

# Parents First

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)*

## Church Teaching *Son and Spirit*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that the Holy Spirit is the “interior Master of life according to Christ, a gentle guest and friend who inspires, guides, corrects, and strengthens this life” (CCC 1697). As your child prepares to receive the “Sacrament of the Holy Spirit” this year, it is important to understand that, with this sacrament, God will begin to bestow special and often powerful gifts (charisms) upon your child in order to help them strengthen and lift up his Church (CCC 799-801). As parents, it is a part of our



role to help our children to discern the path to which God is calling them. A great part of this discernment process is the development of an

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ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments—“the holy mysteries”—and, in Him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with Him” (CCC 2014). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we have a natural longing for this relationship (CCC 27). By assisting our children in fostering this union with Christ, we can help them avoid attempting to fill this longing with less healthy relationships and help them avoid filling their desire for intimacy with pre-marital sexual encounters.

### Growing in Virtue

In the Catholic understanding, prudence is also known as practical wisdom. Wisdom of this type helps us discern when to act and to what degree, in some sense, judging our own strengths and those of the world around us. Prudence enables us to make right judgments. At this stage of development teens often fail to consider the consequences of actions. They can have a “live for today” mentality. You can help your child develop appropriate judgment by teaching them how to deal

with money and finances, by watching the news together and discussing how people get into bad situations, and by pointing out the unrealistic aspects of movies and television shows.

While prudence helps us to make appropriate judgments, fortitude is the actual courage needed to carry them out. Unfortunately, the only way to grow in fortitude is to do difficult things. This means learning self-discipline, working hard, and setting strong boundaries. Statistics also show that good examples and influences also help in this regard. For example, single parents who cohabit are more likely to have children who engage in pre-marital sex while parents who eat dinner with their children every night are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

#### Culture Alert...

Hook-ups are sexual encounters ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse. They are often short-lived, nonexclusive, and emotionally shallow, with a purpose of one-time sexual activity (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). The terms “friends with benefits” and “casual sex” are also used as synonyms for hooking up (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).

# Guidelines for Answering your Child's Questions

- Ask for more information before answering, (i.e. "Why do you ask?", or "Tell me more."). Your child's response will provide you with insight, context and time to think.
- Pause to ask God for the wisdom and grace to provide an appropriate answer.
- Phrase your answer in the context of your family's Catholic values (i.e. "When you are grown and married..." or "As Catholics, we believe...")
- If you don't know the answer, say "That's a great question but I'm not sure of the exact answer. I will look it up and get back to you later today." Make sure to follow up later with an answer.

## Examples: When can I start dating? or When can I "go with" someone?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Do they currently "like" someone? Are they experiencing peer pressure to have a boy/girl friend? It is important to note, that even at this age, there are common phrases for casual sex which are: "FWB" (friends with benefits) or "hooking up" with someone. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

### Possible Responses:

- "Before we talk about when, let's talk about why. In our family, we believe that dating has several important purposes - to get to know others and yourself better (likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, values, personalities); to learn how to communicate and have fun with the opposite sex; and after high school, choosing your future spouse."
- "When you show us in everyday activities that you are responsible, trustworthy and respectful, we will know you are ready to date."
- "You may be allowed to go on a Group Date - several boys and girls going somewhere together when you are 14."
- "Car dating - one boy and one girl going out without a chaperone can begin when you are 16 because, at that age, you will be better able to handle yourself alone and you would be able to drive the car if something happened to your date."

# Practical Suggestions



Try to remain compassionate and empathetic as your child experiences the many emotional and physical changes associated with adolescence and

puberty. Remember what this time was like for you and treat your child as you would have liked to be treated. Some families celebrate or affirm the changes that occur during puberty while others quietly acknowledge changes and make

appropriate adaptations. Regardless of how your family deals with puberty, make sure to avoid the following:

- Minimizing your child's emotions. Hormonal changes during puberty may make it seem like your child is on an emotional roller coaster. Prepare your child for the possibility of emotional changes and acknowledge emotions when they happen. Help your child learn to separate feelings from behaviors, (i.e. "Even though you may be feeling crabby

or down, it's not okay to say hurtful things.")

- Teasing or making fun of your child. He is already hyper-sensitive and maybe even confused by the changes occurring in his body. Now is the time for compassion and sensitivity. Without it, he may physically or emotionally overreact to teasing or joking.

*"Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to give Christians the necessary graces to lead a life of virtue" (CCC 1469).*

## Parent Resources

- *There are No Simple Rules for Dating my Daughter: Avoiding the Pitfalls and Pratfalls of Teen Romance*, by Kathleen M. McGee and Laura Buddenberg, Boys Town Press, 2005
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout