

Parents First

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

Church Teaching *Social Sin*

Around this age your child may enter a stage of group thinking in terms of their moral development. You will likely often hear the excuse, “Everyone is doing it.” This is the time to remain strong in your convictions and help your child to understand that participation in sin is still sin. As your child begins to develop more on a social level, this might be a good time to discuss with your son or daughter that we have a moral responsibility, not just for our own sins, but also for the sins of others when we participate in them (CCC 1868). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives us



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a number of ways that we might participate in the sins of others: “by participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so and by protecting evil-doers” (CCC 1868). Every time that we sin, it becomes easier to sin (CCC 1865). We call this the development of vice. Adolescents who develop a “follow the crowd” mentality, will be more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors when prodded by peers. Vice has a tendency to cloud one’s judgment and can cause one to begin to justify their actions in a variety of ways (CCC 1865). Vice can also cause a person to have misplaced values, to respond negatively without thinking, or to develop unhealthy relationships.

Growing in Virtue

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. A great part of this particular virtue is perpetual vigilance. As your child transitions into junior high school, it is easy for them to become distracted by all of the changes going on in their life around them. At this stage of life they are often likely to make grave mistakes due to inadvertence, emotions or mood swings, general ignorance, or due to bad habits. It is important to point out to them where these mistakes are common so that they can grow in self-mastery and make appropriate choices. At the same time, it is also important to understand that appropriate correction is also necessary at this stage. If our response to failures is too weak at this point in our child’s life, we

may be setting them up for greater failures in the future.



Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and His Church (CCC 1814). As this virtue develops in your child, it is

important to make certain that they not only believe, but that they also act on that belief. They should be prepared to profess their faith boldly in both words and actions. Doing this requires confidence and conviction. They will gain these traits by watching and learning from you and the other adults in their lives. Parents can greatly aid their children at this stage by giving them an apprenticeship in prayer, communal worship, and works of mercy. This requires both a personal relationship with Jesus and integration into the community of believers.

Culture Alert...

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.

Guidelines for Answering 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.

Example: When is it okay to kiss someone I like?

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

- "Instead of talking about when, let's first talk about what kissing means. In our family, kissing is a big deal, not something you do just for fun."
- "We believe that you only kiss someone you really love and care about."
- "It's also important to know that kissing can easily lead to other sexual activity."
- "Before you kiss someone you need to know and be able to talk about your sexual and physical boundaries so things don't get out of hand."
- "Remember, as Catholics we believe that sex is for married couples only. While you are single we expect you to abstain from sexual activity."

Practical Suggestions

Though your child may look more like an adult and may want more freedom and independence, they still need you to be present and involved in their lives. Several studies show that teens really do want parents to set limits and talk to them about pressures like teen sex, alcohol and drug use

Unfortunately, most teens won't just say "Mom, Dad, I want your advice and help". In fact, many teens do just the opposite; they roll their eyes or walk away. However, now is not the time to retreat! Instead, take advantage of the time you do have together to listen and ask questions. Teens may be more likely to talk when:

- Driving: Turn off the radio; take off the headphones and talk. Sometimes car conversations, especially at night, can be

easier on your teen. You're looking at the road and not focused on them. Just the fact that they do not have to make eye contact, may help them feel more at ease and less on the hot seat.

- Doing a chore together: Sweeping the garage or doing dishes side by side may help facilitate conversation. Again, your teen may feel less scrutinized because your focus is more on the chore and less on your teen.
- Before bed: Your teen's biological clock is now set to stay up later (and rise later, too!) Their later bedtime may make it harder for you to stay awake but do! For your teen it may be a time they're more apt to talk.
- Taking time to talk to your child is crucial at this age as they are experiencing many changes and pressures.

The Circle of Grace 7th grade lesson is about respect of oneself and others as this is an age where many youth experience bullying.

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

Parent Resources

- For youth - Teresa Tomeo's (with Molly Miller & Monica Cops) *All Things* series for Catholic Tweens, Bezael Press, 2009
- For parents- *Good Discipline, Great Teens*, by Dr. Guarendi.
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout