



# The Hardest Topic in Parenting

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April 2005

Sex. Okay, we've named it. For most of us, sexuality is the hardest topic in parenting.

So many questions. When do we begin? (Today!) When should we have "the one, big talk"? (A myth, it's always too late, always lacking credibility.) Who should do it? (Both Mom and Dad.) How do we respond if our child asks questions and we don't know the answer or we really don't want to answer? ("I don't know, but let's find out" or "That is personal, so I'd rather not talk about it.")

Most of us are nervous, ill-equipped and don't have role models. With no available map for this journey, what are we to do?

If we say nothing, our silence gives the message that we don't know anything, have values, or care what kids do. Most kids assume that if they can't talk to their parent about sexuality, then they don't turn to their parent with other important questions and issues. Schools and congregations should also teach about healthy sexuality, but parents have the most credibility. Even when kids don't seem to listen, they hear every word and observe every action.

In our sexualized culture, if we don't speak, how else will children hear that God, not Hugh Hefner, created sexuality as a good gift with guidelines for its use? How will we keep kids safe from the seductive voices of the commercial sex trade, peer pressure, and cultural values that have nothing to do with God's plan?

Start teaching values from infancy ... or begin today. From the first loving touch, we say this is the way you deserve to be touched, your needs are okay with me. By giving them anatomically correct words for all their body parts, we say that all they are is precious to God and to us.

Model values. Talk about relationships and respect and self-respect. Use teachable moments — music lyrics, movies, ads, conversations in the carpool, and countless others — to talk to kids about hopes, beliefs and fears. Make it an ongoing conversation.

And we need to talk about the hard stuff — sexual predation, unplanned pregnancies, disease, abusive relationships, and commercial sexual exploitation. Talk about God's grace and forgiveness when we have made mistakes. Assure them of God's love and of yours. This is the way to keep our kids safe and healthy and all God created them to be. If we don't do it, who will? Our children are counting on us.

For more information about preventing commercial sexual exploitation, contact Adults Saving Kids, 612/872-0684.

## Family Activities

1. Listen to your children's music with them and discuss the values espoused. Do they fit your family's values?
2. Find a book that will help equip you to talk to your kids about sexuality. (*Before They Ask: Talking About Sex from a Christian Perspective* and *Can I Have the Keys to the Car? How Teens and Parents Can Talk about Things That Really Matter* are both available from The Youth & Family Institute.)
3. Take a walk or ride together and tackle one subject you want to make sure you and your child talk about.
4. Rent a movie on a subject important to you to discuss with your child ... and use the movie as a teachable moment.
5. Write your child a love letter on each birthday, sharing your dreams, values and concerns for your child.