and I can satisfy each other.

Topics embedded in question: compatibility, sexuality, marriage, expectations

Additional questions to invite more sharing:

- What is compatibility?
- You said they just got married... Do you think it takes time for a couple to learn compatibility?
- Miserable is a strong word. What are some things she is enjoying in her marriage?
- What is her view of marriage? What is yours?

Example responses:

- According to the world, you should try each other on, so to speak. The world says having sex before marriage allows you to ensure you can please each other or be pleased. Worldly sex prioritizes performance and physicality over intimacy. The physical part is nice, but when it is performance-based, it is pretty selfish. Each person comes to the bed ready to be pleased or entertained. If someone isn't pleased, you're incompatible, and your partner leaves. Or you leave.
- From a godly perspective, sex within marriage is a self-sacrificial act. It looks to please the other person physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Yes, you want to be pleased, but you are mutually aiming to please the other person because you love them so much. It is giving yourself fully to the other person and accepting them fully. You cannot do that if performance is the priority. You cannot do that if you leave when someone doesn't perform well.
- We cannot actually please a person fully. We can't fully accept a person IF God isn't a part of it. Having sex the way God designed it to happen is having sex according to what He says is best and inviting Him to be a part of it. That is where compatibility can occur.
- It is common for sexual struggles to occur in marriage, but that invites a couple to discover how to be close, how to work through the most intimate of things together, and to rely on God to teach them how, because He knows how to love perfectly and forever.

Activities to Promote Conversations

Kids are not like adults. They can only handle bits and pieces of information. Kids have shorter attention spans, they often communicate less verbally and more nonverbally, and they often need playful engagement to communicate fully. Playful engagement can help children and teens be more fully themselves and communicate more fully. Therefore, it may be valuable to consider playful ways of exploring topics as you introduce different concepts and encourage conversation.

Below are a couple of activities to try with your kids to see if they help you continue conversations in a supportive way. Kids may or may not love each activity. The activity is less important than the ongoing invitation to ask more and share more. You want your kids to come to you without barriers for whatever conversation it is.

Jeopardy

Setup:

Set up a posterboard with topics you want to focus on with your child. You could use this with young children and focus on body parts, or with kids entering puberty and their feelings related to that. You could use this with older children, too. Focus on gender, sexuality, and specific scenarios they may find themselves in and need help knowing how to navigate. You could also focus on sex in terms of logistics, desire, and scenarios. There are endless ways to structure the Jeopardy game at different ages and stages as your child grows.

Steps:

1. On a posterboard, pick three sections and label them at the top.
2. Identify questions related to that topic and write them on sticky notes.
3. Attach the sticky notes to the posterboard.
4. Cover each question with a second sticky note containing a point value for the question (e.g., Gender for $300, Sexuality for $100, Body for $150).
5. In lieu of posterboard and sticky notes, you can use a piece of paper, too.

Example:

Body and Gender		Sex and Sexuality		Feelings and Tough Situations	
50	100	50	100	50	100
150	200	150	200	150	200
250	300	250	300	250	300
350	400	350	400	350	400
450	500	450	500	450	500
550	600	550	600	550	600
650	700	650	700	650	700

Introduction:

If you have already had an initial conversation about a particular topic with your child, you can share the game to continue the conversation in a playful, fun way. If you have not yet had a conversation about a particular topic, you could say, "I've been wanting to talk to you about ____, but wanted to do so in a way that wasn't intimidating or awkward like talking can sometimes be. This is a way to make a game out of the conversation. If you'd rather just talk, we can do that instead."

Modifications:

Instead of Jeopardy, you could pre-select questions on a topic, type and print them, and have them in a jar or bowl. Pull a question from the bowl while you play UNO, SKIP BO, WAR, or Jenga. Every time a Wild card, Skip Bo, or Joker is played, or every time a person picks a block, that person answers a question. You can also use the spinning wheel on Login (wordwall.net). You can add questions to the wheel and use it while playing card games or Jenga.

If your child or teen is not into the game, you could have different jars with different questions typed and folded up. Each day, give your child or teen the choice of which jar to choose from. Take turns asking each other questions. This lets you continue the conversation, especially if you already have a weekly or monthly routine.

