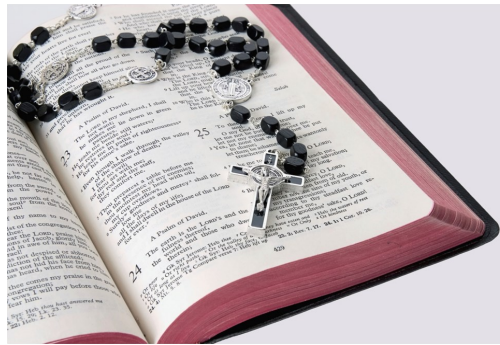


Parents First

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)

Church Teaching *Spirit and Flesh*



Because human beings are composite beings, spirit and body, there already exists a certain tension in us; a certain struggle of tendencies between "spirit" and "flesh" develops (CCC 2516). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the life of a junior high-age child. It is also a reality that every person will struggle with for the rest of their lives. It is the "daily experience of spiritual battle" (CCC 2516).

As children begin the transition to adulthood, they will often be surprised by the

overwhelming emotions, called passions, that will often move them to act one way or another (CCC 1763). When properly directed, the passions can move a young man or woman toward amazing acts of courage and self-sacrifice, strong dedication to the faith, and even profound and genuine love (CCC 1765). When misdirected, the passions can lead to rash action, misguided sentiment, and abusive behavior (CCC 1768). It is at this particular time in life when children will need to begin to learn discipline with regard to emotions and desires. By doing so, they develop emotions that point them toward the good thus bringing their heart in line with their soul, allowing the body to be redeemed with the spirit (CCC 1770).

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Growing in Virtue

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. Moral courage is the courage to take action for the sake of good despite the risk of adverse consequences. As your children gets older, they may find that it can become a bit scary to do the right thing. If I defend a classmate, I may be ostracized. If I work out, it will take me away from my video games. Acknowledge your children's bravery in taking the more difficult path. The more they grow in this virtue, the easier it will become.

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and his Church (CCC 1814). As your children begin to develop psychologically, they transition from a concrete understanding of the world to a more abstract understanding. Adolescence is a key time when children begin to question everything from household rules to religion. It is important at this stage to help them develop the ideal of "faith seeking understanding." While our faith is a gift to us from God, we can nurture that faith by feeding it with reason and virtuous behavior. It is important at this stage that parents understand the distinction between questions about the faith in a genuine search to make faith stronger and intentional doubt of the faith which may make it weaker. Frequent and consistent practice of the faith is crucial as is the ear of a trusted and knowledgeable adult to field those questions.

Culture Alert...

60 years ago, the average dinnertime was 90 minutes. Today it is less than 12 minutes.

Kids and teens who share family dinners 3 or more times per week:

- Are less likely to be over weight
- Are more likely to eat healthy foods
- Perform better academically
- Are less likely to engage in risky behavior (drugs, alcohol, sexual activity)
- Have better relationships with their parents

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Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more.") Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...").
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

Examples: Is sex a good or bad thing? or Why is sex bad? or What is the big deal about sex?

Know the context of the question (see the above guidelines) i.e.: Is this something that their peers are talking about? Did they see something on TV or the computer? Remember that today's culture promotes that sex is no big deal. It promotes the false assumption that what you do with your body has no effect on your person: a disconnect of persons from their bodies. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to him/her.

Possible Responses:

- "As Catholics, we believe that sexual intercourse is an awesome gift God gives exclusively to married couples as a way to express love for each other and to bring new life into the world."
- "Sometimes people misuse sexual intercourse by having sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse; or before marriage, it can cause some negative or life-altering consequences (i.e. broken relationship with God, unplanned pregnancy, sexually-transmitted disease, broken heart, bad reputation, guilt, etc.)"

Practical Suggestions

Continue to build a good relationship with your child. The effort you put into spending time with and getting to know your child at every age will be rewarding. It's important to spend committed quality time with your child. You will more likely to notice the many emotional and physical changes that happen during puberty. More importantly, you will be aware when your child needs your support and guidance. Daily activities that could be used as relationship builders can include:

- ◆ Do a chore together.
- ◆ **Plan a family meal at least once weekly** (more if possible).

Gather and learn what is new with each member of the family. Make this a solid commitment that nothing interferes with, turn off technology. This may become a habit that follows your whole family into adulthood.

- ◆ Use drive time or bedtime to do a daily check-in.
- ◆ Reinforce your children's Circle of Grace lessons about their God-given uniqueness and all relationships are called to be sacred and special. Remind them about the difference between

safe and unsafe situations. You will receive a letter that will give you valuable information to discuss unsafe situations with your child.



"...the FAMILY that PRAYS together STAYS together."

-Pope Francis-

May We Recommend...

Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout

[Parenting with Grace: The Catholic Parents' Guide to Raising almost Perfect Kids](#)

By: Gregory and Lisa Popcak

<http://integrityrestored.com/>

[Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Raising Sexually Whole and Holy Kids](#)

By: Gregory and Lisa Popcak

<http://family.archomaha.org/respecting-life/human-sexuality-formation/>

[Our Lady's Message to the Three Shepard Children and the World](#)

By: Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

(YouTube videos are recommended for parent viewing only)
YouTube: *Talking to children about their bodies* – Jason Evert on Catholic Answers Live