

BETH ROBINSON, EdD & LATAYNE C. SCOTT, PhD

TALKING



WITH

TEENS



ABOUT

SEXUALITY



CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT / SOCIAL MEDIA
GENDER IDENTITY / SAME-SEX ATTRACTION
PORNOGRAPHY / PURITY / DATING / ETC.

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Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you
do flows from it.

Proverbs 4:23

Latayne dedicates this
to her precious grandchildren.



Beth dedicates this to the kids
who continue to teach her:
Lana, Gerrit, and Dawson.
They inspire and motivate her.



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Get Real

Last semester, I walked away from the psychology class I teach to university freshmen and had to stand for a moment to absorb what *they* had taught *me*. I was floored.

“What do parents need to know about teens and sex?” I had asked them.

The cumulative answer was, “Everything. They are clueless.”

Waitamminute. We’ve had sex, that’s how we produced kids. We know all about hormones because we remember their house-on-fire effect on us.

We’re hip. We know all about #MeToo and workplace sexual harassment, with human resources rules we can practically recite by rote. We’ve got this.

Except we don’t. According to kids today who are just coming out of their teens, we have no idea how sexually saturated their world is. And how nearly worthless many of us have been in helping them navigate it.

Why do they say we’re clueless?

Parents are often “one and done” when it comes to personalized sex education for their kids. We have “the talk,” or

send them to a seminar, or give them a book, and then dread/hope they'll come to us with further questions. But they usually don't. They want casual, everyday conversations about it. If it's going to get awkward, a Wikipedia article won't judge them for asking.

Today's boundaries confuse kids. They understand that people get in trouble and can lose their jobs or celebrity status because of #MeToo issues, but some young males are understandably anxious and confused about what the lines are that they can't cross, what could get them arrested. And girls watch videos and think being sexy/powerful has nothing to do with being victimized.

- That whole no-dating and purity pledge thing confused us too. True, it provided some overt boundaries, but even its pioneers now admit that by guaranteeing great sex for those who wait until marriage, the realities of newlywed life crushed many who never developed a healthy view of the synergy between sexuality and spirituality. (What? You didn't know there's a synergy? Read on!)
- In past years, talking to teens about sex assumed binary genders—male and female. Now homosexuality and a spectrum of behaviors up to and including omnisexuality (sexual attraction to people of all genders and orientations) have muddied the waters for teens, and even more for their parents.
- Kids aren't aware that you may actually know about all these things, so they assume you don't. Because you don't talk about it to them.

A Reality Check

Teenagers today were born immersed in technology, and they're oblivious to how it subsumes their lives. You won't be surprised

to learn that fully 95 percent of teens have access to a smart-phone, 45 percent say they are online “almost constantly,” and 90 percent say they play video games.¹

What has this virtual reality taught them?

- Entertainment and social media depict casual, uncommitted sex as normal between unmarried people. For youth, it’s a landmark of growing up, similar to getting a driver’s license. (We as parents tell them how to avoid wrecks and not to drink and drive; we also tell them how to protect themselves against pregnancy and disease—thereby implying that teens’ active sexual behavior is as much a given as driving.)
- Almost everything in their world says that homosexual sex is good to explore, and that authentic gender identity is what the individual (even a toddler) says it is.
- There’s no sense of the sacred in sex. Teens aren’t awed by sex—if not “down and dirty,” it’s at least commonplace.
- Be prepared for variety—like when your boyfriend wants anal sex, as a *Teen Vogue* article described for young females.²

But Here’s the Real Surprise

If teens don’t know how to navigate the mysterious world of sexual practices, they are even more unsure about real, lasting relationships. Surprisingly, while parents are trying to figure out how to prevent their kids from having sex too early or with the wrong people, today’s youth just fade into the less-risky fantasy world of technology.

Listen, parents! *They’re not having more sex, they’re having less.* One 2015 Centers for Disease Control study said that 60 percent of high school students had not had sex before they

graduated from high school.³ As we will see in later chapters, many young people are scared to death about intimacy in any form. They are highly educated in sex, they just don't engage in sexual behaviors as much as teens did in the past.

