



MODULE THREE

Sexuality Education

Contents

Preface	6
Glossary of Terms	7
Chapter Eighteen - Introduction to the Series	9
<i>Revisiting the Foundations</i>	10
<i>Man and Woman He Made Them</i>	11
<i>Points for Reflection</i>	12
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	12
<i>Resources</i>	12
<i>Notes</i>	13
Chapter Nineteen – Preparing Ourselves for the Talk(s).....	14
<i>My Embarrassing Experience</i>	15
<i>Preparing Ourselves</i>	15
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	17
<i>Resources</i>	17
<i>Notes</i>	18
Chapter Twenty – Understanding Sexual Desire.....	19
<i>The Origin of Eros</i>	20
<i>The Fullness of Eros</i>	20
<i>The Opposite of Love</i>	21
<i>Managing the Power of Eros</i>	22
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	23
<i>Resources</i>	23
<i>Notes</i>	24
Chapter Twenty-One – Chastity: Same as Celibacy?.....	25
<i>The Goal of Sexuality Education</i>	26
<i>True Love</i>	26
<i>Freedom to Love</i>	26
<i>Universal Virtue</i>	27
<i>Summary</i>	28
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	29
<i>Resources</i>	30
<i>Notes</i>	31

Chapter Twenty-Two – Empowering Our Children for Chastity.....	32
<i>Virtues as the Starting Point</i>	33
<i>Justice</i>	33
<i>Temperance</i>	34
<i>Fortitude</i>	34
<i>Prudence</i>	35
<i>The Theological Virtues</i>	35
<i>Summary</i>	36
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	36
<i>Resources</i>	37
<i>Notes</i>	38
Chapter Twenty-Three	39
Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – Pre-School	39
<i>The Principles of Engagement</i>	40
<i>Talking to Our Young Ones</i>	41
<i>Summary</i>	42
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	43
<i>Resources</i>	43
<i>Notes</i>	44
Chapter Twenty-Four	45
Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 6 to 9 years old	45
<i>Principles for Engaging Our Children</i>	46
<i>The Talk(s)</i>	46
<i>Summary</i>	48
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	48
<i>Resources</i>	49
<i>Notes</i>	50
Chapter Twenty-Five	51
Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 10 to 12 years old.....	51
<i>Principles</i>	52
<i>Changes in Puberty</i>	52
<i>Crushes</i>	53
<i>God’s Plan for Love and Sex</i>	54
<i>Pornography</i>	54
<i>Communication</i>	55

<i>Summary</i>	56
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	56
<i>Resources</i>	56
<i>Notes</i>	57
Chapter Twenty-Six.....	58
Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 13 years old and older.....	58
<i>The Teen Years</i>	59
<i>Understanding Our Teens</i>	59
<i>Basic Principles</i>	60
<i>The Talk</i>	61
<i>Summary</i>	63
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	63
<i>Resources</i>	63
<i>Notes</i>	64
Chapter Twenty-Seven.....	65
Talking to Our Children About Masturbation.....	65
<i>Defining the Term</i>	66
<i>The Body Has a Meaning</i>	66
<i>Selfless Gift vs Selfish Gratification</i>	66
<i>Loving the Afflicted</i>	67
<i>Need for Character Formation</i>	67
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	67
<i>Resources</i>	68
<i>Notes</i>	69
Chapter Twenty-Eight.....	70
What if our Children are Already “Doing it”?.....	70
<i>What if?</i>	71
<i>The Six Steps</i>	71
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	72
<i>Resources</i>	72
<i>Notes</i>	73
Chapter Twenty-Nine.....	74
Talking to Our Children About Condoms and “Safe Sex”.....	74
<i>“Safe” Sex?</i>	75
<i>Assumptions</i>	75

<i>Condoms and Pregnancy</i>	76
<i>Condoms and STIs</i>	76
<i>Consistently and Correctly?</i>	77
<i>The Holistic Response</i>	77
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	78
<i>Notes</i>	79
Chapter Thirty	80
Talking to Our Children About Contraception	80
<i>Revisiting the TOB</i>	81
<i>Telling a Lie with our Bodies</i>	81
<i>Learning the Language of the Body</i>	82
<i>An Analogy to Learning the Language</i>	83
<i>Asking the Right Questions</i>	84
<i>Summary</i>	84
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	84
<i>Resources</i>	85
<i>Notes</i>	86
Chapter Thirty-One	87
Talking to Our Children About Cohabitation and Premarital Sex	87
<i>A Worrying Trend</i>	88
<i>Shaky Ground</i>	88
<i>Building Strong Foundations</i>	89
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	90
<i>Resources</i>	91
<i>Notes</i>	92
Chapter Thirty-Two	93
Talking to Our Children About Modesty	93
<i>What is Modesty?</i>	94
<i>Great Worth</i>	94
<i>Practical Steps</i>	95
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	96
<i>Resources</i>	96
<i>Notes</i>	97
Chapter Thirty-Three	98
Should I Let My Child Attend Sex Ed Classes in School?	98

<i>School or Home?</i>	99
<i>Opening Up Discussion</i>	99
<i>Personal Decision</i>	100
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	101
<i>Resources</i>	101
<i>Notes</i>	102
Chapter Thirty-Four	103
Abortion – Why Not?	103
<i>A Sensitive Topic</i>	104
<i>Culture of Life</i>	104
<i>When Does Human Life Begin?</i>	104
<i>Not Yet a Person?</i>	105
<i>What Science Tells Us</i>	106
<i>Discrimination</i>	106
<i>Ethical Aspect</i>	106
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	107
<i>Resources</i>	107
<i>Notes</i>	108
Chapter Thirty-Five	109
Talking About Abortion – Pastoral Aspects	109
<i>The Need for Accompaniment</i>	110
<i>Pregnancy Support – A Story to Share</i>	110
<i>The Feminine Genius</i>	111
<i>Support Network</i>	111
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	112
<i>Resources</i>	112
<i>Notes</i>	113

Preface

Welcome to Catholic Parents Online, where we share tips and resources on Catholic parenting. This is brought to you by the Theology of the Body parenting team of the Apostolate for Catholic Truth. Presented with the lens of the Theology of the Body, we will see how we can be a sincere gift of ourselves to our kids, in ways that will help them find true happiness and flourish in accordance with God's wonderful plan for each and every one of them.

This project began as a YouTube and podcast channel for Catholic parents, with various modules covering topics such as the foundations of Catholic parenting, bonding with our children, sexuality education, managing social media and so on. In our hope to help parents optimize its contents, we have developed a handbook to accompany each module.

While the contents of each chapter/episode can be done through print (handbook), video (YouTube) or audio (Podcast) format, depending on each individual's preference, parents now have the opportunity to run through its contents in greater detail through reflection questions at the end of each chapter. These questions are designed to help us assimilate the materials better, whether as individuals, as couples, or as parent support groups in parishes or Church groups.

We hope and pray you will find these handbooks and YouTube and podcast episodes useful. It is our hope and prayer that through these resources, through God's mercy and grace, we will connect better with our children and lead them to where God wants them to be, glorifying God as human persons fully alive in His image and likeness.

Humbly in His Love and Service,

The TOB Parenting Team, Apostolate for Catholic Truth

Glossary of Terms

- AL** **Amoris laetitia** – Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of Love”, 19 March 2016.
- CCC** **Catechism Of The Catholic Church** - Latin text copyright (c) Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano 1993.
- EV** **Evangelium vitae** - Pope St John Paul II, Encyclical “The Gospel of Life”, 25 March 1995.
- FC** **Familiaris consortio** - Pope St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation “On the role of the Christian Family in the Modern World”, 22 November 1981.
- GS** **Gaudium et spes**, “Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World”, 7 December 1965.
- HV** **Humanae vitae**, - Blessed Pope Paul VI, Encyclical “Of Human Life”, 25 July 1968.
- TMHS** **“The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family”**, Pontifical Council for the Family, December 8, 1995
- TOB** **Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body**, Michael Waldstein, Pauline Books & Media (2006).

'THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR THE ENTIRE
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TO RECOVER AN
APPRECIATION OF THE VIRTUE OF CHASTITY.
... THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF
SEXUALITY AS A SOURCE OF GENUINE
FREEDOM, HAPPINESS AND THE FULFILMENT
OF OUR FUNDAMENTAL AND INNATE HUMAN
VOCATION TO LOVE.'

- Address of Pope Benedict XVI
to the U.S. bishops from Minnesota, North Dakota,
and South Dakota on Friday, 9 March 2012.



TALKING WITH OUR CHILDREN ABOUT
SEXUALITY

CATHOLICPARENTS.ONLINE

Chapter Eighteen - Introduction to the Series

Talking to our children about sexuality is not easy, especially in today's digital world.

But it can and should be done. In this chapter we revisit some of the foundations needed for this conversation with our children, so that we can talk with them in a way that will form and prepare them for the challenges ahead, as well as help us bond more closely with them in the process. It also prepares us for the rest of this mini-series on "Talking With our Children About Sexuality".

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Revisiting the Foundations

In our first mini-series, we covered the foundations and pillars of Catholic parenting, followed by one that discussed the ABCs of connecting with our children.

These foundational episodes provided us with the backbone, so to speak, of Catholic parenting. They helped us understand our role as priest, prophet and king in our family. They helped us appreciate the foundational role that Jesus has in our lives, both in our individual lives and our family lives.

We also learned about the importance of connecting with the Church through her teachings, support and sacramental life, as well as the importance of connecting with our spouse and children.

When discussing the latter, we shared about the ABCs of why and how we can bond with our children ever more closely through the following:

- A - for affirmation,
- B - for being there for them,
- C - for communicating well with them,
- D - for disciplining them well,
- E - for being empathetic with them,
- F- for forgiveness,
- G - for being God centred in our family life,
- H - for honesty,
- I - for integrity, and finally
- J - for being joyful.

Without this strong foundation that I have just laid out, it will be difficult to connect well with our children and share with them the values and virtues that matter so much to us, and which we know are necessary for their flourishing.

If you have not gone through those from chapters **episodes 1 to 17** yet, I would strongly urge you to do so.

Because it is with these foundational principles as our basis, that we can now be ready to launch into more specific topics such as chastity and sexuality education, management of the internet and social media, faith formation and so on.

Man and Woman He Made Them

Here I would like to introduce you to the next mini-series on Catholic parenting – sexuality education.

This is not an easy topic. My wife and I have made mistakes in the past as we tried to form our children in this area. I will share some of these with you in a later chapter.

We have learned much from them. As mentioned in our introductory chapter, it is our hope that you will learn from our mistakes, so that you and your children will be spared the same.

In this mini-series, the areas covered will include, though not limited to, topics such as understanding God’s plan for sex, what chastity is really about, premarital sex, modesty, pornography and so on.

Why do we have sexual desire? Is it good or bad? How do we handle it? How do we prepare ourselves to form our children in this area? How do we equip our children for this intense and “hot” battle, so to speak? How do we help them overcome temptations in this area? How do we explain to them difficult topics such as masturbation and contraception, and others?

These are just some of the questions that we must, and will, cover as we dive into this mini-series on sexuality education.

Points for Reflection

1. “The family has as its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love...” – Pope St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, #17
2. “It is an illusion to think we can build a true culture of human life if we do not ... Accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and their close inter-connection.” – Pope St John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, #97
3. “Parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse. It follows that they should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately.” – Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, #259
4. “[the parents’] role as educators is so decisive that scarcely any thing can compensate for their failure in it.” – Pope St John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, #36
5. “Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern, and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time, will we be able to shield them from harm. Vigilance is always necessary and neglect is never beneficial.” – Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, #260

Reflection Questions

1. Do I feel awkward when talking with my children about sexuality? Why?
2. Do I think I should let them learn the topic from school, their friends or the internet? Or should I be their primary educator?

Resources

1. “**The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality**” – **Guidelines for Education within the Family**, The Pontifical Council For The Family, 8 December 1995.

Notes

Chapter Nineteen – Preparing Ourselves for the Talk(s)

As parents, talking to our children about sexuality may be a daunting prospect for many of us, and even embarrassing for some. Yet we cannot shirk from this responsibility if we want to form our children well so that they can, as sexual beings, learn to love as God loves in and through their bodies, according to the state of life they are in.

This chapter discusses how we can prepare ourselves for this task and what we need to equip ourselves with for this “talk”, or rather “talks”, as we embark on this exciting journey of sexuality education at home.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



My Embarrassing Experience

I remember when I first broached the topic of sex with my children. My eldest daughter was just about 8 years old when she asked me where babies came from. I decided to tell her the facts as they were. She was shocked, and ran off to her room to tell her 6-year-old sister what I said. Then both started crying on each other's shoulders. I felt like an abject failure as a father-cum-educator.

As you can see, my mistakes were stark, most notably in the fact that I failed to prepare my children (and myself) for this "big" conversation in age-appropriate ways. This was largely due to my lack of preparation, as well as my lack of understanding and awareness of where they were, before I dropped the bomb, so to speak.

Preparing Ourselves

How can we prepare ourselves for this task of sexuality education?

Broadly, there are a few important ways:

- 1. Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray.** We need our Lord to enlighten and guide us in what we are to say and how we are to say it, at different times and in different situations. This is not merely a human effort, but a spiritual battle. As St Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness..." On our own, we will lose the battle. But with Christ by our side fighting for us, we will win it. For ourselves and for our children. Remember to pray all the time, and especially say a little prayer before speaking with them on a topic like this.
- 2. Learn more about the topics we want to discuss with them.** The Catholic Church has abundant resources and richness on these topics. The wisdom and truth of her teachings are just so rich and beautiful. Read more about them in the Church's documents. We can also listen to various YouTube and podcast channels that share her teachings reliably and clearly. We have shared a few links **here** with this episode, as well as **on our Resource page**.
- 3. Strengthen our marriage.** Let our marriage be a living witness to our children as to what true love is meant to be – a reflection of Christ's love, self-sacrificial love, for His Church.

For those among us who do not have our spouse with us for various reasons, let Jesus be our spouse. Strengthen our bond with Him, and let Him lead us, and our children, on this journey. We are not alone. He is with us, as individuals and as couples.

4. If you can, form a group with other like-minded parents to support each other on this journey. You could meet up with each other once a week or once a fortnight, pray together, reflect on a Bible passage together, and share with each other how your journey in this area of parenting has been. Do remember that when sharing, we should not be judgemental towards each other; neither should we jump in and interrupt when another person is sharing. Share tips and resources with one another – these should be taken from resources that are faithful to the constant teachings of Holy Mother Church. We have shared some **resources** on our website and with this YouTube and podcast.

5. Build a strong bond with our children. We covered these in earlier chapters, namely from chapters 8 to 17. Do **refer** to them if you have not done so.

6. Remember that sexuality education does not happen in one big talk, but all the time. It really happens from the very first moments of our children's lives. How they see us love one another as Christ loves; how they see us regard and respect members of the opposite sex; how they hear us talking at the dining table and at family gatherings about related topics like premarital sex and modesty, and so on; how they witness us thanking God for the gift of life, for the gift of love, for the gift of children, for the gift of family in our prayers and our conversations. In that sense, sexuality education is happening ALL the time!

With these in mind, let us move forward in our journey. In the next chapter, we will discuss the topic of sexual desire. Why do we have sexual desire? Is it good or bad? Can we have sexual desire and be chaste at the same time? We will discuss these questions and more.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I set aside time for prayer each day? Is the Lord calling me to deeper prayer with him.
2. Do I tend to “outsource” the formation of my children in this area?
3. How important is my role in my child’s formation in this area of sexuality.
4. How do I intend to prepare myself for this role?
5. Do I think it will be beneficial for me/us to join a group of like minded parents to support each other on this journey as our children’s primary educators?

Resources

1. **Talking to Your Children about the Gift of Human Sexuality**, The Diocese of Harrisburg.
2. **Beyond the Birds and the Bees: The Secrets of Raising Sexually Whole (and Holy!) Kids**, Gregory and Lisa Popcak.
3. **“The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality” – Guidelines for Education within the Family**, The Pontifical Council For The Family, 8 December 1995.

Notes

Chapter Twenty – Understanding Sexual Desire

We know how powerful sexual desire can be. Some have even compared it to a raging river, which if not controlled or managed, can cause immense destruction.

Yet, what is sexual desire? Is it good, or bad? Why were we created with it in the first place?

This chapter seeks to explain the origin, beauty and power of sexual desire, and how, when properly directed, it can lead us to an even greater understanding of and appreciation for such a beautiful gift that God has imbued us with.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



The Origin of Eros

Many of us think that *Eros* or sexual desire is the attraction to, and perhaps the desire to have sex with another person, and chastity is simply the avoidance of sexual intercourse, or maybe even the annihilation of sexual desire within us. But this is far, far from the truth.

In order to understand what these terms really mean, let us once again turn to Pope St John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* that we discussed briefly in **chapter 2** of this series. You would remember some of the concepts that we brought up, namely:

1. We are made in the image and likeness of God;
2. Since God is love, and we are made in His image, we will find fulfilment only when we love as He loves;
3. God exists as an eternal exchange of love in the Holy Trinity. Made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity, we too are made for loving communion;
4. This call to loving communion is stamped right here, in our male and female bodies. The fruitful love of husband and wife in the union of their bodies is meant to image Trinitarian love, a love which is free, total, faithful and fruitful. Not only are we designed for that union, to love as God loves in all our masculinity and all our femininity; we are also given a desire for that union.

With this in mind, we can now have some idea of what sexual desire is.

The Fullness of Eros

But to understand it even better, let us turn to what Pope St John Paul II described as original nakedness, one of the original experiences of man, male and female, that is, before the fall.

Referring to the verse “**And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.**” (**Genesis 2:25**) St John Paul tell us that this verse “presents one of the key elements of the original revelation.”

Why were they not ashamed?

Because they looked at each other as God looked at them. They saw God's plan of love inscribed in their naked bodies. They saw each other as only God would see, and it was very good! And with that, their only desire was to love as He loves in and through their bodies.

They saw and knew each other “with all the peace of the interior gaze.” (TOB 13:1) as Pope St John Paul II tells us.

And as they looked at each other as God would look, in love, they were not afraid of the other's gaze, because “**perfect love casts out fear**” (1 John 4:18). And this is how our first parents experienced sexual desire. How they experienced *eros*, as a desire to love the other as God loves, in a sincere gift of self to the other that was free, total, faithful, and fruitful.

In fact, St John Paul II said that **the “fullness of ‘eros’... implies the upward lifting of the human spirit to what is true, good and beautiful, so that what is ‘erotic’ also becomes true, good and beautiful.” (TOB 48:1)**

Which is also why Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)* said that “Eros” and Agape” are one: **Eros... is so purified as to become one with agape (DCE, 10)**

The Opposite of Love

What is the opposite of love? Many of us would think it is “hate”, wouldn't we? But for St John Paul II, the **opposite of love** is not so much hatred, but **lust**, a disordered state of experiencing sexuality.

Before the Fall, our first parents experienced sexual desire as a desire to be a total self-gift of one to the other, in a love that was free, total, faithful, and fruitful. But after the Fall, instead of experiencing it as a desire to love as God loves, instead of being **gift** to the other, they experienced lust – a desire instead to **use** the other, to grasp the other, for one's own gratification, whether it is physical or emotional gratification.

Isn't that what we so often experience today? Where we continuously have to struggle with, and battle for, the purity of our hearts? It is an uphill battle. But be not afraid. As Pope St John Paul often does in his teachings, he invites us to allow Jesus into our lives to be our Redeemer and

Saviour, to change our hearts, to remove the hardness of our hearts, and to purify them in His love. Not only will we find peace and happiness; we will also find liberation, liberation not just from our weakened nature, but also liberation for greatness – to love an *other* as Christ loves, and as God had meant us to love from the moment He created us.

Managing the Power of Eros

We know sexual desire is powerful. Some have compared it to a raging river, which if not controlled or managed, can cause immense destruction. But if we were to, say, put up dams and embankments and irrigation channels at strategic points along the river, the energy of the raging waters may not only be controlled, but also put to good use, allowing us to harness electricity for power, and redirecting the water to irrigate the surrounding land, providing life, foliage and fruits for the benefit of all.

Likewise, many have therefore compared the virtues which act like dams and irrigation channels in directing our sexual desire to where it can give life, and authentic love. In particular: chastity. As the catechism tells us, “**The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him... [which] ensures the unity of the person.**” (CCC, 2338)

We will discuss this topic of chastity in the next chapter. What does chastity really mean? How we can live it, and how we can form our children in this virtue? How can we prepare and guide our children for this journey ahead?

Reflection Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, what was my understanding of sexual desire?
2. After reading this chapter, what is my understanding of what sexual desire?
3. Do I see myself as gift to my spouse?
4. Or do I tend to use my spouse for my own self-gratification?
5. How can I let Jesus redeem my sexual desire?

Resources

1. Christopher West: The Christian Fulfillment of Eros, Seedbed.
2. What to Do with Your “Sexual Needs” as a Christian, Theology of the Body Institute.

Notes

Chapter Twenty-One – Chastity: Same as Celibacy?

The word “Chastity” has been very much misunderstood in our culture today. It is often seen as a repression of our innermost desires, with a list of prohibitions preventing us from satisfying the deepest yearning of our hearts for love and union. It has even been equated to celibacy, and therefore reserved only for priests, religious and singles. Yet, properly understood, it is anything but that.

Chastity is not merely about saying “no” to sex. Chastity is about saying “yes” to God’s plan for our sexuality.

This episode explores what this entails, and how it actually frees us for authentic love in all its splendour and beauty.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



The Goal of Sexuality Education

What kind of husband would we like our daughter to marry? Or what kind of wife would we want our son to marry?

I would venture to think that we would like their spouse to be kind, generous, just, prudent, able to exercise self-control, and self-sacrificing. In a sense, we would like our child's spouse to love him or her as Christ loves each and every one of us.

That is also what we should aim for our own children to be like, so that they too can love their future spouses as Christ would love. In other words, we would want our children to be strong in the virtues, and chaste. This is the goal of sexuality education.

But what is chastity?

True Love

The word "Chastity" has been very much misunderstood, and even ridiculed, in the culture of today. It is often seen as a repression of our innermost desires, a list of prohibitions preventing us from satisfying the deepest yearning of our hearts for love and union. Yet, properly understood, it is anything but that.

As the Catechism tells us, Chastity is a virtue.¹ It is a firm and stable disposition to love as God loves, in a total gift of self, in all our masculinity and all our femininity. In other words, chastity is a virtue that frees us for authentic love.

Now, we might ask, what is freedom?

Freedom to Love

Many of us think that having freedom means having the licence to do whatever we want. Yet, St John Paul II explains to us that true "**Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.**"²

In other words, having the right to do right, liberated from the constraints of our sinful selves in order that we can love as God loves. You would remember the example we brought up of the concert pianist in our episode on discipline. How she exercised her freedom to practice on the piano for hours on end, even making many sacrifices in doing so, such that in the end, the music that she freely plays is so magnificent and beautiful that it can lift us up to the heavens.

Extrapolated to the realm of chastity, it would mean that we practise authentic love regularly, consistently, in such a way that we will in time achieve true freedom to love properly and effortlessly. And the love that we give, will be so beautiful it will lift our beloved to the heavens, where we are all called to be in the wedding of the Lamb.

Universal Virtue

Is chastity only for priests and religious? And singles? Absolutely not. The virtue of chastity is for everyone, married or unmarried. Chastity is not merely about saying “no” to sex. Chastity is about saying “yes” to God’s plan for our sexuality.

It is a virtue that frees us for authentic love, and helps us make a sincere gift of self to others, according to the state of life we are in. How?

SINGLES live out this virtue by being a loving gift to people around them. They avoid sexual intercourse which is reserved for those who are married, since sexual intercourse is essentially the consummation and renewal of a couple’s wedding vows.

CONSECRATED CELIBATES forego marriage, and thus sexual intercourse, not because it is bad, but by forgoing this good, they are able to give themselves to God alone, the highest good, with a total and undivided heart, mind and body.

And **MARRIED COUPLES** are also called to chastity in marriage. They do this by loving each other as God loves in and through their bodies, giving themselves exclusively to each other “till death do they part”, as they promised each other in their wedding vows. The 4 aspects of their wedding vows, that is to love one another freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully, are

consummated and renewed, in and through their bodies, every time they engage in conjugal intercourse.