Example questions based on topic:

Body and gender

- What is the body part that makes a boy a boy?
- What is the body part that makes a girl a girl?
- True or false: If a girl plays with trucks, it makes her a boy.

- True or false: If a boy plays with dolls, it makes him a girl.
- Is it okay for a boy to cry? Why or why not?
- Is it okay for a girl to be opinionated or a leader? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to be powerful or strong?
- What does it mean to be nurturing or kind?
- What is a way a girl has been strong?
- What is a way a girl has been kind or nurtured you?
- What is a way a boy has been strong?
- What is a way a boy has been kind or nurtured you?
- Who made our bodies and is best at knowing how a body should be made or used?
- True or false: God made bodies of all different types, sizes, shapes, and colors, and He made each of them beautiful.
- Who is allowed to see and/or touch your private parts? What makes that safe or okay?
- When is it okay to show your private parts to another person?
- What could you do if someone asked to see your private parts?
- Who would you tell if someone touched your private parts?
- Is it okay for someone to touch your private parts without asking?
- If someone asked to see your private parts, what would you say?
- If someone tried to touch your private parts, what would you do?
- What is a vagina?
- What is a penis?
- What is a scrotum?
- What are breasts?
- As a person gets older, is it normal for them to grow? In what ways do they grow?
- What are healthy ways to help our bodies grow?
- How easy is it to do healthy things?
- Are there ways you are learning to be healthier?
- What parts of you are girly or feminine?
- What parts of you are boyish or manly?
- Is there a way to be a boy and still have characteristically feminine qualities?
- Is there a way to be a girl and still have characteristically masculine qualities?
- When you read the Psalm about being fearfully and wonderfully made, what does that mean to you?
- When you read the Psalm about the Lord knitting you together in your mom's womb...what does that mean?
- What does it mean that the Lord knows the number of hairs on your head?
- What parts of Jesus' character are masculine?

- What parts of Jesus' character are feminine?
- What do you think it was like for Jesus to be kind?
- What do you think it was like for Jesus to be strong?
- What do you think it was like for Jesus to be patient?
- What parts of Scripture speak to godly masculinity?
- What parts of Scripture speak to godly femininity?

Puberty

- What is puberty?
- What is a uterus?
- What is semen?
- What is a wet dream?
- What are two things that change for a girl's body in puberty?
- What are two things that change for a boy's body in puberty?
- What is a period?
- What symptoms happen when you are on your period?
- Do you think tampons or pads are better for managing your period? Why?
- When do you think a girl should start wearing a bra?
- What are ways you need to take care of your hygiene in puberty?
- What is PMS?
- Is PMS an excuse to be a jerk?
- What parts of puberty are confusing for you?
- What parts of puberty feel gross or strange?
- What is the point of puberty?
- How or why is puberty good?
- What is a way to be kind to boys during puberty?
- What is a way to be kind to girls during puberty?
- Why does a boy's voice change in puberty?
- What changes have you noticed since you started puberty?
    - Which parts are cool?
    - Which parts do you not like?
    - Why?
- When do you think you should learn to shave? Why?
- What would you do if you started your period at school or got blood on your pants?

- What are two benefits of puberty?
- What are two costs of puberty?
- What are you most looking forward to about puberty?
- What are you most dreading about puberty?
- Knowing God made our bodies and therefore puberty, what do you learn about Him?

Sex (logistics)

- What is sex?
- Who made sex?
- How does sex happen?
- What is an erection?
- What would you do if you got an erection at school?
- What is masturbation? Is it wrong?
- True or false: Sex is when you kiss and hold hands.
- True or false: Sex is when a boy's penis goes into a girl's vagina.
- What is one reason God made sex?
- True or false: Sex always happens between a girl and a boy.
- True or false: God designed sex to be between one man and one woman who are married.
- True or false: Sex outside of marriage is a sin.
- How is a baby formed?
- How long does sexual intercourse last?
- Can men and women have sex for a lifetime?
- What is an orgasm?
- True or false: Men always have an orgasm every time they have sex.
- True or false: Women always have an orgasm every time they have sex.

Sex (risks)

- What risks come with having sex?
- What things can you do to protect yourself from those risks?
- What is consensual sex?
- What is nonconsensual sex?
- What is sexual abuse?
- What is pornography?
- Is viewing pornography wrong? Why or why not?
- What risks are there for pornography?

