



God's Best in Relationships

KICK-START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

- Sex and purity conversations can be the hardest conversations to have with your teen, but they are also talks that can take your relationship to a new level.
- Even though your 13-year-old may wince every time the s-e-x word comes up, they really do want to feel safe with you on this topic.
- Even as an adult, you can still model purity for your teen in your media choices, language, and relationships with the opposite gender at work or in social settings.

FRAMING UP OUR PURPOSE

“One flesh” is a really big deal and a great place to start the conversation.

“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called “woman,” because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh.” --Genesis 2:22-24

When God first brought a man and woman together, Adam’s response was that she was, in reality, a part of him. It pretty much took his breath away to realize that they were meant to be made one.

A great place to start in explaining the sacredness of sex is that God intends for us to be joined and united as one with another human being. It is a powerful union to care for another person sexually, emotionally, and spiritually, and it is not meant to be carelessly repeated with different people throughout our lives. To become one flesh means not to be torn apart.

Grace and restoration play an important part here, too, because our kids sometimes stumble and make poor sexual choices. Marriages often struggle and end. But helping our teens strive for the goal of experiencing “one flesh” with just one person will guard their hearts in a world of broken ones.

Talk to them about intimacy.

“Standing behind at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” --Luke 7:38

“When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” --1 Samuel 18:1

“His left hand would be under my head. His right hand would embrace me... Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death.” --Song of Solomon 8:3, 6

One definition of intimacy could be summarized as a feeling of belonging together. It's the sense that we can let down our guard, be real, and not worry about rejection. There are many examples of intimate relationships in our lives. Hopefully, we can learn to be intimate with God. Most people have a few friendships in their lifetime that are incredibly close and honest. And often there is at least one family relationship that is extremely close to you. So there is more than one kind of intimate relationship where we feel like we belong with someone.

Talk about sex through the lens of God's best for them.

"The man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed." --Genesis 2:25

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light..."
--1 Peter 2:9

Although it's true that sex outside of marriage is a bad choice--and there can be painful consequences to unhealthy sexual behavior--, sex is still God's gift to us, and it's not helpful to just tell our teens that it's "bad." We want them to anticipate not being ashamed of past relationship struggles and look forward to this gift that they someday will give their spouse.

We want them to see that God has His very best in mind for us when He commands us to save sex for marriage. It's also important for our teens to discover that they should not only be concerned about God's best for themselves but also God's best for the people they are attracted to and God's best for the people they are influencing. Their perspective will really be impacted when they consider that their sexual behaviors have an impact on the people around them, too.

Give practical guidance to help them set healthy relationship boundaries.

"Finally then, brothers, we beg and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, that you abound more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

For this is the will of God: your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who don't know God;

that no one should take advantage of and wrong a brother or sister in this matter..."

--1 Thessalonians 4:1-6

Paul reminds the church in Thessalonica that he has given them a description of how to walk and please God. Christian culture does a good job of telling teens, "Don't do that," when it comes to sex. We don't do such a good job of equipping them for that challenge. Here are a

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few ideas to equip you and your teen to walk this journey of purity:

Encourage your teen to enjoy co-ed friendship groups as often as possible, because they can learn so much more about sharing everyday life with the opposite sex in those relationships than they will in dating relationships.

Establish the PDA boundaries in your home (location and privacy) to help them avoid tempting situations.

Ask your teen questions like “Are you trusting in God’s best for you in your dating relationships?” and “Are you remembering to keep God’s best for your girlfriend/boyfriend ahead of your own desires?”

Lastly, troubleshoot with your teenager about what to do if they find themselves in a situation where they might compromise on sexual choices.

IDEAS FOR STRIVING FOR GOD’S BEST IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

- Ask fearless questions like “How are you doing in this relationship?”
- Introduce your teen to couples who have a powerful purity story to tell.
- Point out scriptures that reinforce trusting God’s best for our lives.
- Discourage middle school girls and boys from “going together” and have them wait for actual dating till at least their junior year.
- Teach your son to call and ask a girl’s father if he can ask her out on a date.
- If your teen is in a relationship, have dinner with the young couple once a month.
- Sexting is a HUGE problem among teens, so social media accountability is a non-negotiable. You should always be allowed to know passwords and check their Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and text messages.

8th Grade: Guide for a Successful Purity Weekend

Invite your teenager to go with you on a weekend full of fun.

If at all possible, let them decide what that fun will be, within the constraints of your family's budget.

Have fun! Plan activities that your teenager loves and do it with them.

Often this trip is planned for one parent and one teenager. Many families make this a father/son or mother/daughter event. However, this may not be possible (or best) for your family.

Before the weekend begins, be sure to let your teenager know your plan. Try not to surprise them. Teenagers don't like surprises, especially when it comes to talking about sexual purity. Let them know specifically at what point on this trip you will be discussing sexual purity. That way they can be prepared for it.

Share your dreams for them in the area of sexual purity.

When talking about purity or any sexually-related topic, it's important that parents initiate the conversation but stay away from lectures.

Consider sharing with your teenager your experience in learning about the subject of sex. You can tell them whether it was positive or negative and how it affected you as an adult. Share with your teenager that you want to set them up to be healthy in the area of sex.

