

# Let's Talk

## Supporting Children & Teens With Critical Decisions Regarding Sexuality

[compiled by the Evangelical Christian Leaders Network]

### **I. Parents are the most significant influencers (for good or bad) in a child's life.**

#### **Key Facts:**

**A. We were created for relationship – with God and with others.**

**B. Children want a great relationship with their parents.**

Parents need to understand that no matter what kids say, they really do want their parents to stay involved in their lives, in appropriate ways that don't embarrass them. They want parental approval and affirmation. They want parental attention, and even parental guidance. (Leman, p. 40).

**C. When the parent-child relationship isn't all it could be, children will look to fill that relationship void in other ways.**

Kids want a sense of belonging, and if they don't find it with their family, they'll try to create it with their peers. (Leman, p. 31).

Most sexually active pubescents and adolescents have one thing in common: Busy parents. Distracted parents. Overwhelmed parents. (Leman, p. 165).

One girl said "Sex is the price you are willing to pay to fit in." (Leman, p. 165).

Our teens are growing up in a world that is trying to chew them up and spit them out. What the media and popular youth entertainment business want is kids' money. The teen culture is wide open for exploitation. (Scherrer, p. 182).

**D. Absolute truth is not valued in our culture, even among Christians.**

Barna Research (2001) found that 83% of Christian teens believe that moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only 6% believe that moral truth is absolute. (Scherrer, p. 45).

**E. Teens are looking for something real. They are quickly turned off by hypocrisy.**

It is likely to be our modeling, not our mouthing that gets the job done. (Scherrer, p. 14)

## Action Points:

### A. Live out your faith in the context of real life.

“**You** shall love the LORD your God with all **your** heart, with all **your** soul, and with all **your** strength. <sup>6</sup> “And these words which I command you today shall be in **your** heart. <sup>7</sup> **You** shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> **You** shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> **You** shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (NKJV).

You teach your children by example. The example may be a positive one, a negative one, or more likely, a mixture of the two. But you’re always teaching. (Leman, p. 36).

You’re already establishing a track record with your kid by how you listen, by what you say when you get angry, and by how you treat your spouse. (Leman, p. 34).

Teens need truth spoken to them in the context of loving relationships. This is what will help them hold onto truth in a world that doesn’t value truth. The loving relationships help strengthen the credibility of the truth in the minds of our teens.

### B. Make time for your children.

Statistics show that the vast majority of kids have had sex prior to the age of 20. Therefore, the passive approach to parenting will no longer work. (Leman, p. 17).

The most important thing that a child needs to succeed is an involved and loving parent. (Leman, p. 19).

The greatest foundation you can give to a child for positive sexual education is an involved and caring parent. (Leman, p. 37).

Your kids are looking to you for your messages, spoken or unspoken. They can’t pick up these messages if they’re hanging out at the mall while you’re at home. They can’t read your reactions if they’re always at a friend’s house, playing the latest PlayStation game. They can’t learn your values if they spend the bulk of their life hanging around their peers. (Leman, p. 31).

Slow down. Kids require attention, and with all the changes going on during puberty, you're going to have to make time and space for them. You can't switch to autopilot as a parent just because your son can now fix himself a sandwich or give the dog water. Parenting at this stage isn't something you can whip through, and why would you want to?... Don't pack your calendar. Get rid of anything that takes you away from the time you need to be with your family... It is not enough to reserve time for the urgent; family intimacy gets built around "nonessential" time like tossing a ball around, making a mess of the kitchen while baking cookies, going out for pizza together, spontaneously talking about whatever comes up on the spur of the moment and really listening and getting involved in what your kids are doing. You have to leave mental space to direct them; you can't effectively parent while fully wrapped up in your work. (Leman, p. 38).

### **C. Create an environment your children want to be in.**

The recipe is quite simple: you need to keep your kids around your home. That way you can teach them your values and beliefs as you go about your daily routine, interacting with them and their friends through the normal parts of daily life. (Leman, p. 30).

The best positive peer-pressure is the family. The best defense against peer pressure is family belonging. Create an environment that your children want to be in. (Leman, p. 68).

Protecting your child is all about that parent-child relationship, remaining heavily involved in your child's life, and preserving your child's sense of belonging at home. As your child grows, you will need to express your love differently to match his or her growing independence. But it is still your affirmation that answers your pubescent child's question, "Am I loveable?" (Leman, p. 165).

### **D. Find balance in your parenting.**

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4 (NIV).