Can chastity be mastered once and for all? The good news is that with God's grace, we can master our impulses and direct them to the good. The possibly not so good news is that we can never consider chastity acquired once and for all during our earthly life, for it presupposes renewed effort and fortitude, and may I say prayer too, at all stages of life, as the catechism tells us.³ We have seen so many examples of lives around us, and even in our own lives, when we fall, especially when we think we have made it and in our pride fail to turn to Christ continually for His saving grace and help.

Summary

1. **Chastity is the goal of sexuality education**, because it is a virtue that frees us to love as God loves, in a total gift of self, in and through our bodies, in all our masculinity and all our femininity;
2. Chastity is for **everyone**;
3. We need **Christ's grace and mercy** to help us master chastity, all the time!

By now you are probably asking, "Chastity may be the goal of sexuality education. But how can we help our children attain this goal?"

To do that we must form our children in the moral, or cardinal virtues, namely, temperance, justice, fortitude and prudence. Why? Because chastity flows from, and is strengthened by, these virtues. How?

We will share more about this in the next chapter, as we continue our journey in sexuality education.

Reflection Questions

1. In what areas of my life do I need Jesus to help me in, so that I can live the virtue of chastity in a way that will be liberating for me and a witness to my children?"
2. Why is chastity is not merely about saying "no" to sex?
3. How can married persons be chaste?
4. How am I being called to chastity? How can I live it in my life?
5. What struggles do I have in this area of chastity? What help can I seek to help me address my struggles?
6. Do I constantly seek God's help to give me strength in this battle for purity?
7. How can I form my children in the virtue of chastity?
8. How can I be a role model for my children in the virtue of chastity?

Resources

1. **What Chastity Actually Means**, Christopher West, Theology of the Body Institute.

2. **Chastity Advice that Actually Works**, Ascension Press.

“As we will later observe, virginal and married love are the two forms in which the person’s call to love is fulfilled. In order for both to develop, they require the commitment to live chastity, in conformity with each person’s own state of life. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, sexuality “becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and mutual lifelong gift of a man and a woman”. Insofar as it entails sincere self-giving, it is obvious that growth in love is helped by that discipline of the feelings, passions and emotions which leads us to self-mastery. One cannot give what one does not possess. If the person is not master of self — through the virtues and, in a concrete way, through chastity — he or she lacks that self-possession which makes self-giving possible. Chastity is the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression. To the degree that a person weakens chastity, his or her love becomes more and more selfish, that is, satisfying a desire for pleasure and no longer self-giving.”

- **“The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality” – Guidelines for Education within the Family**, The Pontifical Council For The Family, 8 December 1995, n.16

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Two – Empowering Our Children for Chastity

In our previous episode we had shared what chastity is really about, and why it is the goal of sexuality education. To strengthen our children in the virtue of chastity, we need to cultivate the virtues, namely temperance, justice, fortitude and prudence. Because chastity flows from, and is strengthened by, these virtues.

This chapter discusses why this is so, and explores how we can form our children in these virtues for the sake of their flourishing and authentic happiness.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Virtues as the Starting Point

In our previous episode we shared what chastity is really about, and why it is the goal of sexuality education. We ended that episode by stating that to strengthen our children in the virtue of chastity, we need to cultivate the moral virtues: temperance, justice, fortitude and prudence. As the catechism tells us, chastity flows from, and is strengthened by, these virtues.¹

We need temperance to control and manage our desires correctly. We need justice to give our beloved his or her due, which is to be loved, and not used. We need fortitude to do what is right even when others are not doing so and we find ourselves going against the current; and we need prudence to know what to pursue and what to avoid, and when to do so.

How do we help our children develop and strengthen these virtues?

Justice

According to the catechism, justice consists in the constant and firm will to give our due to God and neighbour. When we give God His due, we give Him right praise and worship, in and through our bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

As for teaching justice due to others, we can start by invoking the golden rule from the time our children are young. From my own experience, they can start developing a fairly good idea of this from about the age of two. We could teach them, for example, by saying, “Oh dear, why did you grab that toy from your brother, or sister? How would you feel if they did the same to you and grabbed the toy from you that you were playing with?” All the time with a firm but gentle and loving tone.

Not only will justice inform them how they should regard others – it will also empower them to know how they themselves should be treated by others, with respect and not as objects, to be loved and not to be used.

¹

Temperance

Temperance is a virtue that helps us master our bodily passions and desires and direct our actions to what is good. If we think about it, if a child does not learn how to say no to sweets and chocolates, how do we expect them to say no to sexual sins when the temptations inevitably come?

How can we form them in this virtue? By teaching them to say no to excesses and practise delayed gratification, whether in food or pleasure. For example, we can be firm with them about having a proper meal first before their desserts (which too must be in moderation). We could also let them know there is a limit to the cookies that they can eat each time and each day, and set a limit to screen time every day, based on paediatric guidelines for the age group our kids are in. We will discuss more of this in a later series on managing social media and screen time.

Moreover, the practice of fast and abstinence on a regular basis, as prescribed by the Church, can be a very good and powerful way for our kids to learn this virtue from us too, both by word and example.

Fortitude

Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy to choose the good despite trials and tribulations. It will help our children stay strong despite peer and societal pressures. In order to do this, they will need a healthy sense of self-esteem, which we have covered in earlier foundational episodes on affirmation and connection with our children.

Prudence

Prudence helps us discern the right thing to do, and the right means to achieve it. In fact, it has been referred to as the mother of the cardinal virtues because it helps us practise those virtues to seek the good in the right way, and often at the right time.

How can we help our children develop prudence? Again, by modelling and teaching it. We could express verbally how we came to making certain decisions in our lives, even in our everyday lives such as why we decided to have our family dinner at a particular place. Perhaps it was because the restaurant was in a safer part of town, or perhaps the price was a lot more affordable for the same quality and quantity of food, and so on.

As they grow older, we could also ask them questions to help them process their thoughts in an age-appropriate way, and guide them to making good decisions that they can take responsibility and be accountable for.

The Theological Virtues

Now while these moral or cardinal virtues that we have just discussed are good and indeed necessary to help our children live chaste lives, there will come a point, or probably many points in their lives when they will ask, “But why must we live virtuous lives in the first place?”

For any project to be successful, we must begin with the end in mind. As we discussed in an earlier episode on discipline, the goal of a virtuous life is to be like God, the source and meaning of our lives. It is only then, when we participate in God’s life and can love as He loves, that we will find true happiness.

This is where the theological virtues of faith, hope and love come into the picture. We will discuss these theological virtues more in a later episode on faith formation.

For now, suffice to say that it is through faith that our children will believe in the God who created us in love to participate in His divine life in Heaven.

It is through hope that our children will have the motivation to live the virtues in anticipation of their final destiny – Heaven.

It is through charity, or love, that they will be able to perfect themselves in the virtues, so that they can love as God loves, always working for the good of others – for the sake of justice, through temperance, with fortitude, and guided by prudence.

Summary

1. The moral or human virtues of justice, temperance, fortitude and prudence are good and indeed necessary to help our children live chaste lives;
2. These virtues must be strengthened, enlivened and perfected by the theological virtues of faith, hope and love.

Ponder this question: How can I strengthen my children in the virtues, so that they can be empowered to be chaste?

In the next episode, we will discuss a bit more of the finer details of how we can speak with our children about sexuality.

Reflection Questions

1. Why are the virtues needed for chastity?
2. How can I strengthen my children in the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude?
3. How can I help my children cultivate the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity?
4. As with other areas of parenting, how have I been a role model to my children in living the virtues?

Resources

1. Education in Virtue <https://openlightmedia.com/education-in-virtue/>
2. “It must be stressed that education for chastity is inseparable from efforts to cultivate *all the other virtues* and, in a particular way, *Christian love*, characterized by respect, altruism and service, which after all is called *charity*. Sexuality is such an important good that it must be protected by following the order of reason enlightened by faith: ‘The greater a good, the more the order of reason must be observed in it’. From this it follows that in order to educate in chastity, ‘self-control is necessary, which presupposes such virtues as modesty, temperance, respect for self and for others, openness to one’s neighbour’ ”
– **“The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality” – Guidelines for Education within the Family**, The Pontifical Council For The Family, 8 December 1995, n.55

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Three

Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – Pre-School

In our earlier chapters on talking to our children about sexuality, we shared about the important foundations needed before we could have fruitful conversations with our children about sexuality. Namely, having a good connection with them and forming them in the virtues and the faith.

In this chapter, we will discuss the principles and practical ways in which we can initiate this talk, or rather these talks, with our children from the time they are born to the age of 5 years or so.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



The Principles of Engagement

Here are a few important principles to guide us:

1. **As parents, we are the first and foremost educators** of our children in all areas of their lives, including sexuality education.
2. We form them not only by word, but very importantly **by example**. If we want our children to live their lives according to God's plan, we must show them that we do that too – through our prayer lives, through how we respect and love each other as husband and wife, and through how faithful we are in following the Church's teachings on sex and love in our marriage.
3. Develop **good communication** with our children, based on honesty, openness, and trust. We should be approachable and try to be gentle and calm always, so that they can be more confident in asking us questions and confiding in us. Try our best not to appear awkward, no matter how funny or uncomfortable their questions and comments may be. Otherwise, they may be less open with what they may want to ask or share with us in future.
4. We need to be **age-appropriate** in how we talk with our children at different stages of development, because it is imperative to engage them at a level that they can understand and are comfortable with. Every child is different. As parents who should know our children well, we should be able to know what they are able to understand, and handle, at different stages of their lives.
5. Remember to **pray always** and entrust our children and our endeavours to our Lord.

Talking to Our Young Ones

Now that we have gone through the principles of engagement, how do we actually go about talking with our young kids about sexuality?

1. **Affirm them** that they are beautiful and special, made in the image and likeness of God. And let them know everyone else is special too.

2. Show and teach them **respect and love for others**.

3. **Celebrate marriage** as a beautiful bond. Celebrate your anniversaries, go for your date nights when you can. Show them, and tell them, how much you mean to each other. Let them see how you love one another, how you forgive each other, how you treasure each other. Develop in them a sense of awe, a sense of admiration for marriage as a God-given institution to raise a family.

However if your spouse is not with you for whatever reason, whether through death, divorce or separation, be not afraid. You can still enlist the support of others such as close friends and relatives. Most importantly, turn to Jesus. You can still guide your children well, with prayer and trust in God's grace, with Christ by your side, as well as our Blessed Mother's prayers.

4. **Celebrate God's wonderful work of creation** in pregnant ladies and babies whenever we see them. Praise God for them!

5. **Teach them the proper names for their body parts** e.g. penis, vagina and so on. Once they get used to it, they will not be uncomfortable when we talk to them using these words. It was quite funny when our grandchildren aged 2 to 4 recently learned about the proper words to use for their genitals. Their first project after that? They discussed, and even argued with each other, who in the household had a penis and who did not.

6. Stress the **importance of modesty**. Affirm them that they are beautifully made and special, and their private parts should remain private and should not be exposed to others. Let them know they should tell you if anyone else touches them inappropriately there. One more thing – even at this age, it is good to get them used to wearing clothes that protect their modesty, and continue to affirm their beauty in these. This affirmation of their innate

goodness and beauty, coupled with your unconditional love for them, will make it that much easier to continue cultivating the virtue of modesty as they grow older.

7. **Do not indulge their wants**, giving them whatever they want in an instant all the time. It is important for them to gradually learn delayed gratification. For example, they can have their candy only after they have completed their meal properly, or only on certain days. Another way is to practise abstinence together as a family, regularly. Simple abstinence from ice cream or food that they like on certain days e.g. on Fridays, can also be a way of inculcating temperance in children of this age group.

8. Make use of **teachable moments** when these present themselves e.g. when watching TV together and certain scenes pop up, reading newspaper articles with them, or observing events that have happened to people around us. These chats do not have to be long. They shouldn't be. Just long enough, or rather short enough, to communicate the main message. They need frequent chats of this nature, and not one long, long chat. This will go a long way in forming our children well.