Share with them why you believe that God's plan for sex is best for them. Here are some Scriptures you might want to share with them:

- **Genesis 1:26, 31:** God sees sex as a good thing.
- **Genesis 2:18-25:** God created sex.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3:** God has a standard for sex.
- **Matthew 19:4-6:** God created man and woman to become one flesh.
- **1 Corinthians 6:12-20:** Sex outside of marriage is not a good thing.

Many people in our culture ridicule the idea of waiting until marriage to have sex. Discuss with your teenager the common viewpoints against God's plan for sex. Here are some statements you might use in this part of the discussion:

I have never met someone who waited until marriage to have sex and regretted it. I have never met someone who followed God's plan and then after their honeymoon said, "I wish I would have had more sex before marriage!"

The people who disagree with God's plan for sex see it more as a physical act. God created it to connect body and soul. Sex for a married couple is like spiritual super glue. It is not meant to be exchanged casually.

When you engage in sexual activity prior to marriage, you are creating a "marital" type bond with a boyfriend or girlfriend. That type of bonding should only follow a marital commitment.



God's plan for sex is the only safe sex. There is no way to 100% avoid pregnancy outside of marriage or to elude sexually transmitted diseases with pills or condoms. The only way to avoid these things completely is to save sex for its proper place--a committed marriage.

Sex is used by many to sell movies, music, and products. Sex is undervalued by many and is used to satisfy a physical urge at the cost of emotional pain. My dream for you is that you value yourself, value your relationship with God, value your relationship with me, value your future spouse, value your own body, value your own soul, and value sex as something to be treasured, not used casually.

It is your job to honor the purity and integrity of your boyfriend/girlfriend, not take advantage of it. One day you might attend the wedding of someone you dated and broke up with. I want you to be able to shake the hand of their future spouse, with no regrets, knowing that you protected their purity.

Commit to each other to value purity.

Let your teenager know that you value purity as well. Give them permission to hold you accountable for treasuring purity in what you watch, what you think, and how you live.

Give your teenager a symbol to remember your conversation and commitment to one another.

Many parents give a ring to their teenager to represent their commitment to purity. That ring can then be exchanged with the wedding ring at their future wedding ceremony.

You might think of another symbol that would better fit your teenager to help them remember this very important commitment you are making to each other.

Pray Together

Take some time to thank God for the opportunity to share with each other honestly.

Here are some things you can pray over your teenager:

- Pray that God would guard their mind and fill it with truth in the area of sex.
- Pray that God would guard their body and give them a desire to honor their body.
- Pray that God would guard their heart and protect them from unnecessary emotional pain in the area of sex.
- Pray that God would continue to grow your relationship with them and give each of you the courage to continue talking about purity.

Thank God for the strength and opportunity to have this important moment together.

Now get back to having fun!

There is no way to avoid awkwardness in this conversation. One way to combat awkwardness is to quickly follow up your face-to-face conversation with some shoulder-to-shoulder fun!

Remember that no one has a louder voice than you in the life of your teenager. Your words weigh the most to them. You are their greatest spiritual influence. Congratulations on using that influence to set them up for success and health in the area of sex!



What's Going on With My 8th Grader?

The 8th grader says “goodbye” to puberty issues and “hello” to the quest for freedom from parents and “kiddie” things. Major changes occur during this year as the teen transitions into the middle of the adolescent journey. Here is a look at what is going on with your 8th grader.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Upper body strength begins to develop in boys.
- Boys and girls level out in height.
- Girls are almost fully developed physically.
- Boys have more of a growth spurt to continue.
- Sexual desire awakens in both boys and girls.
- They have a need to develop exercise routines and healthy habits.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The 8th grader may:

- Have a more evident “adult” personality
- Want to try new things in an effort to discover identity
- Obtain a strong sense of accomplishment from being involved in various activities
- Be easily “bored”
- Begin to question authority and analyze their behavior
- Exhibit impulsive behavior with friends and peers
- Express less affection for parents
- Not respond to adult lectures, feeling they know better what is going on than the adult does
- Experience periods of sadness and depression and desperation, which can lead to poor coping habits



RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Relationships with parents become focused on a negotiation to get what they want.
- They have a strong desire to be accepted by their peers.
- Girls have a tendency to be interested in older boys.
- There is a desire to have and “overuse” a cell phone.
- Friendships change due to new schools, boyfriends/girlfriends, and change of affinity groups.
- Girls tend to build friendships in groups of 2-3.
- Boys tend to build friendships in “packs” of 8-10, based on affinity.
- Boys struggle with being “loners” if they do not find a pack of friends.
- A strong interest in sports is typical for both genders but is not exclusive.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- They need a trusted and loving adult to talk to them about what the Bible teaches on “adult” subjects like sex.
- Rather than being told what to believe, they need spiritual leaders to ask their opinions and let them develop their beliefs.
- Their interest and commitment to faith change rapidly back and forth, signaling an internal struggle on whether or not to accept it.
- While timid about taking on difficult intellectual tasks like studying the Bible, they are ready to begin the practice of daily Bible study (with lots of encouragement).