Our kids need room to grow and blossom into the people God created them to be. We can't be too controlling, yet we can't be too permissive. Balance is the key. The art of parenting is a subtle one: you must gradually, in the right proportion, loosen your hold on the reins and let your child begin to run. This means creating age-appropriate healthy boundaries. (Leman, pp. 66-67).

The key is letting go at the appropriate times. Not authoritarian parenting (parenting out of fear and control); not child-centered parenting (parenting that revolves around the child); but Biblical parenting.

## **II. Regular and Consistent Communication between parent and child is vital.**

### **Key Facts:**

#### **A. Words have tremendous power, especially when coming from a parent.**

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:29 (NIV).

#### **B. Communication is an essential part of life. Our children will find answers to their questions. They just may not be the right answers.**

If they can't get their questions answered at home, they'll get them answered elsewhere, and when that happens, your ability to place sexual activity within the framework of your values has evaporated. (Leman, p. 167).

#### **C. It is easier to talk about difficult issues when good channels of communication have already been established.**

The process begins with talking to your children openly about first base issues (neck up issues). It will be a major shock for everyone to jump immediately into issues “below the belt”. (Leman, p. 13).

“Here's the real challenge: physical maturity does not equal emotional or relational maturity. When kids reach puberty it is time to talk to them about sexuality, yes, but what sets pubescent kids up for success in their sexuality is character education, personal hygiene, and regular communication with their parents. It is these basic skills – how to care for changing skin and hair, how to wait for that video game they really want, how to communicate openly with their parents when they hear the f-word from their peers and wonder what it means – that makes kids receptive when their parents begin talking to them about abstaining from sex before marriage.” (Leman, p. 14).

The communication highway is vital. Sadly, many parents leave this road entirely untended until a crisis hits... Parents with a good, well-maintained highway of communication are going to feel much more secure when the unknown comes. Why? They've paved the way by first talking through very simple things with their kids. (Leman, p. 37).

## **Action Points:**

### **A. Be an encourager.**

Children need encouragement and praise. Catch them doing things right. Believe in them. See what they are becoming (that's good) or what they could become, and continue to point them in that direction.

Negative parents – those who never take the time to catch their children doing something right – often increase the psychological damage by also passing on a revulsion of the body's natural processes. Some kids learn early to feel ashamed of their bodies, and many of them never quite shake the harmful lesson. (Leman, p. 74).

### **B. Talk openly and honestly with your child.**

Kids want to know about their changing bodies. As parents, we fear that any mention of the word “sex” will leave them groping for each other, but the reality is that for most of these kids, sexual intercourse is simply a Lego piece to click into the larger context of understanding the world.” (Leman, pp. 167-168).

Our kids search for intimacy as they become increasingly aware of the opposite sex, and we provide intimacy by loving them, listening to them, and guiding them down a path they have never trod – a path you know firsthand, whether it was an easy one for you or not. For many pubescent girls who become sexually active, sexuality isn't so much about “having sex” as it is about fitting in or feeling close to someone – a need so strong that they will violate the dictates of their own consciences to get it. (Leman, pp. 31-32).

Parents need to understand that if you don't provide a positive interpretation of bodily functions, your pubescent children will likely feel shame and discouragement about the changes happening to their bodies. (Leman, p. 75).

### **C. Be age-appropriate in your communication.**

#### **Tips for Talking:**

1. Always answer the question at an age-appropriate level.
2. Practice how you will respond when your child asks a tough question.
3. Get feedback (to make sure there is true communication taking place).
4. Look at other families. Talk to those with older children and find out what issues they've dealt with.
5. Read. Study. Get accurate information.
6. Keep the big picture in mind when answering. Put things in Biblical perspective.

#### **D. Look for teachable moments.**

“Parents often ask us when to start talking about sex, but sex education – or better stated, puberty education – is an ongoing process if you’re doing the job correctly. If you reduce this education process to simply having “a talk,” you’re missing the point. Being close enough to your child to talk meaningfully about sex is more about nurturing an ongoing, open, loving relationship than having a onetime discussion.” (Leman, p. 13).

Sample talk with your kids:

“The neat thing about this thing called life is that dad and mom don’t walk around with you for the rest of it. We don’t monitor what you say and what you do every moment of the day. There’s no way we could do that even if we wanted to. But we have great belief that you can handle the things that come your way. There’s going to come a day when you may think dad and mom are the two most out-of-it people in the world (if that day hasn’t already come!). But here are some things we think are going to happen to you: you’ll see and hear things that are not appropriate, that are filthy, and that are disrespectful. Kids are going to say things to you like, ‘Drink this, smoke this, snort this – it’s fun.’ In those moments, it’s up to you how you are going to respond. It’s your life, not mine or your mom’s, not your brother’s or your sister’s. We want you to know that we believe in you. Like a lot of things in life, there are times you’ll need help, and I hope we can talk as we’ve always talked.” (Leman, p. 43).