I also asked college freshmen about Christian values and sexuality. While most might agree that homosexuality is wrong, they are very fuzzy about whether what's wrong are homosexual inclinations or just homosexual behaviors. I give them the scenario of two unmarried sexually active gays who want to come to their church, and the freshmen conclude that someone should teach the couple the appropriate Bible verses about homosexuality, and if they won't accept those teachings and make behavioral changes, then they obviously don't believe the Bible and shouldn't go to that church.

But then I give a similar scenario, except the couple is "straight," and one person is having an extramarital affair. The students reason that church leaders should give him or her Scriptures about adultery, but usually the students' responses indicating the couple should be cut off aren't as strong as with homosexual couples. With heterosexual couples, students are more likely to respond that church leaders would counsel the individuals and work with them to honor their commitments.

This helps students recognize that our response to sexual situations often isn't just biblical; it's also informed by our own family culture and beliefs. We can't blame them. Most of us aren't even sure about what we think are reliable boundaries and definitions. Test yourself with these scenarios.

You drop by your son's new apartment at college to bring him groceries, and his roommate, who is wearing just underwear, answers the door. On the couch, you see a partially clothed young man. They say your son will return later, so after introducing yourself, you leave the groceries.

- What would you expect your son to do?
- What if your son assured you the couple were in a monogamous, committed relationship?
- Would it change your assessment if your son's roommate were female?
- Would it have been different if it was your daughter's apartment?
- What if you had found this situation at your own house after coming home unexpectedly?
- What if your son or daughter was thirteen? Or sixteen?

One of your son's friends lingers after a church party at your house. "I need to talk to you," he tells you. "I know this will sound weird, but I feel like I'm a girl trapped in a boy's body. I don't know what to do or who to talk to."

- What would you tell this teen?
- Would this disclosure change your feelings toward him? Toward your son's friendship with him?
- What would you say to help?

Relatives are coming for a visit, and you've asked your son to clean up his room so your sister and her husband can sleep there. You are disappointed at the still-messy room, and as you straighten your son's desk, you hit the mouse and the monitor flickers on and displays a pornographic picture.

- What would you expect your son to do?
- How would this change your interactions with your son?
- Would you react differently if it were your daughter's room?

Ah. Not so easy. What made you uncomfortable? What was downright intolerable? But more important, will your discomfort be a barrier to discussing these totally possible situations with your teen?

Test Yourself

Christians shouldn't have to operate on feelings or "situation ethics" if we have some clear biblical guidelines, right? However, our parents may not have covered that with us in "the talk." Most of our instructions about sex from our own parents may have been, in essence, "Don't do it till you're married." And "it" is never described or discussed.

Test yourself here to see if you know what the Bible actually says about some of these issues. Grab a Bible, a pencil, and a concordance to answer these questions. You may have to ask a pastor for help.

1. What does the Bible teach about sex in the context of a marriage relationship?
2. What guidelines does the Bible provide for helping teens set physical and sexual boundaries when they are dating?
3. What does the Bible teach about masturbation?
4. What does the Bible teach about abortion?
5. What does the Bible teach about sex outside of marriage?
6. What does the Bible teach about homosexuality?
7. What does the Bible teach about rape and incest?
8. What does the Bible teach about pornography?
9. What does the Bible teach about gender fluidity?

What your kid will naturally want to know even if they don't ask: Once you've figured out what the Bible says about these

issues, are you involved with any of these practices? And what are you doing about it? We will discuss how to address these issues later in the book.

What God Intended Sex to Be

The first question may be the most essential one, because in talking about sex with our kids, we often emphasize the negatives, the “what not to do.” (True, there’s “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” in Colossians 2:21–23, but this Scripture shows that forbidding alone is of limited value.)

We don’t know how to talk about the other side of the coin, the ideal of Christian sexuality, that it is a way to actually reflect something about humanity’s relationship with God. It might make you uncomfortable to learn, for instance, that in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “know,” as in knowing another individual, is the same word for *sexual relations*. So when Jeremiah says you can brag about knowing God,⁴ he’s not ignoring the implications of intimacy that are far above mere acquaintance.

