

Parents First

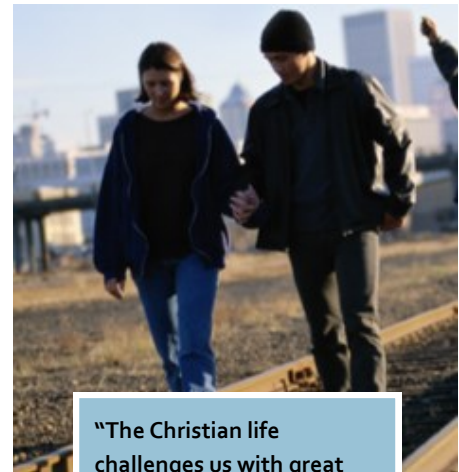
Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)

Church Teaching *True Liberty*

The word “sophomore” means “wise fool.” The use of this term in academia is meant to remind us that having knowledge and having the discretion to know when and how to use it are two different things. Often students at this age have left the naivety of their freshmen year behind, but they still have a lot to learn. In some cases they may have learned to act in a generally virtuous manner or developed the ability to embrace certain virtues but likely have not mastered any of them. This is often due to the fact that, while they have learned the concepts, they have little experience with being truly challenged (CCC 1803-4).

As children gain the privilege to drive, perhaps hold down a job, or begin to participate in adult level activities and organizations, they may begin to notice that it was easier to do the right thing when mom and dad were watching. This is a good time to discuss with your child the difference between true freedom, the ability to do what is right, the ability to do as I want without regard for the good (CCC 1731, 1740). The virtuous person is always free to do what is

right, but the person with bad habits is always a slave to their emotions, whims, and appetites (CCC 1733, 2339). Any person can know how to drive. A license shows that I have trained and shown myself responsible and controlled enough to be trusted. In a similar way, anyone can abuse their sexual powers in a variety of ways; only a chaste person “governs their passions and finds peace” (CCC 2339).



“The Christian life challenges us with great ideals.” Pope Francis

Growing in Virtue

Charity is also the virtue known often in Scripture as love. Love as it is understood in the Church is not just a strong emotional feeling, but rather a virtue that requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. St. Paul reminds us of this virtue

often at weddings (1Cor. 13) when we read his description of true love as opposed to infatuation. Genuine love is not blind. It knows the costs and chooses to accept them, even when it means death on a cross. The theological virtue of hope is directed at our salvation. It is a balance between despair at our own wretchedness and presuming that God will give us the gift of His glory. The sins against this virtue are common at this age where some teens will act sinfully, presuming that God will forgive them later, while others fall into deep despair and insecurity not trusting in the good things that God wants to give them. The former will justify any action but the latter may fall prey to flattery and bribery. Knowing your children well at this stage will help you to help them to find the balance that is the hope God intended.

Culture Alert...

Factors that influence adolescents’ sexual behavior lie close to home:

Studies show-

- Youth whose parents talk to them about social and moral consequences of being sexually active and can convey clear standards are more likely to be abstinent.
- Teens whose parents indicate a concern about their behavior via monitoring and involvement are less likely to be sexually active.
- Messages sent through parents’ own example have impact on the sexual behavior of their children.

Regardless of the impact of culture and peers, parents can and do have an effect on their children’s sexual behavior. Dailysignal.com

Guidelines for Answering 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.

Example: Why should I stay a virgin?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Did they read something or hear peers talking about it? Are they experiencing some peer pressure? Did they see something on TV or the computer? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to him/her.

Possible responses:

- “Even though it may seem like a hardship right now, remaining a virgin is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and your future spouse.”
- “And it can actually be freedom from stress. Most teens say high school is pretty tough, lots of homework and other pressures to deal with. By remaining chaste and abstinent you can make your life a little easier by not having to worry about the many risks that come from engaging in sexual behavior before marriage.”
- Some of the risks of pre-marital sexual behavior are:
 - Getting pregnant/ fathering a child
 - Getting a bad reputation
 - Broken trust with your parents, family or friends
 - Damaging your relationship with God
 - Sexually transmitted diseases or infections
 - The emotional baggage that comes with hooking up and breaking up
 - Broken hearts
- Staying focused: Prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments can give you the strength you need to remain chaste.

The virtuous person is always free to do what is right.

Practical Suggestions



Parents want their children to save sex until marriage but are unsure or uncomfortable talking about it. Some may feel hypocritical because they did not remain abstinent. Some parents just do not know where to start.

Here are some ways you can encourage your teen to remain abstinent:

- ◆ Model faithfulness to being chaste if married, in a relationship or single.
 - ◆ Create and discuss a dating policy for your teens; stick with it.
 - ◆ Help your teen set and maintain healthy boundaries and limits within relationships.
 - ◆ Help your children come up with “escape” signals to alert you when they need you to step in and help. For example, they
- feel uncomfortable in a situation and they call home using a preplanned code word that lets you know they need you to come and pick them up or intervene.
- ◆ Use examples from TV shows, movies, or news stories to help open the door to discussions about sex and abstinence/the potential negative consequences of teen sex.

May We Recommend...

Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout
Theology of the Body for Teens: High School Edition

By: Jason & Crystalina Evert and Brian Butler

Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Raising Sexually Whole and Holy Kids

By: Gregory and Lisa Popcak

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

(YouTube videos are recommended for parent viewing only)

YouTube: Jason Evert – *What is Chastity?*

YouTube: Jason Evert – *Three Keys to Dating*