

Sex Education: at Home or in School?

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Focus on the Family – July 2006

“Where do babies come from?” your sweet 4-year-old asks. This question can cause your heart to pound and palms to sweat. Talking to your child about issues of sexuality should come naturally for Christian parents, so why isn’t it easier?

Some parents struggle to protect children’s modesty in a sex-saturated culture and may wonder if their children know more about the topic than they do. Also, personal sexual histories can cause other parents to feel disqualified from talking about abstinence and God’s plan. And, sadly, some moms and dads have a background of sexual abuse, making the subject even more difficult to address.

Regardless, parents *should* be the primary sex educators of their children. Public school sex education will fill in the gaps, positively or negatively. Yet there is no substitute for parents explaining the truth to their own children.

Public school concepts

Sex education varies from classroom to classroom, so talking with a child’s teacher is essential. Some of the following sex-education concepts often taught in school are controversial and may go against your family’s values:

- Instructing children to make independent sexual decisions without parental input.
- Teaching about contraceptives and promoting their use.
- Encouraging access to health-care providers, contraceptives and abortion without parental knowledge or permission.
- Strong emphasis on finding one’s own sexual preferences by presenting heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality as morally equal.

Influence sex education

If your child’s school teaches abstinence as its form of sex education, be thankful; many don’t. What should you do if there’s problematic teaching in your child’s school? Use the following to influence those teachings.

- Talk with the teacher, and ask about his or her values regarding sex outside of marriage.
- If you are not satisfied with the teacher’s response, ask the same questions of the school principal.
- Request to see all written curricula, handouts and videos to determine whether they reflect your family’s values.
- If you have concerns with the content, talk with other parents and form a group to voice concerns to the principal and school board. You may need to remove your child from the course or clearly tell your child why you disagree with the lessons.
- Attend school board meetings regularly to assess their sex education standards and voice concerns, if warranted.

Teach the truth about sex

Sexuality is much more than the physical aspects, although those are essential to teach. God designed sex to bond a husband and wife together and model Christ’s relationship with the church. It’s about emotions, thoughts, feelings and spirituality, and each of these must be imparted to children so they understand God’s plan.

Instructing children about sexuality can be as fulfilling as teaching them about any other creation of God. Read and be prepared to answer their questions at an age-appropriate level, and determine God's non-negotiable values about sex that you wish to pass on to your children.

Use every teachable moment to naturally discuss these standards. Typically, children 10 years old and younger are eager to learn from their parents. Answer their questions with age-appropriate responses.

Teaching about sex should start in earnest as children move toward late elementary school. This is when teaching should be done in short segments with specific instruction about the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of sex.

In the teenage years, *modeling* godly sexuality will outweigh teaching. Teens learn the most by observing parents dress modestly, interact with the opposite sex in a holy way and respect sexuality and sexual content in their speech. Time spent with teens will pay huge dividends in keeping lines of communication open and trust high. Research shows that teens' primary influence regarding sexual decision making is their parents – even if your teens never admit it!

A parent's responsibility to teach and model this awesome gift of sex never ends, and neither does the blessing. It's not about *the* talk; it's about the *lifetime* of talks that continues as sexuality unfolds, even in children's marriages. Then, as you become grandparents, you'll be ready to encourage your children to be the primary sex educators of *their* children.