

How to Navigate Your Teen Toward Purity

We live in a sex-saturated culture, and today's Christian teenagers are soaking in it. Here's how you can navigate them toward purity.

Let's be honest. Talking to our kids about sex frightens us!

But we must do it. Our children are learning more about sex earlier than we did—and they are becoming sexually active earlier.

I can assure you that you will feel the heat as you discuss it. But not to talk about it puts sexual pressure on your kids that, in today's culture, they cannot bear.

How can you help them? Answering these three questions will give you a path to pursue: What pressure do my kids feel about sex? Will my child become a “trash can” or a “temple”? How can I have the talks, but not “The Talk”?

What Pressure?

Most parents have no idea how much sexual pressure kids experience in our society and how seriously it affects them. The comments I heard from one teenager make it clear.

“Everywhere I looked,” he said, “I was seeing all the magazine and television ads telling me of the sexual nature of their products and all those sitcoms with their innuendos of sexual prowess. My friends always seemed to be talking about last weekend at the party or were always asking me about my experiences.

“‘Yes, I had a girlfriend.’ ‘No, I didn’t do stuff like that!’
‘Yeah, we held hands walking home from school a couple times.’
‘Yes, I liked her.’ ‘No, I didn’t have to prove anything to

her.'

"'Virgin'—it was worse than having herpes. With herpes my friends would be sympathetic and caring. But 'virgin' drew snickers as I would pass in the hallways. No more, 'Whatcha doin' Friday night?' because they knew."

As parents we must commit ourselves to understanding this overwhelming pressure that our children face 24/7 in their adolescent years. Consider these statistics taken from federal court cases:

****By their 18th birth-day, 6 in 10 teenage women and nearly 7 in 10 teenage men have had sexual intercourse. Nationwide, 6.6 percent of students reported initiating sexual intercourse before age 13.**

*** Nearly 1 million teen girls get pregnant each year. Nearly 4 in 10 young women get pregnant at least once before they turn 20. Each year the federal government spends about \$40 billion to help families that began with a birth during the mother's teen years.**

*** The highest abortion rate is among 18- to 19-year-olds—56 percent per 1,000 women.**

When we are aware of what our children face every day sexually, we can help take the pressure off. We can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

However, because many of us did not learn about sexuality from our parents, we too need role models to help us. And even if our parents did a credible job of helping us understand our sexuality, times have changed. The issues and consequences have intensified greatly.

It is not easy living a clean life in a dirty world. Impurity comes at our kids from every direction—friends, television, movies, music, the Internet—and from internal sources as well.

Because of our sin natures, all of us find ourselves drawn toward impurity like metal to a magnet.

Did you know that teenage guys think about sex every 29 seconds? No wonder they are drawn into impurity! The fact that lust can be confused with love creates even more problems. Often our kids don't know the difference between simply satisfying their own physical desires and really being in love.

They become susceptible to immoral behavior when the internal struggles and external pressures get too heavy. And if they give in, the effects of impurity—loss of virginity, fear, guilt, bad memories, hurt parents, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and so on—devastate them.

The solution to sexual pressure is intimacy. When intimacy does not exist in a family—between husband and wife, between parents and children, and ultimately between each person and Jesus—then that lack, more than any other factor, leads to impurity.

Simply putting a book under your child's pillow in the hope that he will read it, or talking briefly in the dark just before he goes to bed will not relieve the sexual pressure or preserve his purity. But raising him in a close family with an intimate relationship with God will make him much less likely to engage in premarital sexual activity and more likely to adopt high moral standards.

Trash Cans or Temples?

When we think of talking to our kids about sex, what scares us the most? For many parents, it's remembering what we did as teenagers! We become paralyzed that our children will discover what we did and do the same thing.

These fears are highly justified. Children copy the behavior of their parents. One 16-year-old girl confessed to me:

“Barry, I’ve gotten involved with this guy, and we’ve gone too far. I might be pregnant. I hate it. I don’t even know why I did it. I don’t even love him.”

When I asked her, “What will your parents say?” she replied, “I found out several months ago that my parents conceived me before they got married.”

We cannot help our children pursue purity if impurity remains in our lives. In order for us to model purity and develop it in our children, we must lay our own foundation of purity. In 2 Timothy 2:20-22 the apostle Paul offers a picture of what that looks like and gives us practical advice about purity.

“In a wealthy home there are dishes made of gold and silver as well as some made from wood and clay. The expensive dishes are used for guests, and the cheap ones are used in the kitchen or to put garbage in.

“If you stay away from sin you will become like one of these dishes made of purest gold—the very best in the house—so that Christ himself can use you for his highest purposes.

“Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts” (The Living Bible).

How do you relate to this picture? Are you a “cheap dish” that has been used for garbage? Or are you an “expensive dish” whom God can use for His highest purposes?

Double your investment on these important points. They apply to you, but you can also use them to communicate about sexual purity to your teens. Your answer lays the foundation for whether your children become “trash cans” or “temples.”

Trash stinks! At home it must go out regularly. If, in our

personal lives, we do not take out the trash—the sensual thoughts, fantasies, lust, pornography, masturbation, immorality and so on—we become just as gross as an overripe trash can.

The Holy Spirit wants to change us into temples that contain “the very best in the house” so He can use us for His highest purposes (see 2 Tim. 2:21). When we give Him control of an impure area of our lives, He transforms it, and in the process keeps on making us a transformed temple—pure and holy. And He does that in our children as well.

Superficially sweeping up the trash so we look clean is not the answer. God wants to change us inside so we become clean. He wants to make us into people in whom the Spirit of God can dwell fully.

First Corinthians 6:18-20 tells us: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (NIV).

How do we do this? In 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul gives us three “brooms” to use for totally cleaning out our temples.

Broom 1: Run from youthful passions. “Passions” include sexual desires, cravings and lusts. These rise up in us in our “youthful” years. (Teenagers are hormones with feet!)

If we made bad choices in the past, we can “run” from our old behavior to the cross, where forgiveness and the power to resist future temptation flow freely (see 1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 10:13). Taking these steps will help you get free:

- * Make a list of everything in your past that condemns you.

- * Honestly admit every item on your list, taking full responsibility for your actions.
- * Give your list to Jesus and accept His forgiveness.
- * Forgive yourself.
- * Avoid the temptations that trapped you before.

Broom 2: Set your mind on Jesus Christ. Only Jesus possesses the qualities of “righteousness, faith, love and peace” (see 2 Tim. 2:22). The only way to keep our temples clean is to pursue Him.

Our minds more than our bodies determine our purity. Purity is a choice.

According to Romans 8:5-6, those who live according to the Spirit don't set their minds on the things of the flesh (trash) but on the things of the Spirit (temple). Three actions will help us set our minds on Jesus when we are tempted with lustful thoughts and actions.

****Praising the Lord.** When facing a sexual temptation, just say, “Praise the Lord.” Your focus will change from your desires to God's desires. His holy presence will take control of your thoughts and neutralize temptation.

****Memorizing Scripture.** Memorizing Scripture records God's thoughts over our impure thoughts. Psalm 119:9-11 tells us we can keep pure “by living according to [God's] word” and following the example of the psalmist, who declared, “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”

****Picturing Jesus.** Our minds function as cameras, taking pictures of every sensual thing our eyes see and then bringing out the photos when we are alone. But we can trash the pictures we don't want and take better ones. Picture Jesus on the cross, raised from the dead, seated at God's right hand,

then filling you with Himself.

Broom 3: Select an accountability partner. To live free from impurity we need accountability. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul tells us that developing relationships with others “who call upon the Lord from a pure heart” will sweep the temple clean.

The hardest step in cleaning out impurity is telling someone else. We feel ashamed. We want to hide it.

We think no one else struggles as we do. We believe our reputation will be ruined if someone finds out. Our spouse will reject us if we tell him or her. Those are lies!

Satan likes to keep our sin hidden. God wants it in the light. Tell someone. Pray for a person whom you can confide in. God will use that person to encourage purity in you.

How does purity pass from us to our kids? Transparency.

Intimacy will never occur in a cloud of secret lies. Being discreet, yet honest, we must openly confess our past impurity to our spouse and children.

Overcoming your fear of rejection and of hurting your family, you can say something like this:

“When I was young I didn’t deal with sex very well. I did things wrong.” (With your spouse, be specific about your actions, not another person’s.) “I ask for your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?”

(To your child): “I have learned some painful lessons that will help you not make the same mistakes I did. I want you to have purity in your life.”

What’s Wrong With ‘The Talk’?

With our purity intact, intimate communication with our kids can follow. But discussing sex is more than “The Talk”—one

anxiety-producing lecture completed as quickly as possible.

The Talk doesn't move us toward effective communication about sex with our kids. Instead we need ongoing discussions. Our children need and want straight answers about sex. Yet often we are not prepared to give straight answers.

You may be asking, "What do I say?" "How much do I tell them?" "When do I tell them?" The answer? Little questions deserve little answers. Big questions deserve big answers.

We must design what we teach to fit the need and the age of the child (see accompanying story on page 70). If we begin with many talks while they are young, then we open the door that will allow us to deal with the tougher issues in their teen years.

Never give in to the idea that it is too late. With God all things are possible. In an amazing number of instances He has done miracles in answer to a parent's prayer.

When you totally depend on Him to meet your needs, answer your questions and show you what to do to shape your teenager's dating life, sexual identity and ability to love, He will come through. Even though these can be tough times, the Lord will use them to bond you together.

The grace of God can still build purity into your teenager, intimacy into your home and communication into your relationship.

The Time to Talk Is NOW!

Waiting for the 'right time' to talk to your kids about sex? Don't expect them to initiate the conversation.

As parents, we need to have ongoing discussions with our kids about sex that are appropriate for their ages. If you're wondering how much to say and when, the following list of subjects divided by age will give you an idea of what topics

your kids will bring up. If they don't ask these questions, it's up to you to initiate discussion.

Young children

- * The wonder of having babies
- * Respect for their bodies
- * Bathroom language
- * Playing doctor
- * Playing with themselves
- * Seeing dirty pictures
- * Sexual abuse

Preteen girls

- * Wearing a bra
- * Deciding on clothes, including swimsuits
- * Piercing my ears, shaving my legs and wearing makeup
- * Talking about/hanging out with guys
- * Going to parties
- * Discovering body changes/puberty/sex organs/menstrual cycle

Preteen guys

- * Taking a shower, using deodorant
- * Wearing a jock
- * Talking about/hanging out with girls
- * Going to parties
- * Discovering body changes/puberty/wet dreams/masturbation

Adolescents

- * Dating decisions: dating/hanging out; dating/going out; dating/staying out
- * Sex is fantastic: God's ultimate purpose for sex
- * The opposite sex: Why are guys so weird? Why are girls so strange?
- * Fatal attraction: Sexual intercourse/oral sex
- * The value of virginity: Why wait for sex?

- * Setting limits: How far is too far?
- * Lines used to seduce: What if I am pressured?

My book *Talking to Your Kids About Love, Sex and Dating* provides extensive outlines, specific conversations and a weekend retreat experience that will help you communicate each of these topics over an extended period of time.

Beyond these subjects, many parents already face problems with their children in these areas:

- * refusing to follow dating and sexual guidelines
- * dating someone parents don't approve of
- * breaking up, heartbreak
- * indulging in lust, pornography, masturbation
- * engaging in intercourse
- * becoming pregnant

Obviously, no easy solutions exist. Only through God's grace and tough obedience can we solve these problems. For specific help, read *Talking to Your Kids About Love, Sex and Dating* (available at) and consult your pastor or youth pastor.

Barry St. Clair is founder and president of Reach Out Youth Solutions (). He speaks to and trains thousands of students, parents and youth leaders each year. The author of more than 20 books, he wrote *Ignite the Fire: Kindling a Passion for Christ in Your Kids* with his late wife, Carol. Barry and his wife, Lawanna, live in Atlanta and have a combined family of five children.