Summary

For all that we have shared in this chapter, allow me to summarise it thus:

1. Sexuality education takes place **from the very first moments** of our children's lives, and it takes place **all the time**.
2. Our **channels of communication** with them must be open and loving so that they know they can come to us whenever they want to, and with whatever they have in mind.
3. Show them **God's plan for love and marriage** in our family, in a way that they will want it for their own in future.
4. Never forget to **pray and entrust our mission to our Lord**, the source of life and love.

Perhaps for our reflection at the end of this episode, let us ask ourselves: how can I foster an environment at home whereby my children can experience the fruits of following God's plan,

such as love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness? Which will in turn lead them to be more comfortable and confident in sharing their thoughts and feelings with us?

In the next chapter, we will share about how we can talk about sexuality to children from about the age of 6 to 9 years of age.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I seek to continually affirm my children in their goodness?
2. Do I provide an open, warm and nurturing environment at home for communication with my children?
3. (For couples) Is our marriage a reflection of God's free, total, faithful and fruitful love?
4. (For single parents) Do I think I might need the help of another person as a positive male or female role model for my children?

Resources

1. [Good Books for Catholic Kids https://goodbooksforcatholickids.com/](https://goodbooksforcatholickids.com/)
2. <https://chastity.com/qa/category/parenting/>
3. *Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.: A Simple Plan to Protect Young Minds (For ages 3-6 years old)*, by Kristen A. Jenson, MA, Illustrated by Debbie Fox, 2017

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Four

Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 6 to 9 years old

By the time our children reach the age of 6 to 9 years old, they will likely be curious and asking where babies come from. In addition, children in this age group may also be at risk of exposure to pornography and sexual grooming, even molestation and sexual abuse.

How can we talk to our children in this age group about sexuality? How can we protect them from the possible harms that may be inflicted on them by others who approach them with less than noble intentions?

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Principles for Engaging Our Children

As with our previous episode, allow me to outline a few important principles to guide us in this mission.

1. Continue to build on our marriage so that our children can see, and learn, what true and mature sexual love is meant to be.
2. Continue to affirm them in their innate goodness and beauty, and form them in the virtues and the faith, by word and example.
3. Endeavour to provide an environment that fosters open, honest and loving communication with our kids.
4. Remember always to pray and entrust our children to our Lord.

With these principles undergirding our efforts, let us now outline how we can carry out the chats with our children in this age group.

The Talk(s)

1. At this stage, it is very likely that they will ask about how babies are formed. It is important that we are honest, so that they will continue to come to us for information, and less likely to seek it out from other sources, such as friends, the internet and so on. If we think our child is ready, then we can share about sexual intercourse factually, gently, in a way that they will understand, without appearing awkward or uncomfortable. While carrying out the chats, do remember to always emphasise sexual intercourse as a loving union between husband and wife, always within the context of marriage.

Do not shy away from showing affection for each other, even, or should I say, especially, in front of your children. I remember when we did that years ago when they were young, they gave a seemingly embarrassed, “Ew... PDA!”

And we took the opportunity to let them know that such display of affection, reasonable public display of affection, was ok, in fact beautiful, when it is between husband and wife.

We knew that even though they appeared embarrassed, they were actually quite pleased within that we continued to love each other and forgive each other despite the many ups and downs they knew we went through at various times of our marriage.

2. Continue to talk to them about inappropriate touching by others, as they may be exposed to sexual abuse from this stage onwards. No one should be seeing or touching their genitals except approved caregivers, doctors and parents in the appropriate setting of care.

3. This is also the stage when some of them may be exposed to pornography. While some surveys have indicated that the average age of first exposure to pornography is between 10 to 12 years of age, it has been estimated that 5 percent or even more of children below the age of nine have been exposed to it. We need to prepare them for this eventuality. In today's world, it is almost a given.

Teach them that should they come across pictures of nudity or people who are inappropriately dressed, in any form of media, they should guard their eyes, put these aside and let us know.

When they do tell us, we are not going to respond with a "You saw what??" or they will never report this to us again. Instead, we seek to understand the circumstances in which this happened, which often is accidental in the first instance, and even traumatic to their young eyes. Tell them that they should "give those persons their privacy" and that the private parts shown should remain private for that person, and not to be seen by others.

Then let them know we are there to love them, support them, and journey with them, and share with them how they can avoid such exposure in future. It is always important to let them know we are there for them, and with them.

Of course, setting up filters and accountability software will help a great deal, and we will delve more into this in a later series on managing social media and the internet.

4. Continue to stress the importance of modesty by continuing to encourage them to wear clothes that protect their modesty. Go shopping with them. Let them choose some clothes that they may be keen on. Then discuss with them the merits or otherwise of the clothes they have chosen. Then buy those that both of you like. And then continue to affirm their

beauty in these clothes. This affirmation of their innate goodness and beauty, coupled with your unconditional love for them, will make it that much easier to continue cultivating the virtue of modesty as they grow older.

5. Continue to make use of teachable moments when these present themselves, e.g. when watching movies together and certain scenes pop up; reading newspaper articles with them; or observing events and people around us. Once again, these chats do not have to be long. Frequent short talks are the key, not long monologues.

Summary

1. Sexual love should always be placed within the context of marital love.
2. Our channels of communication with our children must be open, loving and supportive, so that they know they can come to us whenever they want to, and with whatever they have in mind. And finally,
3. Finally, never forget to pray.

In the next chapter, we will share about how we can speak about sexuality with children from about the ages of 10 to 12 years. The journey is going to get more exciting.

Reflection Questions

1. How can I love my spouse even more, as God loves, that is, in a self-sacrificial way, so that our children can better understand and appreciate that sexual love can find its home only in marital love?
2. Do I show appropriate affection and tenderness to my spouse in front of our children?
3. Do I make the effort to spend time with each of my children?

Resources

1. [How to Teach Your Kids Healthy Sexuality](#), Jason Evert.
2. [Parenting Q&A](#), Chastity Project.
3. *Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.: A Simple Plan to Protect Young Minds (For ages 7-12 years old)*, by Kristen A. Jenson, MA, Illustrated by Debbie Fox, 2018

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Five

Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 10 to 12 years old

At 10 to 12 years of age, our children are on the cusp of puberty. And at this stage, a significant proportion of them will have been exposed to pornography, intentionally or otherwise.

What can we as Catholic parents do to help them navigate the pre-pubertal years? How can we prepare them for the changes to be expected in puberty? What about pornography? Even sexual grooming and abuse.

This chapter explores these questions and gives us tips on how we can help us survive, and more importantly, help our children flourish as they continue their journey towards their teen years.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Principles

Here are a few important principles to guide us in this mission:

1. Continue to **build on our marriage** so that our children can see, and learn, what true and mature sexual love is meant to be; and that sexual love must always be seen in the context of marital love.
2. We continue to **affirm them** in their innate goodness and beauty.
3. We continue to encourage **open, honest and loving communication** with our children.
4. At this stage, we **prepare them for the changes** they can expect in puberty.
5. Continue to affirm the concept that, being made in the image of God, we are meant to be **gift** to others.
6. Remember always to **pray** and entrust our children to our Lord.

With these principles as our guide, let us now outline how we can carry out chats with our children in this age group.

Changes in Puberty

At this stage, we can talk to them about puberty – which they can expect to experience soon. Prepare them for the impending physical changes that will take place in their development – their genitals, their pubic hair and so on.

For girls, it will be good to prepare them for the onset of menstruation as part of the maturation process to prepare them for motherhood in future. Mothers can explain to them what it is and how they can be prepared for it, so that they will not be shocked or unduly embarrassed when it happens.

Fathers too have a role. We can explain to our daughters that, as they develop their secondary sexual characteristics, such as the enlargement of their breasts and pelvis, guys may be attracted to their physical attributes. It will thus be important to continue to be modest in their

dressing, to protect their dignity, so that others will not be tempted to look upon them as objects to be lusted over, but rather as persons to be respected and loved. I'm not talking about covering them from head to toe; what I am saying is that there are many types of clothes out there that are fashionable, and elegant at the same time, which can continue to bring out their beauty with which God has endowed them.

For boys, fathers can explain that as their genitals develop in puberty, there may be times when they start experiencing “wet dreams”. This is a manifestation of their development as their bodies prepare for manhood, for fatherhood.

Emphasise that all these developments are meant to prepare them to be a gift to their wife in a life-giving way in future. This can also be a time when we teach them that it is not right to “deliberately stimulate their genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure” (CCC, 2352). Their bodies are meant to be a special gift for their wives in future, and should not be used for selfish reasons.

Crushes

It is also at this stage when sexual attraction to those of the opposite sex is likely to begin. I remember I started taking notice of girls from the age of about 9 years or so. Explain to them that “crushes”, or feelings of infatuation, are common and a very normal part of growing up. These are merely feelings which will come and go.

They should not act on them by pursuing serious one-on-one relationships; neither should they be distracted from their work or other activities by them. As mentioned in an earlier episode on communication with and empathy for our children, it will be interesting for them if we could share with them the crushes we had when we were their age, and how we handled them – maybe even mishandled them.

God's Plan for Love and Sex

In all the developments mentioned above, place everything in the context of God's design for love, marriage and sex. He made us that way, to prepare us physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to become good fathers and mothers in the future, so that He can continue His work of creation through the love of husband and wife.

As we continue to help them prepare to be givers rather than grabbers, it would be good to encourage them to help others, especially those in need; for example, their siblings, their friends, their neighbours. Encourage them to practice acts of charity, such as saving money to donate to the less fortunate, or helping them in other ways – what the Church teaches as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Once again, we should be role models for them as we lead them in this journey.

Pornography

Surveys have shown that it is in this age group, between 10 to 12 years of age, that many of our kids will be exposed to pornography, in one way or another, accidentally or otherwise. We need to prepare them for this, which is almost a given in today's world.

Continue to foster open, honest and non-confrontational communication at home. Encourage them to let us know should they accidentally come across any pornographic material. Should they come across such materials, they should guard their eyes, put these aside and let us know.

When they do tell us, we are not going to respond with a "Don't you ever see that again, you hear?" Instead, thank them for being honest and open with us. Try to understand the circumstances in which this happened, and then explore ways with them to see how they can avoid such incidents in future.

They need to know we are on their side in this difficult journey, and never against them. Of course, no method of avoidance is absolutely foolproof, but the idea is there, which is to journey together with them, and not leave them alone to their devices, pun intended. Setting up filters and accountability software will help a great deal, and we will explore these in a later series on navigating the digital world.

Communication

Continue to make use of teachable moments when these present themselves, e.g. when watching movies together or when playing computer games and certain scenes pop up, sharing relevant newspaper articles with them, real-life examples that we see around us, and so on.

Once again, and I cannot emphasise this enough, frequent short talks are the key, and continue to show openness to any queries and concerns they may have. Let them know you are there for them and you are available for them.

At the same time, give them their space. Sometimes they do need some quiet time to process some thoughts. But be assured: deep inside them, they too prefer that you are their sexuality educator, rather than other sources outside of the home. It's just that we have to be seen as being for them, with them, and never against them.

Handling Abuse

I'm sure we have read so many reports about sexual grooming and abuse of minors.

From very early childhood, encourage our children to let us know if they feel they have been touched or spoken to in an inappropriate manner, or shown pornographic materials. This can only happen when our channel of communication with them is open, honest and supportive.

If they do bring up such incidents, let them know how glad we are that they raised it up to us. Thank them for bringing it up to our attention. Affirm them for doing so. In a calm loving tone, try to find out what actually happened, then see how best to pursue the matter with the relevant authorities.

Never ever put the blame on them, or show your anger at them. Otherwise, they will just keep more things from us, and become even more vulnerable. In fact, at such times, more than ever, they will need us to be there with them, by them and for them. They need to know we love them no matter what.

Summary

1. At this stage, start preparing them for the changes to be expected in puberty.
2. Sexual love should always be placed within the context of marital love, and within the context of being gift. We called to be givers, not “grabbers”.
3. We must continue to keep our channels of communication with them open, loving and supportive. And finally,
4. Never forget to pray and fast for our children.

Next time, we will share about how we can talk about sexuality to children from about the ages of 13 to 16 years.

