

# Teaching “The Talk”: Helping Parents Faithfully Talk with Their Youth about Sex

*In the Quick Sheet entitled “The Talk: Faithfully Talking to Youth about Sex”, we talked about how churches can create faithful programs that empower youth to have a positive view of sex and their own sexuality; a view that includes God and the love of Christ.* We explained that it was the church’s responsibility to “complete the story” that most youth get from the sex education programs in schools. The completion of the story is of course God and being created in the image of God.

This quicksheet will expand upon the important idea in “The Talk” by including parents in the conversation about sex. This will empower parents to continue the conversation at home, including God and the themes of love, forgiveness, respect, etc. (Hopefully these themes were touched on in the program for the youth.) The goal is to help parents move from the “don’t have sex” message to a message that is full of God being active in the lives of their children, including their sexuality. It is clear that the most effective and lasting messages come from a child’s parents. The church can assist the parents by reinforcing that message and making sure that parents are giving their child the “complete story” of sex and their sexuality but it is a child’s parent that is going to make the most lasting impression.

## The Basics

When thinking about how to best educate and encourage parents to include God and faithfulness in their family conversations about sex, we need to remember that parents may need some help with the basics. Depending on how they were talked to about sex growing up and their own sexual experiences as adults, they may have no clue how to even begin talking to their children about sex.

Here are some things to start with:

- Cover some of the same material with parents that you will cover with the youth, which could include:
  - What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
  - What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?
  - What messages has the church given you about sex over the years?
  - What are the messages their children are getting about sex from friends, media, parents, church, etc.?
  - How has God been a part of their sexuality as adults? How was God a part of their sexuality as youth?

- Talk about basic communication skills. Sometimes when we combine two difficult topics (sex and faith), we forget that a positive experience for everyone can hinge on basic communication skills:
  - Active listening
  - Using “I” statements
  - Asking questions to better understand someone’s point
  - Being willing to hear and respond lovingly to tough questions
  - Being okay with not having all the answers but wanting to find them together
  - Knowing what is important to you as a parent and coming up with loving ways to express and explain them
- Remind parents to not wait until the “sex talk” to start using good communication skills with their children. The more children and adolescents are use to good communication on a regular basis, the more comfortable they will be with the more difficult conversations.
- Help parents understand that they have important information to share about this topic. No matter what their own experiences were as young people, they have knowledge and love to share with their children, including an understanding of God, which is very important for their children to hear.

## Get Parents Together

We were made to be in community and that is most evident when we are dealing with difficult situations in our lives. Being a parent offers some very uniquely difficult situations that can be made a little easier if parents can talk about them together. Oftentimes, there is a stigma and discomfort that comes with “the sex talk.” It might be helpful to offer a forum for parents to discuss how they can empower their children with an ongoing faithful and loving discussion about sex, sexuality, and faith.

## Starting the Conversation

Although many believe that it is important for parents to begin to talk to their children about sex when they are in elementary school, the reality is that this does not always happen. There are many parents with teenage children who may need some assistance beginning the conversation. One way to do that is to include parents in your youth sex education program. Invite parents to join their children for some common education and a chance to start the conversation about faith and sex.

- Have a time when parents and teens can be learning together the gifts of their sexuality and how we want everyone to view their sexuality as something God is active and present in.

- Prepare questions for parents and their children to ask and answer together. These questions are not necessarily questions about sex. They can be questions that just begin a conversation or allow parents and children to share something about themselves that the other might not know. For example:
  - What is something that makes you laugh?
  - What is something that you are scared of?
  - What is a personality trait you look for in your friends?
  - Do you remember the first person you had a crush on?
  - What do you think of when you think of God?
  - How do you use your faith to deal with life choices?

Questions like these break the ice and allow the children and parents to relax and discover something new and fun about each other. It also helps remind the children that their parents are “real people” with real experiences and insight. This can help a discussion about sex seem more like an actual discussion with the child’s best interest in mind and less like a lecture. It is a reminder that we are all created in the image of the same God.

- Then you can help initiate the faithful sex conversation by allowing parents to share the messages they hope to be instilling in their children, while allowing the children to share the messages they have received from their parents. You can also include a question about how the parent’s faith has shaped what they are trying to teach their children, and the messages about sex the children have learned from church.

## Keep the Conversation Going

A detrimental way of thinking that some parents fall into when it comes to their children and sex is, “I know other children have questions about sex, but I don’t think my child is even thinking about it.” In some ways this is an understandable way of thinking for parents, because what parent wants to think his or her child is old enough to be thinking about sex? Unfortunately, this way of thinking can cause problems, because no one’s questions are being addressed and parents aren’t in tune with the way their child is thinking or feeling. One way to address this is to anonymously collect questions written by the parent’s children and then share the list with the parents. Although the parents don’t know which question is their child’s, they know one of the questions belongs to them. In addition they get to see the kinds of questions their child’s peers are struggling over. Hopefully, by offering the parents these questions, it will prompt an ongoing conversation about sex and faith that will benefit both child and parent. This is a wonderfully simple and eye opening exercise for parents of teens.

Another way to keep the conversation going is to offer parent Bible studies or discussion groups that include conversations about sex. The more comfortable parents become with the topic and grow in their own connection between sex, sexuality and God, the more comfortable they will feel discussing sexual issues with their children.

## Be a Support

Continue on this journey with parents offering insights and support to why and how they can engage in faithful and loving conversations with their children. Remind parents often that you want to be a resource for them and that they are not on this journey alone. To be the best support you can be, make sure you are doing some of your own work by finding books, articles, and other resources that would be helpful to parents and are educational to you as a youth worker. You can find a list of resources at the end of the quicksheet titled “The Talk: Faithfully Talking to Youth About Sex” that can get you started, but don’t stop there. Do some searching for yourself.

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