- What should you do if someone asks you to send a naked picture of yourself?
- What should you do if someone says sexual things to you that make you uncomfortable?
- Has anyone ever made you feel uncomfortable through their flirting or sexual talk or behaviors?
- What is a condom?
- Is it okay to send and receive naked pictures from friends or boyfriends/girlfriends? Why or why not?
- What is solicitation? What would you do if someone tried to solicit you for sex online?
- What is an abortion? Is it acceptable? Why or why not?

Sex (desire)

- Why would someone want to have sex?
- How do you know you are ready to have sex?
- Is sex like in the movies?
  - How is it the same?
  - How is it different?
- How do we know God designed sex?
- What parts of sex seem fun to you?
- What parts of sex seem confusing or scary?
- How often do you think about or want to have sex?
  - What do you do when that happens?
  - What do you think God would want you to do?
- True or false: Only boys and men really want to have sex.
- Do men or women initiate sex?
- If we are supposed to wait until marriage for sex, whose responsibility is it to stop physical affection if it is going too far?
- When in a dating relationship should you kiss for the first time?
- Is touching while kissing acceptable?
- Are there certain things that, if you did them, would make it hard to stop from having sex?
- Is it okay to spend the night at your boyfriend/girlfriend's house even if you are not having sex? Why or why not?
- When people get married, how often do married couples typically have sex?
- Is it possible to sin sexually when married? How do you guard against that?
- Do you think it is possible to not have sex ever and live a full life? Why or why not?
- If it is possible to never have sex and live a full life, why is sex such a focus of the world?
- What does it mean that sex is a picture of God's love for the church?
- If God never has sex, why would He use sex as a symbol or picture of His love for His people?

Sexuality

- What does it mean to be straight?
- What does it mean to be gay?
- What does it mean to be bisexual?
- What does it mean to be asexual?
- Do you become sexual when you start having sex? Or are you sexual before?
- Why would God make us sexual?
- Does God only want sex to be between a man and a woman? What evidence do we have for that?
- Is it possible to be a Christian and be gay, bisexual, or asexual?
- Can your sexuality change?
- When do people figure out who they are attracted to sexually?
- Is it okay to experiment sexually to determine who you are attracted to?
- Are people born homosexual, bisexual, or asexual? Or is it something that happens because of things in their life?

Gender

- True or false: Some people don't believe God gets to decide if you are a boy or a girl.
- What do you think God thinks about a boy who decides to be a girl?
- What do you think God thinks about a girl who decides to be a boy?
- What does it mean to be a friend to someone who is confused about their gender?
- What is a good way to be a friend to someone who was born a boy but believes he is a girl (or a girl who believes she is a boy)?
- If a friend is confused about their gender, does that mean you should change your gender? Why or why not?
- If a friend is confused about their gender, does that mean you should change what you think about God?
- What feelings do you have about your friend ____ who believes he is a boy (or believes she is a girl)?
- What questions do you have about boys who decide they are girls?
- What questions do you have about girls who decide they are boys?
- How does masculinity image God?
- How does femininity image God?

Music and Media Scavenger Hunt

Setup:

You and your child(ren) will need access to music and internet.

Steps:

Music Option

1. You and your child will need to find at least three songs that have a romantic message to them or speak about love.
2. You and your child will need to find at least three songs that contain a sexual message.
3. Encourage your child to explore music they already listen to (playlists) rather than googling songs about sex.
4. Discuss how Google searches can lead to dangerous places on the internet.
5. Note: You may want to assign finding songs as "homework" between conversations. When you talk again, you can explore the songs they found together.

Media Option

1. You and your child will need to find commercials, YouTube videos, and/or magazine pictures and articles that speak about love.
2. You and your child will need to find commercials, TV shows, movies, or magazines that teach about sex.
3. Again, have your child think about what they are already watching and reading versus searching for new things.
4. Note: You may want to assign finding songs as "homework" between conversations. When you talk again, you can explore the songs they found together.