Reflection Questions

1. How can I be a gift to my spouse and children, in a way that will encourage my children to be gift to others as well?
2. What steps have I taken to protect my child from exposure to pornography?
3. How shall I respond to my child if I find out he or she has been watching pornography?

Resources

1. [How to Teach Your Kids Healthy Sexuality](#), Jason Evert.
2. [Parenting Q&A](#), Chastity Project.

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Six

Talking to Our Children About Sexuality – 13 years old and older

As our kids become teens, lots of changes, both physical and emotional, will be taking place in their lives. They are developing a mind of their own, and talking about sexuality, and indeed any topic at all, will be quite different from the stages we have discussed before. It becomes less of a “talking down to”, but rather a “dialogue with”.

How can we go about this? How can we help them avoid the pitfalls of following the world’s plan, so to speak, so that they can continue to follow God’s plan instead and grow in His love, and ultimately experience the joy and fruits that this brings?

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



The Teen Years

Let's discuss a very exciting stage of our children's lives – 13 years old and beyond. They are now teens, and if you haven't already noticed changes in them, both physically and emotionally, you might want to consider spending more time with them!

My teen years were one of the most tumultuous periods of my life. I thought it was one of the most exciting too, until I got married. As a teen, I remember I was looking forward to my growth spurt which I had heard so much about – but which didn't quite happen the way I thought it would. Sigh...

Understanding Our Teens

I invite you to try to remember how we were as teenagers and try to put ourselves in our teens' shoes. Here are your teenagers. Their hormones are starting to rage. They are asking more questions: about themselves, about God, the world around, the attractions they feel. They are trying to find their own identity. In so doing, they may want to try to stamp their independence, even though they are still entirely dependent on us for their pocket money.

Friends seem to matter more to them, and often possibly even more than their own family. With the attractions that they feel to others of the opposite sex, they will wonder if their feelings are reciprocated. They wonder, and hope, that they are attractive to others too. As such, they will want to sound cool. Listen to their lingo when they are talking to their friends, especially when talking to friends of the opposite sex. They will want to look good. See how they seem to be so preoccupied with making sure their hair looks just right.

Does this sound like the teenager, or teenagers, you're seeing at home? Fear not, this is quite normal. You will survive. They will survive, especially if Jesus is at the centre of your family life.

At this stage, talking about sexuality will be quite different from the stages we discussed before. We hope and pray that by this time of their development, they would have imbibed our values which we would have, or should have, transmitted to them through word and example in their earlier years.

Do note that, at this time of their lives, they are trying to forge their own identities as they continue their journey into adulthood. We cannot be holding their hands all the time. Sure, we do need to guide them, but we need to let go, little by little, according to the level of maturity and responsibility we see in each child. It is certain that they may fall a little here and there, but that's ok. That's part and parcel, and I would suggest a necessary part, of growing up.

Nevertheless, as an act of love, we should make it a point to always be there for them so they can turn to us for our support when they need to, as they continue on that journey through their teen years. While challenging, and sometimes even scary, for them and for ourselves, this stage can also be very fulfilling.

Basic Principles

As we prepare for this exciting journey, allow me to share some principles upon which our engagement with them should be based.

1. We continue to build on **our marriage as a model**, and support, for them, so that they will always understand sexual love in the context of, and with reference to, marital life-giving love.
2. As persons made in the image and likeness of God, **they need to be affirmed** that they are loved, and that they are loveable. That's our job too, no matter how riled up we may be sometimes.
3. Try to find out more about the **Church's rich teachings on human sexuality**. At this stage, our teens will not merely accept the "What" of what we say, but will often ask "Why?" or "Why not?" Therefore, we should take any opportunity we can to learn why the Church teaches what it teaches. There are lots of reading materials, videos and podcasts out there that we can learn from, and which are faithful to the constant teachings of Mother Church.
4. Help our teens understand the fundamental and important **difference between love and lust**.

5. Continue to foster an atmosphere conducive to **open, honest and loving communication**.

6. Never forget to **pray** and entrust our children and our mission to our Lord and Saviour.

The Talk

Here is how we can go about the chat on sexuality with our teens.

1. Talking with them should not take the form of a “talking down to”, but rather a “dialogue with”, asking each other why some forms of sexual behaviour are in keeping with God’s plan and others are not. Why some acts express the language of love truthfully, while others do not.

Here is one of the important principles we discussed in an earlier episode on communication: we need to listen to them, often more than we talk to them. We need to ask the right questions and listen to their answers. What are they really trying to say? Where is the source of confusion, if any? Where did they get their information from?

This is especially true today when they are bombarded with all sorts of information from the internet. What have their friends been saying about the topic at hand? What about the science lessons they have in school? When my kids were 13, 14 years old, they were already learning about human reproduction and contraception in their science syllabus.

Understandably when we begin these chats, we might not always get our questions or even the conversation right the first time. But be not afraid. With prayer and practice, you will get better.

2. Make time for them and show a genuine interest in them and what is going on in their lives. In this way, we will create more opportunities for them to ask us questions, create more opportunities for us to listen to them, understand and appreciate their concerns better, their fears, and possibly if they are comfortable enough, even their feelings of infatuation. Do not force the issues. Just be there with them, for them, and let them share with you to the degree that they are comfortable with.

To facilitate this, dedicate some time with them every day if possible, even if it is for a short time. Also consider dedicating exclusive time with each child at least once a week, whether it is at their favourite fast food joint or ice-cream outlet, or even a walk in the park or at the beach. Just be there for them and let them know they are important and matter to us. You will be surprised at how making time to be with them can open up conversations.

When my kids were younger, I used to arrange my work hours in such a way that I could fetch them to school and back. I remember once when I was bringing my teenage girls back from school, an all-girls school, out of the blue they asked me, “Dad, what do you think of anal sex?” I broke into a cold sweat for a short while, then said a little prayer to our Lord to guide me in whatever I was going to say, then shared with them my thoughts as calmly as I could. At the end, I told them that if I did not address their question adequately, I would be happy to continue the conversation later at home. Which we did.

3. At this stage of their lives, with hormones starting to rage in them and the attractions that they must be feeling, possibly even confusion, there are two things we want them to know. Firstly, having crushes or feelings of infatuation are normal. These feelings will come, and they will go. Secondly, it is imperative that we help them differentiate between love and lust.

In essence, love is the sincere giving of oneself for the good of another, which is good and rightly ordered; whereas lust is the using of another person for our own gratification, a disordered and selfish desire that totally misses the mark and prevents us from loving as God loves. Examples include premarital sex, pornography and masturbation. We will talk about each of these issues separately in later videos to help us address them more easily with our teens.

4. It will be powerful if we can share with our teens the positive qualities or virtues that we see in our spouse; why we think those qualities make him or her such a good spouse and good parent; and how these qualities are attractive to members of the opposite sex. This will help them have a clearer idea as to what to look out for in a future spouse, and also what they would cultivate in themselves as they journey towards becoming adults and spouses themselves.

Summary

1. Our marital relationship with our spouse, modelled on Christ's love for His Church, is the best human model for our teens to learn about sexual love;
2. Continue to enrich ourselves with the Church's teachings about sexuality;
3. Make time to be with our teens, listening to them, asking them questions to understand them better, and sharing with them short bite-sized thoughts when we can;
4. The gist of the message we want to share with them is this: "We were made in love, to love and for love. And we can only find our fulfilment in life when we love as God loves."
5. Finally, as always, never forget to pray and entrust our children to our Lord.

Following this chapter, we will delve more into each of the relevant topics, such as cohabitation and premarital sex, masturbation, contraception and others. It is our hope that this will help us have more fruitful conversations with our children about sexuality and various related topics.

Reflection Questions

1. Does my relationship with my teen help in our conversations about sexuality? If not how can I try to improve it?
2. Do I make time to be with my teen and listen to him/her?
3. What is the difference between love and lust?
4. Do my spouse and myself live out our marriage as a witness to forgiving and sacrificial love? How can Jesus help us in this area?

Resources

1. [Chastity Project](#).
2. [Is Chastity Humanly Impossible?](#), Jason Evert.
3. [Love Matters](#), Jason Evert.
4. [Parenting for Purity?](#), Jason Evert.

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Talking to Our Children About Masturbation

Many of us instinctively know that masturbation is not right. At the same time, we find much difficulty explaining to our children why this is so.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us in no uncertain terms that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action, while acknowledging that certain conditions may “lessen, if not even reduce to a minimum, moral culpability.” (CCC, 2352).

How do we approach this topic with our children? What should we say to them?

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Defining the Term

As defined by the Catechism, masturbation is “the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure.”

Many of us, if not all of us, instinctively know that masturbation is not right. But why so?

The Body Has a Meaning

1. As human persons, we are made in the **image and likeness of God**, Who is love. In fact, God exists as an eternal exchange of love in the Holy Trinity. Therefore:
2. Made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity, we too are **made for loving communion**.
3. How? As gift. Offering ourselves as a **sincere gift to an other**. And so:
4. As we can see, we are meant to be gift to an other, in and through our bodies. As we are told in *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the major documents of Vatican II, we can only find ourselves, our meaning in life, our **fulfilment in life**, through a sincere gift of self.

Selfless Gift vs Selfish Gratification

Now we can see why masturbation runs counter to the meaning of our bodies. Rather than being gift to an other person, our spouse, we use our bodies instead for our own gratification.

Rightly ordered, we are meant to go out of ourselves and love as God loves in a life-giving gift of self. Masturbation, however, reverses the order. It inverts the orientation of the gift. It is a disordered act that distorts the meaning of our body. Which is also why the Catechism tells us that “masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.”

Loving the Afflicted

We must make it clear that we do not and must not cast judgment on individuals, only on the actions. Some individuals may have conditions that prevent them from understanding what they are doing and therefore may reduce their culpability. Some may have suffered sexual abuse in their younger days. The list can go on.

What is more, if we are to love as God loves, as we are indeed called to do, then we must find ourselves compelled to help these individuals in whatever way we can to overcome and avoid such actions, whether it is through seeking healing or helping them find morally right or at least morally neutral options, to divert their attentions when such temptations arise.

Need for Character Formation

Here, it is clear why forming our children in virtues like temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence is so important in our children's formation. Once they are able to internalise and practise these virtues, it will definitely help them avoid and overcome vices, not just masturbation, but also others like pornography, casual sex, substance abuse and so on.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I struggle with the problem of masturbation myself?
2. If so, how have I tried to overcome it?
3. Why is it important to develop in my children the cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice to prevent or overcome masturbation and other vices?
4. How can Jesus help me in my mission as a parent?

Resources

1. [What's Wrong with Masturbation](#), by Dr Christopher West
2. Discover the keys to living porn-free with the [STRIVE: 21-Day Porn Detox](#)
3. [Forged](#), a book co-written by Jason Evert and Matt Fradd, is a 33-day exercise designed to purify, heal, and strengthen a man, gradually replacing old vices with new virtues. Each day offers a unique weapon that belongs in every man's arsenal against the world, the flesh, and the devil. After completing the 33 days, a man will be well equipped for the battles ahead.

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Eight

What if our Children are Already “Doing it”?

What if we somehow suspect or find out that our children are already engaging in masturbation, or other vices such as pornography for that matter. In this chapter, we discuss the 6 steps we can take as parents should this happen.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



What if?

If our children are already engaging in masturbation, they are unlikely to inform us of this themselves, but as parents who are supposed to know our children well, there may be some signs that might give us grounds for suspecting, and sometimes their siblings might just spill the beans on them.

If we know that our children are already caught in this trap, we should not feel completely helpless. There are at least six things we can do to help them.

The Six Steps

1. First of all, **pray** for the Lord's guidance as to what you should do. And I mean, really pray very hard for your children.
2. Secondly, do not scream or shout at them. Stay **calm**.
3. Next, **communicate** that you love them, no matter what. Now, love is not a fuzzy sentimental feeling that comes sometimes and goes away at other times. Rather, to truly love a person means to *will the good* of that person. What is the ultimate good for your child? To be with God in Heaven. How? By becoming like Him, and loving as He loves.
4. Following that, **ask** them, again calmly and lovingly, what may have tempted them to act this way. Was it stress? Boredom? Pornography? Refrain from interrupting them or just telling them off, as we parents are often tempted to do.
Really listen to them. Not just with your ears, but also with your heart. Is there something that is causing them to feel pain in their heart? Let them know you are with them and for them. Let them know they can turn to you anytime they face challenges and feel tempted to do things that are not right. Let them experience your forgiving love, as the Prodigal Son experienced the love of his father.
5. If possible, **share** with them how you may have faced these temptations yourself, and what you did to overcome them. And encourage them to do the same. If you have fallen in the

past, you may, after proper discernment and prayer, consider sharing with them in a way that helps them understand how they can pick themselves up too.