### **III. Ownership of key values helps a teen when faced with critical decisions regarding sex.**

#### **Key Facts:**

- A. Our culture promotes sexual permissiveness.**
- B. Biblical values quite often run counter-culture.**
- C. Most teens naturally live for the present, in the particular moment.**

“Teens today have never lived without instant food. The microwave oven was first distributed in the early 1980s. They have always had instant access to information with pictures through television. They have always had instant access to international information through cable television. They have instant access to communication on cell phones and instant messenger services on their computers. They have more things designed to entertain them – video games, magazines, music and movies, all designed especially for them. This dynamic of being entertained has become a consumer reality for this culture. The ultimate sin is to be bored. Their concept of reality is blurred. They have always lived with special effects, death that does not kill, violence that does not hurt and casual sex that does not have any consequences.” (Scherrer, p. 42).

**D. Intentional training is required to help teens think and act Biblically rather than culturally.**

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall **teach them diligently** to your children, and shall **talk of them when you sit** in your house, **when you walk** by the way, **when you lie down**, and **when you rise up**. <sup>8</sup> **You shall bind them** as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> **You shall write them** on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (NKJV).

**Action Points:**

**A. Start as early as you can to teach Biblical values.**

**B. Focus on the following key values that have a direct correlation to good decisions later on regarding sex:**

Certain skills should be in place by fifth grade to help your kid achieve social success: knowing the routine, learning to wait, following through, developing foresight, managing time, gaining mastery over feelings, and respecting authority. If these external structures are not solidly in place by fifth grade, then when hormones turn kids’ internal structures into a maelstrom, it can lead to chaos despite your attempts to hold them responsible to observe boundaries they never learned. (Leman, p. 47).

- **Knowing the routine** – Clear expectations, clear responsibilities, and assumed obedience (in things like getting ready in the morning, going to bed, getting chores done) help to prepare your child for making good decisions later on.
- **Learning to Wait** – Delaying gratification – If you always give in to your children’s demands, if no pleasure is ever put off, they will enter adolescence with no learned ability to delay gratification.
- **Following Through** – completing an assignment as given. When a child doesn’t follow through, you just simply allow them to face the consequences of their irresponsibility.

- Developing foresight – slowing down to consider the most likely consequences of their actions.

“Parents, don’t be soft on this! If your kids don’t learn foresight, they’ll grab immediate sexual gratification, chase after the thrill of drugs, and throw themselves headlong into the rush of dangerous behavior (driving too fast, taking stupid risks, and the like) without looking ahead and considering the consequences of their actions. You’ve got to let them learn to face the sting of stupid choices. Failure and its corresponding consequences are best tasted as an eight-year-old who misses a birthday party, rather than as a seventeen-year-old who is paralyzed because he was driving while drunk, or as a sixteen-year-old who gets pregnant on prom night.” (Leman, p. 50).

- Managing Time – respecting time, redeeming the time. This helps to cultivate inner responsibility.
- Gaining mastery over feelings – learning to set aside how they feel about something in order to rationally choose what is best. The goal is to help our children act out of God’s wisdom rather than out of their emotions.
- Respecting Authority – healthy submission to authority. Teaching your child to submit to earthly authorities (teachers, coaches, etc.) has great spiritual value because ultimately you want your child to submit to the Heavenly Father.

### **C. Help your children to develop a plan of escape before the temptation ever comes.**

Self-control is not forged in the heat of the battle. It is something that is developed far in advance. Help your child develop self-control and self-discipline early in life. Teach your children to make great decisions before the expected temptation occurs. Help them know the escape route even before trouble starts. (Scherrer, p. 125).

Our kids have to learn how to be self-directed and how to detect those warning signs that God gives to us. We like to teach kids what we call the “Uh-oh Phenomenon.” When you’re in social situations and you feel that little uh-oh inside – you know something’s wrong... That’s the time to get out. That’s the time to leave. That’s the time to turn away. That’s the time to stop what you’re doing and say to your boyfriend or girlfriend, “Hey, let’s go in a different direction.” In other words, the decisions a young woman makes while in the back seat of a car when she’s sixteen or seventeen are often forged by nonsexually related decisions she made when she was eight or nine.” (Leman, pp. 45-46).