Introduction:

Discuss how we are constantly influenced by the world around us. God calls us to be in the world, but not of it. And yet, the world influences us in lots of ways that we are not attuned to. Invite children to share songs or media they found about love and sex. You do the same. Encourage thought and discussion around questions like the following ones:

- Is the message of the song or media true? How do we know?
- Does the message of the song or other media influence how we view men or women? Is that view negative or positive?
- What do you enjoy about the song or media?
- What do you not like about the song or media?
- Should you keep listening to or watching it? Why or why not?
- Would it be wrong to keep listening or watching?
- What song is your favorite love song? Why?
- What movie or media portrays love in a way you want to experience? What appeals to you?
- What misconceptions are present about love or sex in the selected music or media?

Modifications:

This game can be used to discuss other topics, such as body and general health, gender and sexuality, and how we view God.

Resources

The Austin Stone Counseling Center

Recovery Ministry: recoveryinfo@austinstone.org, austinstonecounseling.org/recovery-ministries-group/

Individual Counseling: austinstonecounseling.org

Books, Podcasts, and Other Resources

The following list of resources are a combination of secular and faith-based resources. Some resources are helpful for understanding and teaching a biblical framework for body, gender, sex, and sexuality. Others may be helpful for discovering language and ways of presenting information to children at various ages.

It is always wise to read resources on your own before introducing them to your child. In addition, it is not recommended to give a child a book without further conversation, dialogue, and support. If you do offer a child a book, we recommend reading with them or reading a chapter or two and then discussing. A book is never a substitute for you and your relationship with them.

Preschool and Young School Age (3-7)

God Made ALL of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies, Justin and Lindsey Holcomb

God Made Boys and Girls: Helping Children Understand the Gift of Gender, Marty Machowski

The Story of Me: Babies, Bodies, and a Very Good God (God's Design for Sex), Stan and Brenna Jones

I *Said "No!" A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private,* Kimberly and Zack King

Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept: Protect Children from Unsafe Touch by Teaching Them to Always Speak Up, Jayneen Sanders and Craig Smith

An Exceptional Children's Guide to Touch: Teaching Social and Physical Boundaries to Kids, McKinely Hunter Manasco and Katharine Manasco

Good Pictures, Bad Pictures Jr.: A Simple Plan to Protect Young Minds, Kristen Jenson and Debbie Fox

Older School Age and Preteens (8-11)

What's Happening to My Body? Book for Girls, Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras

What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys, Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras

Honest Talk: A New Perspective on Talking to Your Kids about Sex, John Fort

Good Pictures, Bad Pictures, Kristen Jenson and Debbie Fox

Teens (12+)

Chasing Love: Sex, Love and Relationships in a Confused Culture, Sean McDowell

Axis (axis.org) is a website dedicated to informing parents about teen culture. Various resources are available, including videos and discussion questions that parents can use with their teens.

Parents

Rethinking Sexuality: God's Design and Why It Matters, Dr. Juli Slattery

25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask about Love, Sex, and Intimacy, Dr. Juli Slattery

Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy, and the Longings of a Woman's Heart, Dannah Gresh and Dr. Juli Slattery

Sex and the Single Girl, Dr. Juli Slattery, Abby Ludvigson, and Chelsey Nugterem

Our Bodies Tell God's Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender, Christopher West

Fill These Hearts: God, Sex, and the Universal Longing, Christopher West

Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say, Preston Sprinkle

What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves, Sam Allberry

Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction, Sam Allberry

7 Myths about Singleness, Sam Allberry

God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity, Andrew T. Walker

Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others without Sacrificing Conviction, Caleb Kaltenbach

Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story, Christopher Yuan

Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope., Christopher Yuan

Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters, Abigail Shrier

Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture, Mark A. Yarhouse

Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers, Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté MD

The Talk: 7 Lessons to Introduce Your Child to Biblical Sexuality, Luke Gilkerson

Body Safety Education: A Parent's Guide to Protecting Kids from Sexual Abuse, Jayneen Sanders

How to Talk to Your Kids about Pornography, Dina Alexander

Mom, Dad...What's Sex?: Giving Your Kids a Gospel-Centered View of Sex and Our Culture, Jessica Thompson and Joel Fitzpatrick

Sex, Jesus, and the Conversations the Church Forgot, Mo Isom

The Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography, Matt Fradd

The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place, Andy and Amy Crouch

Authentic Intimacy (Dr. July Slattery)

Birds & Bees Online Store

Critique Purity Culture, but Teach Sexual Ethics to Teens

inspiredteentherapy.com/videos-2/

Dysphoric: A Four-Part Documentary

1. youtube.com/watch?v=w8taOdnXD6o
2. youtube.com/watch?v=S3dbikSgvR4
3. youtube.com/watch?v=FRePOJ5lbFI
4. youtube.com/watch?v=yVzodw938c4

Attachment and Peer Orientation

On Devices

Benjamin Boyce (Interview)

Identity and Teen Development

Parenting the Gender Dysphoric Child

Teen Transition and Social Media

Hip to Be Trans?