6. Finally, bring them to **Jesus**, our Divine Physician, in prayer. Encourage them and bring them often to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life, as the Church tells us. Pray and fast for them. Only Jesus can heal, forgive, and empower us to live a life He has called us to live, in His own time and in His own way. And only He can then give us and our children a peace that the world cannot give. Without Him, we can do nothing.

Reflection Questions

1. How can we form our children to be a gift to others around them, through word *and* example?
2. How will I feel if my child is indulging in one or more of these vices?
3. Do I pray for my children daily, entrusting them to our Divine Physician and our Blessed Mother's prayers?
4. Do I pray with my children? If not, how can I begin to do so? And remain committed to it?
5. Do I think there might be a need for us to seek the help of a professional eg counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist?

Resources

1. [How can I talk to my teen about masturbation?](#) Fr Mike Schmitz and Jason Evert.
2. Discover with your child the keys to living porn-free with [STRIVE: 21-Day Porn Detox](#)
3. [Forged](#), a book co-written by Jason Evert and Matt Fradd, is a 33-day exercise designed to purify, heal, and strengthen a man, gradually replacing old vices with new virtues. Each day offers a unique weapon that belongs in every man's arsenal against the world, the flesh, and the devil. After completing the 33 days, a man will be well equipped for the battles ahead. Do it with your son.

Notes

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Talking to Our Children About Condoms and “Safe Sex”

How effective, really, is the condom in preventing sexually transmitted infections (or STIs)?

With all the information, and perhaps misinformation, that our teens are bombarded with from all avenues, it will be useful for us parents to be ready with the right questions, and the right answers.

In this chapter, we discuss the medical data regarding the actual effectiveness of the condom in preventing pregnancy and STIs. We also discuss why it is so important for us to not just look at the biology behind this issue, but to understand it holistically, and consider the complex social, psychological and emotional aspects that impact it.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



“Safe” Sex?

“Dad, how effective is the condom in preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?”

This was a question my teens asked me one day after a sex education class they had attended in school. I was really glad they had asked me that question, as it gave me the opportunity to discuss the topic with them in greater depth.

Let me clarify: the sex education class they attended did mention that abstinence and faithfulness to a non-infected spouse was the best way to avoid STIs. But in case they were unable to refrain from sex before getting married, then “safe sex” with the condom was the proposed option.

As parents, it is useful for us to be prepared for such a scenario, and to be ready with the right questions, and the right answers. There are two aspects to cover with our children – the medical as well as the human aspects.

Assumptions

How effective is the condom, really, in preventing pregnancy and STIs? Why or why not? Let us explore this a little bit more.

As mentioned, it has often been suggested that using the condom will help prevent STIs among teens should they engage in sex. Such a proposition is premised on 2 main presuppositions:

That contraceptives are 100% effective in reducing pregnancy and STIs, and

That teens will use the condom correctly and consistently, that is, all the time

Both these presumptions are not well supported by the data.

First, the condom does not offer 100 percent protection. Check any condom packet and we will very likely find this disclaimer, or something that sounds like this: “Latex condoms do not completely eliminate the risks of pregnancy and STIs”.

Condoms and Pregnancy

When it comes to preventing pregnancy, the condom has been touted to have a 98 percent effectiveness rate. This means that for every 100 women who use it, 2 women will get pregnant in one year. But that is, if it is used perfectly all the time. In reality, however, and understandably, this is not the case. With typical use, about 14 women out of 100 who use the condom will get pregnant in one year.^[i]

Condoms and STIs

What about the effectiveness of the condom in preventing STIs?

According to the June 2004 Bulletin of the World Health Organization, consistent use of the condom may reduce the risk of HIV transmission by about 80 percent,^[ii] but not 100 percent. When scientists refer to an 80 percent risk reduction in HIV transmission, they do not mean that every act of sexual intercourse with a HIV infected person carries with it a 100 percent chance of getting infected while using the condom reduces that risk to 20 percent.

Rather, the number was arrived at through studies like the one conducted by Weller and Davis which studied HIV sero-discordant couples, that is, couples in which one partner was HIV-positive and the other was not. For the group of HIV sero-discordant couples who used the condom consistently, the number that became infected was 1.14 per 100 person years, that is, in one year, 1.14 persons would be infected out of 100 sero-discordant couples.

Put in another way, out of 10,000 sero-discordant couples who used the condom consistently, 114 persons would be infected by the end of one year. For the sero-discordant couples who did not use the condom, the infection rate was 5.75 per 100 person years. 1.14 is approximately one-fifth or 20 percent of 5.75. Hence the figure of 80 percent risk reduction with consistent use of the condom.

Now we should note that this figure is typically applicable to so-called discharge STIs (that is STIs that are transmitted mainly through genital secretions), like HIV, Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia.^[iii] The condom actually offers much less protection against STIs that are spread by skin-to-skin contact, such as Herpes and Human Papilloma Viruses, the family of viruses that can cause cervical cancer and genital warts. Why? According to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention, or CDC, this is because “Condoms may not cover all infected areas or areas that could become infected.”^[iv]

Consistently and Correctly?

Furthermore, in order to have any meaningful effectiveness in reducing STI transmission, the condom needs to be used consistently and correctly. In reality, many people, especially youth, fail to do so. Studies have shown that only between 8% and 48.4% of those surveyed use the condom consistently.^[v] On top of that, one local survey of “at-risk youth” found that about 42 percent had experienced slippage while using the condom, and about 32 percent had experienced breakage. ^[vi]

The Holistic Response

What do these data tell us? Simply that an adequate response to the issue of teen sex must go beyond this merely biological response. Which is why, and it is interesting to note, that a contributor to the *British Medical Journal*, Dr Stephen Genuis, once remarked that merely promoting condoms “disregards the complex nature of human sexuality and fails to tackle the underlying social and emotional needs of young people, who are often trapped in high-risk sexual behaviour as a consequence of difficult life circumstances.”^[vii]

^[i] **Ask a Doctor: “How Often Do Condoms Fail?”** *eMedicineHealth*

^[ii] Weller S, Davis, K. Condom effectiveness in reducing heterosexual HIV transmission (Review), *The Cochrane Library* 2005, Issue 3.

^[iii] The June 2004 *Bulletin* of the World Health Organization noted that with consistent use of the condom, the risk of acquiring chlamydial infection was reduced by about 26 percent, and that for gonorrhoea by 62 percent. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* Vol. 82 Number 6, Geneva, June 2004.

[iv] This is largely due to the fact that “Genital ulcer diseases, like syphilis can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered.” **CDC Fact Sheet.**

[v] “Are condoms the answer to rising rates of non-HIV sexually transmitted infection? No.” – Stephen J Genuis, *British Medical Journal*. BMJ. 2008 Jan 26; 336(7637): 185.

[vi] Randomized controlled trial of abstinence and safer sex intervention for adolescents in Singapore, Wong ML, Chan RK, Tan HH, Sen P, Chio M, Koh D. *J Pediatr* 2013;162:574-80

[vii] “Are condoms the answer to rising rates of non-HIV sexually transmitted infection? No” – Stephen J Genuis, *British Medical Journal*. BMJ. 2008 Jan 26; 336(7637): 185

Reflection Questions

1. Why are condoms not 100 percent effective in preventing STIs and pregnancy?
2. Do I create opportunities to discuss this topic with my children?
3. Why do I think that Dr Stephen Genuis once remarked that merely promoting condoms “disregards the complex nature of human sexuality and fails to tackle the underlying social and emotional needs of young people, who are often trapped in high-risk sexual behaviour as a consequence of difficult life circumstances.”

Notes

Chapter Thirty

Talking to Our Children About Contraception

How can we talk to our children about the morality of using condoms and other forms of contraception? This is not an easy topic, and many of us understandably struggle with it ourselves.

Once we are able to appreciate the Language of the Body, which speaks about our vocation to love as God loves in and through our bodies, our eyes will be opened to the wonder of this language that God has given to each and every one of us.

When that happens, the Church's teachings in this area will no longer be seen as a repression of our sexual desire, but rather a redemption of it, in which we will be liberated to love in such a way as to give us a beautiful foretaste of the heavenly delights that await us.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



Revisiting the TOB

How can we talk to our children about the morality of using condoms and other forms of contraception?

To do that, let us revisit some of the points in the **Theology of the Body**.

1. As human persons, we are a composite of both body and spirit. Spiritualised bodies or embodied spirits. As such we are made for more than merely biological needs.
2. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are made for love, for union, for communion – for loving communion. As such, we are made by love, for love, to love and be loved.
3. What kind of love is that? Because this love finds its source in the Holy Trinity, the eternal exchange of love, it is a love that is free, total, faithful and fruitful. In this case of conjugal love, it is a love that is freely given for the good of the beloved, a love that holds nothing back but gives totally of oneself, a love that is faithful till the end, and a love that bears fruit, a love that is life-giving, because it comes from the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life.
4. As embodied spirits, our bodies express the spiritual reality not only of who we are, but also of who God is. God, in whose image we are made. Therefore, our bodies speak a language: a language of the body that reflects such a reality. When we speak this language correctly, we are “true prophets” for our Lord. But when we do not speak this language of the body correctly, when we do something to prevent the conjugal act from being free, or total, or fruitful, or life-giving, we become “false prophets”.

Telling a Lie with our Bodies

With this in mind, we can have a better idea as to why having sex with a condom, also known as a “barrier” contraceptive, is not ordered to the truth of who we are. Instead of promoting a union of bodies, a communion of bodies, the condom actually acts as a barrier and prevents

us from proclaiming that language of total self-gift, that language of life-giving love that we are called to “speak” with our bodies.

In fact, this does not only apply to the condom, but to any form of contraception, which as defined by the Catechism, is “every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible”. (CCC, 2370)

Put in another way, contraception refers to the act which seeks to prevent procreation, whether it is used before, during or after the act of sexual intercourse.

We can now see why the Church says that contraception is in reality a “falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love.” (CCC, 2370)

Learning the Language of the Body

At this juncture, I would like to clarify that what we have just shared is not meant to be a condemnation of any one of us who might have used, or might still be using, contraception. Far from it. I might be a rather small guy, but I’m a big sinner. I can understand how challenging it is to speak the truth with our bodies in the world today.

My wife and I struggled with this too in the earlier years of our marriage. The only reason why we did not use contraception then was because I told her contraception was a serious sin and I didn’t want to go to hell! It was only through the years of living Natural Family Planning (or NFP) that I realised how beautiful the Church’s teachings were and how wonderfully wise she has been in exhorting us to live out the spousal meaning of our bodies by speaking the language of the body correctly in our married life.

An Analogy to Learning the Language

I did not go to kindergarten as my parents were not well off. So when I went into primary school, I learned phonics for the first time.

When the teacher told us that the letter “A” sounded like “air”, and asked us what words started with the letter “A”, I raised my hand straightaway and told her “Alicopter”, one of my favourite vehicles. My teacher told me I wasn’t quite right and that that first letter of “helicopter” would come in due course. Later when she said “E” sound like “Eh”, I raised my hand again and said “Ehlicopter”! Again, she told me I wasn’t quite right.

Now we know English has clear rules to the language, and we had to follow the rules in order to speak it correctly and properly. What would be the loving thing to do if you were my teacher in that situation? Would you say something like, “It’s OK. Just speak English any way you want. I am not going to impose the rules of English on you”?

I am sure you would agree that it would be wrong, and you would instead explain to me, and teach me, gently but firmly, how to speak this language correctly, wouldn’t you? The same goes with the language of the body. There are clear rules to this language because of the fact that the image of God is inscribed into our very being. And we know that it is only by speaking this language correctly and properly in all its beauty that we will find true fulfilment and happiness in due course, if not immediately or in the short term.