We don’t think to say out loud to our kids that Christian sexuality has two forms: expressed in marriage or expressed in celibacy. Sexual urges, created by God, don’t just evaporate with time. We just kind of gloss over all those Scriptures that talk about healthy people with normal sexual urges who choose not to act on them—ever. Sometimes we have to teach ourselves to see such celibate people as heroic role models, as are faithful husbands and wives.

It may be a new thought to us that God created the identity of sexual beings when He created us male and female.⁵ But that’s at the core of everything teens need to know about sexuality. God himself, at the apex of His creativity, put an identifying mark on each of our bodies to indicate something important, both about *identity* and *function*.

Talking Points with Your Teen: The Logo

I want to help parents here, and in upcoming chapters, to have accessible talking points for discussions with their teens. Jesus used stories and visual imagery to get points across, and I want to do the same.

For instance, kids understand logos and brands on genuine products, whether athletic shoes or clothing or software. The logo is the sign that the designer—who created the footwear or clothing or game—put originality, effort, testing, and personal attention into the thing he or she designed.

The designer cared about details, those things that make the product unique and special. With human beings individually designed by God, the details are down to the cellular level. No matter what you look like or make yourself look like on the outside, inside every female are female cells. Inside every male is male DNA. It's the logo of God, who created male and female in His image, that each person is born male or female.⁶

Okay, our sexuality shows our identity, right down to the genes. What does each person's sexuality say about what they are to do with it (function)? Kids understand that you can use brand-new designer jeans to scrub muddy floors. Or you can take a new \$2,000 pair of celebrity sneakers and use them for soup ladles. They probably would work. But why would you? They were designed to help someone stand out. Sneakers help you compete athletically. Clothes make a statement about what's important to the wearer.

Our bodies were designed for even more worthy things. In each person's sexuality, your body carries the logo of its Designer, His intentions for your identity and your functions. It is supposed to be a symbol of your priorities, your focus, your destiny. Even more than that, it is supposed to get the individual to think about the Designer.

Each person is one of a kind, unique, and autographed. And like designers do, God numbers what He has made (“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows,” Matthew 10:30–31). Like a master artist, He keeps a record of His people—engraved on the palms of His hands.⁷

These are issues your teen wants to know about. If they have questions, they’re going to get information somewhere. Teens are right—this world is saturated with sexuality. But not the way you think it is.

EXPLORATION FOR PARENTS

In upcoming chapters, I’ll give you some conversation starters and other ways to interact around your teen’s understanding of his or her sexual self. But now that you’ve read this chapter, these questions are for you.

1. What information in this chapter surprised you? Can you think of how you could share this with your teen by saying something like, “I never knew xyz. What do you think about that?”
2. What lessons did you learn about sexuality as a teen that still influence you today? What can you conclude you should learn from that?
3. Since many teens are not participating in sexual behavior, they need a biblical view of celibacy. Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:11–12, where He said not everyone could live with the difficult requirements of marriage. How many of your interactions with your

children have expressed the possibility that God may want them to be celibate their whole lives, not just during their teenage years? Or do you think marriage is an ideal, and singleness a lesser state?

4. Television and movie depictions of parents often show them as people who obstruct the healthy and natural sexual exploration of teens. Contrast this with Proverbs chapters 4 and 5. Look in these two chapters for details about how a parent's interactions and instructions protect a teen's sexual self. Write yourself some notes.
5. If you were making a pie chart of your leadership of your children in sexual matters, what percentage is love and empathy as you remember your own feelings of teenage angst? What percentage is instruction? How much instruction comes from the Bible or a pastor? What percentage is seeking outside help? Are you satisfied with those percentages? If not, what strategies can you use to change the proportions?
6. Disney movies and much of popular culture teach children that they have the solutions to their own problems within themselves if they just look hard enough. If you are willing to agree that God created an orderly world, what does it mean to you that you were born before your children? In other words, do you see any implications in the idea that God's chronology allowed you at least a couple of decades to prepare to reason biblically with your children?