Five boundaries to help kids before they start dating:

1. Delay dating.
2. Don't drink and date.
3. Delay going steady.
4. Don't be alone. Date in public.
5. Do more double dating or group dating, but still be careful.  
(Scherrer, pp. 122-123).

**D. Make sure your teens are aware of the potential consequences of their actions.**

## **IV. It is important that parents provide children/teens with accurate age-appropriate information about sex.**

**Key Facts:**

**A. What do they need to know when? (Scherrer, pp. 22-23).**

### Preschoolers

- Answer only the question the child asks.
- Give a short, simple explanation in words that are common in your child's vocabulary.
- Explain any difficult words.
- Don't ignore questions; this will cause confusion about sex and can imply that sex is bad.
- Always keep in the back of your mind that you want to communicate through the years that sex is awesome in the context of marriage.

### Ages 5-8

- God made you and you're the only you! You are awesome in all ways.
- We can control all of our behaviors. We need to practice self-control every day.
- We all deserve respect.
- Boys and girls are different in many ways.
  - A girl's body develops in ways that allow a woman to become pregnant and give birth to children.
  - A boy's body develops in ways that allow a man to be a father.
  - All of our body parts are special and are created by God. We need to show our body respect and take care of it every day.

Ages 9-12

- As we enter puberty, our bodies change. We all change at different times. God planned it that way. Talk through at the appropriate time the anatomy of sex.
- As our bodies change, we feel new urges. These are sexual urges.
- Sex is a wonderful gift from God for married people. It brings a husband and wife closer in their relationship. This is called intimacy, and it is good.
- God wants us to wait until we are married to have sex. We are capable of self-control. We use it every day in other areas of our lives.
- God wants us to be careful what we allow ourselves to see and hear and do.
- The Bible tells us how God wants us to use the gift of sexuality.
- God created us in a way that we can think through right and wrong behavior, including choices we make about sex.

Ages 12-15

- Review the physiology and anatomy of sex.
- All of us have sexual feelings. But feelings are different than behaviors. We can control our behavior with the choices we make.
- All sex is sex. God calls us to save sex for marriage.
- Marriage between a man and a woman provides a stable relationship that helps children grow into healthy adults.
- God calls us to follow his rules within the Bible to protect us physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.
- Having sexual partners outside of marriage has physical and psychological consequences that may never go away.

Ages 16-18

- The joy of marrying a person who has waited to give you the gift of his or her sexuality is one of God's greatest gifts to you.
- Sex is never an obligation.
- Sex is not love. Love is not sex.
- Love is unconditional and is never earned.
- Trust is always earned and is not unconditional.
- Being sexually pure (no sexual activity) before marriage decreases the chance of damage to the reproductive system from STDs.
- Condoms do little to protect against the most common STDs.
- AIDS is destroying entire cultures in some parts of the world.
- Sexual abuse is widespread in our society. If you know or suspect you have been sexually abused, immediately seek help from a parent, pastor, or counselor.

**B. Kids usually learn best with concise information presented in a few sentences, preferably with concrete, hands-on illustrations.**

Leman & Bell address very specific issues in a helpful way in their book, [A Chicken's Guide To Talking Turkey With Your Kids About Sex](#):

Ch. 7 – First Base – Changes from the Neck Up

Ch. 8 – Second Base – Changes from the Neck to the Waist

Ch. 9 – Third Base – Female Changes from the Waist Down

Ch. 10 – Third Base – Male Changes from the Waist Down

Ch. 11 – Home Plate – The Big “It”

**Action Points:**

**A. Be equipped to counteract the lies of the culture:**

Lies that the culture puts forth:

- Sex is bad.
- Sex is love and love is sex.
- Sex is an obligation.
- This only involves the two of us.
- I won't get pregnant.
- I won't get a disease.

Scherrer & Klepacki discuss these lies on pp. 76-81 in their book [How to Talk to Your Kids About Sexuality](#).

**B. Be well-informed. There are many excellent resources to help with this process.**

See Resource List below.

**C. Pray.**

We must realize that a distorted view of sex is one of Satan's most effective tools to destroy us. This is a spiritual battle and it cannot be won in our own strength. Take these issues to the Lord for His guidance.

**Book Resources:**

David Scherrer & Linda Klepacki, How to Talk to Your Kids About Sexuality

Kevin Leman & Kathy Flores Bell, A Chicken's Guide to Talking Turkey with Your Kids About Sex

**Internet resources:**

Focus on the Family – Child Development/Sexuality Articles:

<http://www.family.org/parenting/A000000692.cfm>

<http://www.focusonyourchild.com/hottopics/A0001294.cfm>