So if any of you has been misled by the culture and used contraception in the past, do not despair, do not beat yourself about the head, do not condemn yourself. I too have sinned big time in my own way. Many times. Remember that Jesus came not to condemn, but to save us from our sins. We can turn back to Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then go to Him frequently in the Eucharist. Let us go back to Him with all our heart. He will never, ever turn us away. And you can go to a good centre to learn, or relearn, how NFP works.

Asking the Right Questions

How can we talk to our teens about the use of condoms and other forms of contraception?

It is good to ask questions for them to think about. Of course, be ready with answers. We hope they have learned about our position – the Church’s teachings in this area – by now. Whatever their position may be, we can ask questions that help us address the issue.

How **effective** is the condom, really, in preventing pregnancy and STIs? Why?

What is sexual intercourse for? What is the language of the body when spoken between spouses, as compared to when spoken between persons engaging in extramarital affairs? What about during premarital sex? Or between a man and a prostitute?

How does using contraception change the language of the body? Which language truly reflects the free, total, faithful and fruitful love of God? Which language most accurately says that we want to love as God loves, in and through our bodies that we have already pledged to each other in our wedding vows? Which language allows Him, who is perfect love, to enter into our union without any physical or chemical barriers to that love?

Summary

Using the condom, or indeed any of form of contraception, drastically alters the language of the body. It acts as a barrier to our proclaiming the free, total, faithful and fruitful love of the Holy Trinity, the eternal exchange of self-donating love in whose image we are made.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the Language of the Body?
2. How can I, by word and example, help my child better understand the Language of the Body as God has given us?
3. Do I “speak” the Language of the Body to my spouse the way God has intended me to?
4. Have my spouse and I taken the effort to learn Natural Family Planning and live it as a way of life? If not, can we prayerfully consider the invitation to do so?
5. How can I continue to draw on Christ’s help in proclaiming the Language of the Body well?

Resources

1. **Is NFP a Form of Contraception?** Theology of the Body Institute
2. **What's the Problem with Contraception?** Theology of the Body Institute
3. Natural Family Planning Service Singapore <http://naturalfamilyplanning.sg/site/>
4. Understanding the Billings Ovulation Method <https://billings.life/en/>

Notes

Chapter Thirty-One

Talking to Our Children About Cohabitation and Premarital Sex

Surveys suggest that more people seem to be having premarital sex and living together before marriage. Yet studies also suggest a positive correlation between these and subsequent divorce later in life.

As Catholic parents, we know that sexual intercourse is reserved for the married. After all, sexual intercourse is essentially a bodily proclamation of our wedding vows, a time when our wedding vows that we professed at the altar become flesh in and through our bodies. Anything other than marital intercourse speaks the language of the body falsely and in an incoherent manner.

Yet how can we form our children in this area? How can we equip them? Especially when many sectors of society and social media are telling them very different things and attempting to shape their values in a different way?

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



A Worrying Trend

At one time, my wife and I served in a ministry helping engaged couples prepare for marriage in our Archdiocese.

Over those 20 years of service, we noticed a distinct and worrying trend. More couples were either cohabiting or having premarital sex before they were married. The reasons given included the following:

1. It was a more convenient and cost-effective arrangement, and
2. They needed to test each other out to see if they were compatible before they got married.

There was another observation we made: when it came to discussing challenging topics such as finance, religion, in-laws and even sex, these couples tended to have a lot more difficulty discussing these issues with each other in depth. And we could sense a rather deep tension, sometimes even a coldness, between them.

Shaky Ground

On deeper reflection, this should not be too surprising. Once a couple starts focusing more on the physical aspects of a relationship, they will tend to focus less on the other important aspects that would have otherwise enhanced their relationship, which in turn would have brought their relationship to a deeper level of intimacy – such as communication, understanding each other's thoughts and emotions, love language, and so on.

When that happens, their relationship is less enriched, less sturdy, and thus less able to take the misunderstandings and storms that will inevitably happen in any marital relationship. This may explain why many studies show a strong correlation between cohabitation and subsequent divorce. We have included some of the studies in the resources below. We have also included some links to talks by Christopher West and Jason Evert which explain this association well.

Building Strong Foundations

We know that sexual intercourse is reserved for the married. After all, sexual intercourse is essentially a bodily proclamation of our wedding vows, a time when our wedding vows that we professed at the altar become flesh in and through our bodies. Anything other than marital intercourse speaks the **language of the body** falsely and in an incoherent manner.

Now, I am sure, as Catholic parents, we want our children to have good, fulfilling and lifelong marriages. What can we do to help our children make the right decision in this very important aspect of their lives?

First, as always, pray for them. As St Paul emphatically puts it, “Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits.” (Ephesians 6:12)

This is why he exhorts us to draw our strength “from the Lord and from His mighty power”. (Ephesians 6:10)

Secondly, even from the time they are young, we can talk to our children, in age-appropriate ways, that sex and staying together are reserved only for the married. Just short 5 to 10-second statements, whenever the opportunity presents itself. This sets the tone for their knowing our position on this issue: a position that is rooted in love and in our desire for them to find fulfilment in loving as God loves.

As they grow older, it might become a little bit more challenging, what with all the influence from social media, friends and so on. At this stage, it will be good to ask thought-provoking **questions** when opportunities present themselves, for example, when discussing teenage pregnancies and premarital sex. Questions such as:

What is sex for? What does it express?

What is the most appropriate response to a person? Is it love or lust?

Does a particular action speak the language of the body correctly? Or does it not?

Sexual desire is good. In fact, very good, when directed to its ultimate end, which is to love as God loves. What are the temptations a dating couple can face, especially when they find

themselves alone in certain places? What can the couple do in such situations, or better still, how can the couple avoid getting into such situations in the first place?

We could perhaps share with them our journey before we were married, and how we handled past experiences, maybe even mishandled them and what we learned from these. If we made mistakes in the past, perhaps we could, with discernment and prayer, share with them in a manner that will help them understand the issue better and make decisions for their own good and flourishing. How did those mistakes affect us? Who did we hurt in the process? Not just another person, but ourselves as well. How did we seek the Lord's mercy and forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation? Perhaps we could share from the experience of other persons we know who made those mistakes, but in a way that does not harm the honour and integrity of those persons in the process.

These conversations can take place in casual settings such as the dining table or during our parent-child dates; or even while reading the newspapers or social media feed when a topic of interest comes up.

Parenting is not easy. We slip and fall. I've fallen so many times. But let us always rely on the Lord for His strength and our Blessed Mother for her prayers to pick us up and help us along this journey. There were quite a few times when I asked our Lord why I had been so weak and made so many mistakes as a parent. Each time the prompting I receive in His reply is that it is through my weakness that I can see and realise better, how much I need Him in our family life. It is His grace that is what we really need to keep us going.

Reflection Questions

1. How does premarital sex distort the Language of the Body?
2. Do I create opportunities to bring up topics such as premarital sex to my children from early on in their life?
3. What questions can I ask my teen when discussing this topic of cohabitation and premarital sex?
4. What are the ways in which I can advise my teen to avoid premarital sex?

Resources

1. [**The Real Problem with Living Together \(Before You're Married\)**](#), by Christopher West
2. [**Is Sex Before Marriage OK If You're Going to Marry?**](#) by Jason and Crystalina Evert
3. [**Why are the Divorce Rates So High for Couples Who Lived Together Before Marriage?**](#) by Chastity Project
4. [**Cohabitation and Divorce — There is a Correlation**](#), Glenn T. Stanton

Notes

Chapter Thirty-Two

Talking to Our Children About Modesty

Many parents instinctively want our children to dress modestly, do we not? Why do we want to do so? What is wrong with our children showing off their “assets”?

We discuss these questions, and how we can go about forming our children in the virtue of modesty.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



What is Modesty?

According to Oxford Languages, the term “modesty” refers to “behaviour, manner, or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency”. Essentially, it is behaving or dressing in a way that is appropriate for the occasion.

For example, in the public library we wouldn’t talk loudly. Neither would we wear our pyjamas to school or to a formal dinner, or to church, even though it is totally appropriate for our bedroom.

In the context of sexuality, we will confine ourselves to talking about decency in dressing.

Great Worth

I remember hearing the following from Jason Evert in one of his podcasts.

Let us imagine the museum has for display a very precious and expensive collection, say a multi-million dollar set of crown jewels that belong to the royal family. How do you think the museum will display these? Out in the open within the reach of anyone that passes by? Obviously not. I am sure you would agree that the jewels would be kept in shatterproof glass displays, and protected by an extensive network of cameras, alarms and the works, for the simple reason that these have to be protected from individuals who might have avaricious designs on them.

We protect the jewels not because there is a problem with them and we do not want to be seen or appreciated — far from it: we protect them because of the less-than-noble intentions that some people might have when they see such beautiful gems.

The same goes for our bodies. We dress modestly, decently, not because our bodies are bad, but because our bodies are so good, so very good, that we want to protect ourselves from being seen as objects for others’ use. The problem with immodesty, as Pope St John Paul II would suggest, is not that it reveals too much, but that it reveals too little of the person, to whom the only appropriate response is love, and never, ever lust.

Practical Steps

How can we do this?

As always, it is best to start from the time our kids are young.

From a young age, affirm them that they are beautifully made and special, and their private parts should remain private and should not be exposed to others. At this age, it is good to get them used to wearing clothes that protect their modesty. Continue to affirm their beauty in these. This affirmation of their innate goodness and beauty, coupled with our unconditional love for them, will make it that much easier to continue cultivating the virtue of modesty as they grow older.

As they grow older, we can go shopping with them. Let them choose some clothes that they may be keen on. Discuss with them the merits or otherwise of the clothes they have chosen. Then buy the clothes that both of you like, clothes that are modest, elegant and appropriate for the occasions they are to be used for, whether it is for casual wear at the beach, for a formal dinner, or for church.

If at any time we do not agree with what our kids are wearing, let us correct them gently, lovingly and at an appropriate time, without embarrassing them in any way. Once, my wife and I were not too comfortable with what one of our daughters was wearing when going out with her friends. We did not reproach her there and then, but waited till she was home.

Then I spoke with her as gently as I could in the privacy of the bedroom, out of everyone's earshot. I shared with her how certain men might possibly react to her dressing, how it pained me as a father to think that she, so precious and important to us, might be seen as an object of lust rather than as a person who is so very good and so beautifully made that she deserves nothing less than to be loved and respected for who she is. Thank God she took well to our chat and advice.

Summary

1. We value modesty because our bodies are good, in fact so very good that we do not want to be seen as objects to be used;
2. We want to cultivate this virtue from the time our children are young, and perhaps most important of all;
3. We should be role models for our children, wearing clothes that are modest and appropriate for whichever occasion we are dressed for, whether it be for casual wear in the park or for meeting our Lord and King at His banquet in church.

Reflection Questions

1. Some teens may say that their bodies are beautiful, that they should not be ashamed of it, and therefore have no problem flaunting their assets. What is my response to this?
2. Our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Reflect on this verse in relation to modesty in dressing. How can modesty in dressing reveal the presence of God within us?
3. Do I dress appropriately for Mass, respectful of the true presence of our Lord and King in the Holy Eucharist?
4. In what ways am I a model of modesty for my children?

Resources

1. [**Modest is Not Hottest**](#), Jason Evert (podcast)
Jason Evert interviews Leah Darrow, a former contestant on *America's Next Top Model*.

Notes

Chapter Thirty-Three

Should I Let My Child Attend Sex Ed Classes in School?

Sex education is ubiquitous in many school systems today. One of the common questions that many parents wrestle with is this: should we let our children attend these in school? Or should we just rely on the catechism classes in church to do the job? Or should we simply be the ones to teach it at home?

We discuss the various considerations Catholic parents can pray and discern over, in order to optimise the formation of our children in this area of sexuality education.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



School or Home?

Sex education is quite ubiquitous in many school systems today. One of the commonly asked questions that many parents wrestle with is this: should I let my children attend these in school? Or should I just rely on the catechism classes in church to do the job? Or should we simply be the ones to teach it at home?

It is not an easy topic to address. My wife and I struggled with this. In the process, we asked ourselves many questions, such as:

What exactly is being taught in the sex education classes in school?

