

# Center for Youth and Family

## Five Keys for Teaching Kids Healthy Sexuality

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

For most of us, our parents didn't talk to us about healthy sexuality, and unfortunately, we're not doing much better with our own children. A vast majority of young people say they receive more information about sexuality from their friends, media, and school than from their own home. This is not good news, especially when all studies show that the more positive, value-centered sex education kids receive in their home, the less promiscuous they will be.

A parent is almost always the person who has the best interest of their child in mind when it comes to sexuality. And you and I have the opportunity to provide our children healthy, value-centered sex education that is based on what God values. We need to face the facts and deal with the issues in a healthy and beneficial way. It won't always be easy or comfortable, but the results will definitely be worth it.

What follow are five key things children need in order to develop a healthy view of their sexuality and a better relationship with their parents.

**1. Talk.** Communication is a key to developing healthy sexuality. I'll say it again: Kids learn best when they dialogue rather than just hearing lectures from Mom and Dad. Make the teaching of healthy sexual values as normal and natural as possible. Remember that each child is different. One of our children was very open to talking with us about sexual matters. Another was absolutely silent and only later did we understand that she was actually listening. The baby of the family told us she already knew all this stuff because her sisters had taught her long before we thought they should. Nevertheless, developing a healthy atmosphere of conversation about sexuality is critical. Make sure your conversations are developmentally appropriate, and make it a goal to talk about all aspects of sexuality over a period of time. Your ultimate goal is to bring meaning and value to their sexuality that will help them decide to live a life of sexual integrity.

**2. Role Models with Honesty and Integrity.** Talking about sexuality can be uncomfortable. Some of us didn't handle our hormones as well as we wished when we were young. No matter what our situation, dealing with issues in an honest manner is the healthiest approach. You don't have to share all your "sins of the past," but don't be afraid to say that the reason you have concerns for your children is because you didn't get this kind of healthy conversation, and it affected you. Your own sexual integrity will also play a major factor in bringing security to your children. In fact, one of the great Proverbs in the Bible says, "The man [or woman] of integrity walks securely . . ." (Proverbs 10:9), and I am convinced that the man or woman who lives a life of integrity will have much more secure children as well. Let's face it, you can't ask your kids to live out a way of life that you aren't doing yourself.

**3. Positive Peer Influence.** People talk so much about negative peer pressure, but there is also such a thing as positive peer influence. Don't underestimate the influence of your children's friends. As they get older, you obviously can't legislate every moment with every friend, but you can do a great deal to bring positive peer influence into the lives of your kids. Church activities, sports, band, and any other healthy activity will help your kids find good friendships. Encourage the good friendships. Go the extra mile to keep friendships healthy. As kids get older, this is sometimes easier said than done, but don't give up. Authorities tell us that kids will take on the values of their friends. Get to know your kids' friends and their families. Cathy and I actually built a pool in our backyard when our kids got older so that our house would be the place to hang out. Obviously that is not the answer for everyone, but the point is to make positive peer influence a priority.

**4. Grace and Forgiveness.** As you develop conversations with your children about healthy sexuality, make sure there is plenty of positive talk about grace and forgiveness. God is not a “killjoy” when it comes to our sexuality. He cares about every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality. Some families mean well, but in their desperation to teach their kids values, they turn sexuality into something dirty. Don’t be one of those parents. Kids need help setting healthy, positive standards for their sexuality and relationships, and it is always more effective when surrounded with grace and forgiveness. We must help our kids build a “theology of sexuality.” Sometimes, before we teach our children, we need to develop our own theology around the theme that God created our sexuality and sees it as very good in the context of marriage and biblical standards.

**5. Something is Better than Nothing.** There have been times in Cathy’s and my life with our own children when we have either been silent for too long or excessively intense. In a world where most kids do not receive much input at all from their parents, never forget the old adage, “Something is better than nothing.” It is never too early to begin and never too late to start talking about this most important subject. There will be a few bumps along the way and, who knows, maybe even a few bruises. Teaching your children healthy sexuality is definitely a process, and you will have some uncomfortable moments, but you may also have a few smiles along the way. A close friend of mine told me a story about a dad and his thirteen-year-old son who went on a fishing trip. The other purpose, besides catching fish, was to listen to a wonderful CD together about sexuality. The young man kept quiet as the CD played. In fact, the dad wasn’t even sure if he was actually paying attention. After the CD ended, the son just looked out the window. Finally his dad said, “Son, what do you think about all this?” Hesitantly, the boy said, “I can think of three things. One, I can’t believe you and Mom actually do that. Two, I think it’s gross. Three, when I get married, I think I’m really going to like it!”

Helping our kids build a theology of healthy sexuality is not as far of a reach as one might think. We can make a difference, and it’s not all that difficult.

*Excerpted from the book **Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality** by Jim Burns; published by Bethany House Publishers.*

*Azusa Pacific University’s Center for Youth and Family with Jim Burns, Ph.D., serves as a research and training institute dedicated to providing biblically-based resources for parents and youth to help build healthy families.*