



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

A Parent Guide for Middle School Years, PART 6 THE SEXUAL 'TWEEN

Dear 'Tween-ager,

The years between childhood and adolescence are marked with major changes physically, emotionally, and socially. Peer relationships take center focus during middle school years. For that reason a previous newsletter explained how to develop several relational skills: (1) shaping your personality, (2) identifying your strengths and weaknesses, (3) building conversational skills, (4) treating people as expressions of God, and (5) learning to name, claim and tame your emotions.

Another change that 'tweens face during middle school relates to sexual development. Someone who was a "buddy" in earlier grades can now trigger a blush, cause your heart to flutter, or make your palms sweat. Those sensations are indicators that you are developing sexually. Human sexuality is how people experience themselves as male or female. It includes their capacity to be aroused by and respond to sexual desire and how to express themselves as sexual beings.

Having someone to hang with gives a sense of security. It is natural to want an identified boyfriend/girlfriend but adolescence is the time to discover and develop your unique "you-ness." Only two healthy "I's" can become a long-term, life-giving "WE." When 'tweens jump into a serious one-on-one relationship too soon, they stunt the growth of the "I" because they focus on pleasing the "other" and they often lose sight of "self." Once a relationship becomes sexual, it grabs most of the energy and it can put a freeze on emotional, social, and intellectual development.

Sexual relationships are for people who have matured beyond the attitude of "me, myself and I." Sex is but one facet of a permanent relationship. Mature people know that love is far more than a feeling. Love is a decision, an act of the intellect. Love is a choice to do what is best for another person, even at the cost of sacrifice.

Everything in creation has a life-giving purpose. Goodness follows when we use gifts as they were designed by their Creator. Sex is a part of God's design. When used as intended – within a committed, mature relationship – it is freeing, a celebration, private but not secret, it carries no sense of shame, it brings joy, well-being, and hope. It nourishes life emotionally and spiritually, and sometimes it produces a child. A couple is not ready for a sexual relationship

before they are able to sacrifice their lives for the sake of each other and a child, and to provide a home, steady income, health care, and the intention of lifetime fidelity.

Sex includes foreplay, that is, touches or sexual expressions intended to cause sexual arousal that prepares the body for intercourse. Holding hands, goodnight kisses, spontaneous kisses on the forehead or cheek, and walking arm in arm can be healthy, holy expressions. But “making out” – prolonged kissing, intimate touching and/or close body connection with arousal as the goal – falls into the foreplay category reserved for marriage.

Food for Thought

- Sexual self-control (abstinence) eliminates the possibility of unwanted pregnancy, venereal disease, ruined reputation, “freezing” emotional development, and having an adolescent child make a choice between adoption, abortion, and motherhood.
- It takes self-control to avoid pleasurable occasions of lust. Self-control is a quality of true love.
- Often sex has different meaning for boys than for girls. Frequently biological drive and chemical hormones motivate sexual activity in boys whereas girls view sex as a way to experience intimacy, closeness, preference and belonging.
- Apply sacred/reverent attitudes in choice of language, movies, reading material, music, dress, body language . . .
- Safeguard human dignity/reputation regarding Internet use, facebook, blogging, twittering, texting, . .
- Establish mutual respect, responsibility, and self-control as the standard for social engagement.

Middle school is a time to develop many relationships. Group activities like dancing, bowling, swimming, spectator sports, and interests that involve intellectual and social skills help you to find:

- (1) what qualities you like in other people,
- (2) what increases life within you, and
- (3) what about yourself needs development in order to have positive relationships.

Focus on kindness, respect, laughter, shared interests, and conversation skills now and you will grow to be a healthy, happy, well-formed adult ready for all the good things that can come your way.

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