Detransition and the Hero's Journey

Detransition and Self

Coercion and Abuse in the Gender ID Community

Tips

Remember this guide is not a script. Use your own words. Talk to your kids like you normally talk with them. Use this guide to prepare your words for conversations.

Don't talk at children. Find ways to weave questions into the information you want to impart. Read Scripture and notice the unique ways Jesus navigates conversations with His disciples and the religious leaders. He uses questions, tells stories, and teaches. All are helpful ways to sprinkle information throughout a child's lifetime as you gradually disciple them toward a fuller understanding of biblical sexuality and God's goodness toward them in their sexual design.

If a child makes a mistake and shares it with you, consider how you will "discipline" them in comparison to if they got caught. Do not allow your fear of your child's future dictate your response to a repentant heart. You want your children to continue sharing. Try to respond in ways that allow for that.

If your child makes a mistake with something they were ignorant about, again, determine if their action requires punishment or education and redirection.

Additional Topics

Virginity

Children receive highly varying input related to virginity, purity, and saving yourself. In church culture, maintaining virginity is the gold standard of purity. It is what parents and ministers teach as stewarding sexuality—with the best intentions. God's Word is clear that biblical sex is to occur within marriage. Trusting, abiding in, and obeying God and His good design for marriage is the goal. Thus, waiting to have sex until marriage (i.e., remaining a virgin) is a good and godly aim.

The worldly culture, though, presents virginity almost as a curse. If you are a virgin, you are often treated as naïve, unattractive, or not part of the club. Losing your virginity is presented either as a momentous rite of passage that teens should get to as quickly as possible or as no big deal for teens who are anxious about having sex.

Message discrepancies also happen between males and females. Guys are often expected to lose their virginity earlier and to be more sexually promiscuous and experimental. Girls are often expected to hold out to not be seen as a slut, but then be willing, ready, and skilled when the magical moment strikes.

Christian teens grow up with one foot in the world and one foot in church, meaning they are highly divided. They also are at an age when their faith is just becoming their own, but they are unpracticed in applying their faith and exercising what it means to believe God most. It is not impossible to live by faith in Jesus, but it is difficult.

Having conversations with your children allows you to teach them more than an abstinence-only education. Conversations become the means for teaching your children about the goodness of God and His design. They encourage children to trust and experience the goodness of God's redemptive love, even when life is hard and peers pressure them to make decisions.

Responding to Mistakes

Dr. Juli Slattery says we are all sexual beings, and we are all sexually broken. None are exempt. This applies to children, too. As parents, you often experience tremendous pressure to do it right. Almost every parent feels like they are screwing up in some way or another. If you are trying to have conversations, reading Scripture, and praying for your kids, you are likely doing a better job than you give yourself credit for. You are internally evaluating how you are impacting your children and are aiming at faithfulness, which is the goal.

However, there can be a parenting trend toward hypervigilance and perfectionism. In your attempt to be a good parent, you may over-analyze, become paralyzed, or hover and become over-protective. Sometimes, you can have unrealistic expectations of your children.

Children make mistakes. It is expected. (Humans making mistakes is expected.) God is not surprised or scared of His kids' mistakes. He guides, corrects, and provides a covering that enables us to make mistakes and get back up. As parents, you need to embrace the grace generously extended to you as you parent faithfully, not perfectly. You also need to extend grace to your children to model the kind of parenting they have in Jesus.