What is the main emphasis in these classes?

What do we want our child to learn?

Will our child feel left out of place if he or she is the odd one out who does not attend those classes? And has to spend that time alone in the library or some other place. Will that make him or her feel isolated? Teens can be very sensitive about this.

Most important of all, what role do we see ourselves playing in all this?

Opening Up Discussion

On our part, my wife and I gave permission for our teens to attend these classes in school, based on the following points which arose from our discussions with them:

1. At that time abstinence was emphasised as the best and encouraged option, and that it was important to build strong interpersonal relationships at that point of their lives, rather than getting sexually active.
2. We agreed that they would share with us whatever they learned in these classes, so that we could discuss these and continue their formation in this area at home. So even though they did learn about condom use, we were able to share with them its actual effectiveness as well as other aspects of sexuality, including chastity, modesty, what sex was for, who we would reserve it for — that is, our spouse in marriage — and so on.

3. Besides not wanting them to feel left out at school, we thought it was an opportunity for them to attend these classes so that they could engage in useful discussions with their peers after that.

Personal Decision

So, should you let your child attend sex education classes in school?

Obviously, I will not and cannot provide any straightforward answers to these questions. Each of us will have to gather whatever information we can, discern and pray about it as parents, speak with our teens, sharing with them our viewpoints and seeking their input as well, and then make a decision, preferably — much preferably — with them.

Of course, if the main message of the sex education classes in school remains abstinence-based, it would make it easier to say yes to it. But what if this is not the case? Or if the values taught are contrary to those that we esteem?

Ultimately, we as parents will have to make a decision based on the principles outlined earlier.

Whatever our decision may be, this important fact remains: as parents, we are, and must remain, the primary formators of our children in this area of sexuality education, and indeed all aspects of our children's development and formation. This role cannot be outsourced. It must not.

Reflection Questions

1. Am I aware of what is being taught in my child's school, whether it is in science class about the biology of reproduction or the sexuality education programme?
2. Do I make time to talk with my child about what is taught in school, in this case with particular reference to sexuality education?
3. How can I be more aware of the Church's teachings in this area of sexuality?
4. Is my relationship with my spouse a model of mature sexual love, that is, it reflects God's self-sacrificial love? Or does it not? How can I allow Christ to redeem our love?

Resources

1. **The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines For Education Within the Family**, The Pontifical Council for the Family, 8 December 1995
2. **A Reader's Guide to "The Truth And Meaning Of Human Sexuality"**, Msgr. Peter J. Elliott, EWTN Online Services, 1996

Notes

Chapter Thirty-Four

Abortion – Why Not?

There has been much rhetoric and slogans when topics such as abortion are discussed. Many of us know what our stand is, or at least should be. However, we may not be quite sure how to articulate it.

Here we share how we can speak about abortion with our children and form them in this area, in order that they may be more aware of the real issues involved and thereby be better able to form their judgment on this topic.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



A Sensitive Topic

The topic of abortion can be a very emotive one today. Discussions about this topic tend to generate more heat than light. And like it or not, our children are exposed to significant influence from friends, social media, and movies, many of which tend to support abortion in one way or another.

As Catholic parents, how can we shed light on this topic when we talk with our children about abortion?

Culture of Life

For a start, cultivate a healthy respect for life from young. Celebrate life by thanking God for babies and pregnant ladies when we see them. Tell our children how special and beautiful every child is, themselves included.

As they grow older, it will be necessary to engage them at a deeper level, within an environment that continues to facilitate open and honest communication.

We will discuss this from the medical aspect, from the point of justice, the moral aspect, and finally the pastoral.

When Does Human Life Begin?

One of the most important facts to establish is when human life begins. With the advent of modern science and embryology, the fact is very clear that human life begins from the moment of conception, when the sperm and egg fuse to become a new human individual with his or her own unique genetic makeup.

From that moment, the new human being begins a relentless and ordered development, dividing from one cell to two, then four, then eight, and so on. Following that, the cells then differentiate themselves in a very orderly manner into the various specialised tissues and organs, as the embryo continues to grow. Of course, the new individual looks different at different stages of life. Don't we all?

Gone are the days when I used to have a nice crop of hair and a wrinkle-free face. But whether it is me today, or me when I was a teen, or when I was a baby, or when I was a foetus growing in the womb of my mother, or back when I was a single cell after my father's sperm met my mother's egg, I was and am the same individual. I just look different at different stages of my life. That human life begins from the moment of conception is not a matter of opinion, but an objective fact of science.

Not Yet a Person?

However, there are some who would argue that the human embryo is not yet a human person. They argue that an individual can be considered a human person only if he or she possesses sentience and is capable of rational thought and independence of life. The problems with this line of argument are many.

For one, based on such an argument, many of us might be considered non-human persons at some time or another, depending on our physical and mental state of health, and in one state or another — for example, when we are extremely ill, in a comatose state, have dementia, or even infants. Indeed, Dr Peter Singer, a bioethicist at Princeton University who espouses Utilitarianism, once remarked that “Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not persons.” (*Practical Ethics*, Cambridge University Press; 3rd edition, February 21, 2011)

The next obvious problem with the issue of defining when human personhood begins is this: who decides? Many people and groups will have different ideas of what this definition should be, and the argument will likely go on indefinitely. What should we do then, given such a myriad of diverse opinions?

Consider this scenario. Assume I am a hunter with a gun in my hand. I hear a rustle among some plants and I think it is a deer. Yet there is a possibility that the sound could have been made by another human person, as there were some people I had seen earlier in that same vicinity. If there is uncertainty as to whether that animal is human or not, is it right for me to shoot at that target? Surely not, so long as we cannot verify absolutely that that target is not human. Using the same logic, would it not be wrong then to justify abortion based on a

subjective definition of human personhood that is not certain, and certainly not accepted by all?

What Science Tells Us

So we fall back on science, which tells us when human life begins, that is, at conception. That is an objective verifiable fact that cannot be denied.

This is entirely consistent with the Church, which emphatically states: “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.” (CCC, 2270)

Discrimination

How about approaching it from the point of justice? Our teens have a strong sense of fairness. They support equal rights for all. So should we.

We can ask this question — should we accord human rights only to some races and not to others? Should slavery be practised? Certainly not. It is never justified that some people are deprived of basic human rights — rights that should rightly belong to all.

Should we then discriminate against the youngest members of the human race — our unborn children — on the basis of their age, and deprive them of the right to life, that first and most fundamental of all human rights? Clearly, right reason must inform us that the answer to that question has to be: “Surely not!”

Ethical Aspect

As for the ethical aspects, human reason tells us that it is never right to kill an innocent human being. Virtually all jurisdictions agree with this.

What does the Church say? The Church follows God’s commandments, and the fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”, cannot be any clearer than that. Add to this Jesus’ statement: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it unto Me” (cf. Mt 25:40), and we can see why killing a human being at any stage of life is to be deplored. Which is why

the Church has emphatically said: “Direct abortion... is gravely contrary to the moral law.”
(CCC, 2271)

While this is a judgement of the wrongness of abortion, we must be cognisant that this does not in any way justify the condemnation of any individual. This leads us to the pastoral aspect of the discussion, which is just as important when sharing about this topic with our children. And this we will discuss in the next chapter.

Reflection Questions

1. Am I convinced that human life begins at conception?
2. When does an unborn baby’s right to life begin?
3. Refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 2270 to 2275. The Church tells us that “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.” Do I agree with this statement?
4. Do I show a profound respect for the beauty of life in the babies, children and pregnant ladies that I see?

Resources

1. **Speaking for the Unborn: 30-Second Pro-Life Rebuttals to Pro-Choice Arguments**,
Dr Steven A. Christie, M.D., J.D.

Notes

Chapter Thirty-Five

Talking About Abortion – Pastoral Aspects

While the act of direct abortion is to be judged as absolutely wrong and can never be justified in any way, Jesus never fails to remind us that we should neither judge nor condemn persons.

This chapter discusses what we can share with our children when speaking about abortion from the pastoral point of view.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



The Need for Accompaniment

While the act of direct abortion is to be judged as absolutely wrong and can never be justified in any way, Jesus never fails to remind us that we should not judge persons. We too are sinners ourselves. It is one thing to condemn an action; it is quite another to condemn those who go through an abortion.

What we are called to do instead is to accompany and support them on the journey in a way that will help them experience Jesus in us, and see the viable options other than abortion, options that choose life over death, love over fear.

Pregnancy Support – A Story to Share

In my 30-plus years of medical practice, what I have witnessed is that when patients are given the support to choose life-giving options, whether it is to adjust their lifestyles and expectations, or manage their finances differently, or perhaps even give their child up for adoption, they will almost invariably choose life. Never in all my practice has anyone come back to me and said they regretted bringing their child to term after making that decision for life.

I remember some time ago, a lady came to me asking for a referral to abort her child as she and her husband were already up to their neck with their several older children, and finances were terribly tight. I could sense the fear and anxiety in her voice. I inquired about their situation, and invited her husband into the consultation room, with her permission.

I shared with them the medical aspects of abortion and the stage of life their child was at. Then we explored the various options available to them. At the end of the consultation, the husband decided against aborting their child, and said he would support his wife through her pregnancy. When the wife heard this, she immediately said yes to his proposal. You could sense the relief and delight in her disposition.

So they carried on with their pregnancy.

Some time later, the couple came back with their baby to see me, and they said to me something I have not forgotten till today. “Doctor, do you remember us? This is the baby we

gave birth to. He is such a joy to the family. The older siblings are just so happy with him and can't stop fussing over him. We can't imagine what life would be like without him. Thank you. Thank you so much, doctor!"

As it turned out, the husband had given up smoking to save more money for the family expenses, and taken up an extra job to support the family.

This encounter taught me how important it was to support a woman so that she can be empowered to make life-giving choices that she will not regret later in life. There were other examples that I came across, but the one I just shared remains vivid in my memory.

The Feminine Genius

Of course, I must acknowledge that not all situations are the same, and different women will have different challenges, very different challenges. But I believe this one fact is common to all — given the right information, given the right support from family, loved ones and society, every woman who carries a child within her will want to exercise her maternal instinct within herself, an instinct so wondrous and so distinctively a part of the **feminine genius** (a genius which of course includes so many other beautiful and powerful qualities of women that I have seen in my mother, my wife, my sisters and my daughters).

I'm fine with needles so long as they don't touch my skin. My wife is different. She can tolerate needles; she can endure pain, much better than me. Once when she was carrying our daughter down a staircase, she missed a step and fell. In that instant, she instinctively turned herself around so that her own body would cushion our baby and take the full impact of the fall instead. Till today, I continue to marvel at this self-sacrifice and other incredible qualities that my wife and indeed, so many women show in their families and in society.

Support Network

For women who are more challenged by life circumstances, such as single mothers, and that includes teens too, we can refer them to the appropriate counsellors and support centres. Some links to these resources are included below. As mentioned before, it is so important to bring in and gather whatever support we can around them — spouse, parents, family, loved

ones — so that they will not feel alone or abandoned in their hour of need, and know that they have choices available to them — life-giving choices that they will not regret later in life.

What about those who have undergone an abortion? Once again, it is not our job to condemn any person, but to love as Christ loves, and to bring them to Him who heals. Let us offer them our listening ear, and heart. Pray for them, pray with them if they permit, and accompany them as Christ would in truth and in love.

If they are Catholic, encourage them to seek the sacrament of reconciliation, and return to the sacramental life of the Church.

There are also resources we can refer them to for further support if they need it, such as Rachel's Vineyard, a support group for parents (both mothers and fathers) who have undergone the painful experience of abortion and wish to heal from it.

Remember this adage: "Love the mother, so that we can love them both."

Reflection Questions

1. When talking about abortion with my children, do I make the effort to distinguish between condemning the action vs condemning the person?
2. Do I know of anyone, whether relative, friend or colleague, who is considering or has undergone an abortion? How do I think Jesus would want me to accompany them?

Resources

1. **Pregnancy Crisis and Support** – a crisis hotline for women with unplanned and unsupported pregnancies.
2. **Rachel's Vineyard Singapore** – offering support for post abortive women and men who seek healing from abortion

Notes