As you consider the reality that your child is likely going to make mistakes when it comes to their sexuality—just as you likely made mistakes related to your sexuality—please plan for conversations related to the following:

- What to do when you don't know what a word means (related to body, gender, or sexuality)
- What to do when you don't understand something that is happening to your body or something they see or hear

- What to do when someone asks to see their private parts
- What to do when they are curious about their body or someone else's body
- What to do when they see something on their phone or computer that is sexual in nature
- What to do when their friends are talking about something that makes them uncomfortable
- What to do when their friends are trying to make them do something that makes them uncomfortable
- What to do when their friends are exploring things related to gender or sexuality that they know is wrong according to the Bible
- What to do when they are unsure if they believe parts of what God says about their body, gender, or sex
- What to do when they feel stuck or don't know how to say no
- What to do when their sexual desire is high
- What to do when they do have same-sex attraction
- What to do when they don't feel at home in their bodies—hate their bodies
- What to do when they've started a pattern of behavior they know is wrong, but they don't know how to stop
- What to do if a friend has been assaulted
- What to do if someone is trying to solicit them online
- What to do when someone asks to see their private parts
- What to do if they realize they have said something inappropriate
- What to do if they realize they have done something to make someone feel uncomfortable
- What to do when someone forces them to do something they don't want to do
- What to do when they are touched inappropriately
- What to do if they are assaulted
- What to do if they have pressured their girlfriend or boyfriend
- What to do if they have touched someone inappropriately
- What to do if they assault someone
- What to do if they get an STD
- What to do if they get pregnant
- What to do if they get someone pregnant
- What to do if they experiment sexually with a member of the same sex
- What to do if they go too far with their boyfriend or girlfriend

Proactive communication this does not give your children license to sin. Rather, it reminds them they are sinful and often naïve. As a good parent, you preparing them for different situations lets them know:

- The world is not coming to an end—sin happens. God's grace is sufficient to cover this sin.
- Mom and Dad prepared me for this; I know I can talk to them about this.
- I can get help in navigating the best solution forward.

The severity of the mistake will require different responses. For example:

- If a child has viewed pornography 2-3 times, it will require a different response than if your child is viewing pornography every day, multiple times a day.
- If your child is already having sex, will you talk to them about safe sex (condoms, birth control)?
- If your child is in a homosexual relationship, how will you navigate that as a family?
- If your child is sexting or sending nude pictures because they are seeking attention, that requires a different response than if your
  child is sexting or sending nude pictures to someone who has solicited them or to seduce another person.

Same-Sex Attraction

Same-sex attraction is the Christian term for individuals with homosexual desire who live a celibate lifestyle. The term distinguishes attraction from sexual expression. It also separates attraction and behaviors from the person's identity. Each person is, first and foremost, a child of God.

> **John 1:12:** *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

Some teens may be tempted to "think" they are homosexual or bisexual before they actually know what that means. Other kids may experience genuine same-sex attraction. It is important for those kids to know that if they do find they are sexually attracted to members of the same sex, the Lord still gives them a way to honor Him.

First, sexual expression is not essential to a whole life. Jesus lived life fully human without having had sex. Paul, the greatest evangelist in the Bible, was also single and celibate. There is unique pain with same-sex attraction, and there are unique challenges in living a celibate life, but that life is not impossible.

> **2 Peter 1:3:** *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*

Individuals navigating same-sex attraction must wrestle with God's allowance for something that causes pain. But this is true for all believers. All children of God will experience suffering of some kind or another.

> **Matthew 16:24:** *Then Jesus told to His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

Paul says his suffering, a thorn in the flesh, is God's grace toward him. Paul asks for it to be removed, but he humbly accepts he can more fully see God's power at work through the thorn.

> **2 Corinthians 12:7-10:** *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

As believers, we do not know what trials will come our way or our children's way. We do not know what we will be called to do in faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord. But we can have confidence that God purposes all the things He places in our lives. He will see us through them.

Romans 8:26-30: *Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

If your child is navigating same-sex attraction, they may ask questions like these:

- Did God make me wrong?
- Is my sexual desire wrong?
- Is same-sex attraction only sin when it escalates to behavior?
- How do I manage desire?
- Will I only ever have same-sex attraction? Is it possible to develop attraction to the opposite sex?
- Is it wrong to pursue relationships with members of the opposite sex in an attempt to explore attraction?
- Am I doomed to loneliness forever?
- Why did God give me this desire if I cannot have someone to meet that desire?
- Is this punishment for something?
- Does God hate me?
- How do I handle people who are homophobic?

Singleness

While most of your children will grow up, get married, have sex, and raise a family, that will not be the case for all of you. Some of you will have children who grow up and remain single. Considering that, it is important for children to know the beauty of sexuality outside of the physical act and what stewarding their sexuality will look like if they never get married.

This gets into the "point" of sexuality. Sexuality is intended to point to its Creator. It is intended to glorify God. Just as marriage images the covenantal nature of God to His people, sexuality images God's passionate love for His people. We may get nervous imagining God loving us like that. But for people living in prolonged singleness, it is imperative they know their desire is for something. For someone. They need to know they are seen, known, and loved beyond their wildest imaginations by the One who surpasses the best love interest they could imagine.

For a single who does not desire singleness, sexual desire without a solid understanding of God's goodness to them in it can feel like a cruel joke. And, when you have been told to wait to have sex until marriage, and marriage never comes—again, it feels mean. Unless, that is, there is something more than meets the eye.

Both the sexually frustrated single and the sexually frustrated married couple need to know the bigger picture. Our longing and satisfaction reside fully in our Creator and our relationship with Him. Sex and marriage are beautiful images—but they are merely images of the fuller, more beautiful oneness we all await as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verses: Isaiah 54:1-8, Ezekiel 16:1-14, Hosea 2:14-20, Isaiah 43:1-7, Song of Solomon

Concepts: God as husband, God as lover, God as provider, God's pursuit, family of God, marriage as a symbol of God's marriage to His bride, the church

Questions to pray through:

- Do I believe God is sufficient if I never get married (or my child never gets married)?
- Do I believe life is about the nuclear family or the family of God? How does my family reflect that (or not)?
- Do I believe a Christian can be content in a marriage that is hard?
- Do I believe a Christian widow/er will have all she/he needs?
- What does it mean that God is our husband?
- What does it mean that marriage and sex are symbols of God's love for us?
- Does it feel gross to think of God as lover? Why?
- Do I believe God when He says pleasure is at His right hand forevermore (Psalm 16:11)?
    - What hope does that provide for the single and celibate?
    - What hope does that offer a couple struggling with sexual intimacy?
    - What hope does that provide a person with same-sex attraction?
    - How does Psalm 16:11 help us reframe sexual intimacy in general?
- Is someone who remains celibate forever "missing out" or "sad"? Do you feel sorry for them? Why?
- How can you encourage single people? (***Caution flag, it is not encouraging to tell a single person how bad your sex life is as a married person.)
- How should I engage with the Lord as husband—how would that impact the way I pray, work, spend my money, manage my home, build a family, and manage my sexual desire?
- How can married people experience God as husband (He is your first and always spouse)?

WHY is singleness a topic in a guide for teens? Because our language matters. When we use the term "save yourself for marriage," is that accurate? Or are we stewarding sex to honor God? Marriage may happen, and that is the God-honoring place for sex to occur. But tweaking the wording may help children and teens have a better view of sexuality and its purpose.

In addition, our culture is hypersexualized. It is tempting for all of us, children and adults alike, to think that sex and marriage are what we live for. If we pay attention to the media and the way we talk, it is a natural assumption. But life resides in our relationship with the Lord. Believers, single and married, need to know sexuality is just a taste of the pleasure God has for us (Psalms 16:11). We would do well to remember that as we practice for heaven and prepare our hearts for eternity in the here and now. We can do that by embracing these ideas:

- Chase the things that matter
- To not hyper-fixate on our relationship status
- Honor sexuality for what it is, not worship it
- Enjoy more freedom in relationships with men and women (without fear)—they are our brothers and sisters forever
- Singles and marrieds co-labor better together
- Singles to not feel other or isolated in a sea of couples
- Singles to wait until they feel called to a person in marriage rather than finding someone STAT

Closing Note

Thank you for taking time to read this guide thoroughly and prayerfully. We hope you encounter and experience more of Jesus in your own life, and have the tools and language to disciple your child to grow in their knowledge and experience of their Savior.

As we stated at the beginning, the team at The Austin Stone Counseling Center is here to help. If any of the content in this book has left you with questions or concerns, please reach out. Our counselors are happy to walk with you in whatever you are experiencing.