

Parents First

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

Church Teaching *Ability and Responsibility*

The Church teaches us that there is a necessary distinction between power and responsibility. At this age level, bullying becomes common among children who have not gained this understanding. Having a particular ability does not always mean that it can or should be used in all times and places. As our children grow and develop, their bodies develop fascinating new abilities. They become, stronger, faster, and more attractive. With these new powers comes the responsibility to use them in accord with God’s plan, being



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good stewards of what we have been given. The use of these powers is not meant to be “arbitrary or destructive” but rather is meant for a specific pur-

pose (CCC 373). One with strength is meant to use it to protect the weak, but abuse of that power may lead to bullying. With regard to our sexuality, we are not called to use these powers to cause harm and destruction but rather to help us in forming close bonds of friendship and in the transmission of human life. The practice of chastity and self-mastery enable us to be persons of integrity, entering into new friendships that are not self-seeking but rather ones that are a genuine gift of self (CCC 2337-42).

Growing in Virtue

Justice is the virtue of right relationship, as your child’s body begins to develop, it is good to begin to have the conversation about the difference between responsibility and power, between what I should do and what I can do. This becomes particularly important as differences between children become more noticeable as some mature faster than others. Make certain that your child is aware of bullying and other anti-social behaviors at school, and help them to feel comfortable in speaking with you about them.

Temperance is the virtue of balance and self-control. As your child begins to head into puberty, they may be prone to swinging emotions and excessive behaviors. As

they enter this stage of life, it is important to help them learn balance in what they eat, the activities that they participate in, and with whom they as-



sociate. Help your child learn to turn off the TV or video games and to make time for a variety of activities. Helping them to develop a personal schedule will keep them from the feeling of being overwhelmed by school, burnt out by sports, or overly isolated by spending too much time alone reading or playing video games.

Culture Alert...

Science Daily on sciencedaily.com reports “Popular TV shows teach children fame is most important value, psychologists report; being kind to others fell dramatically in importance over 10 years.”

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: What is a period? or What is a tampon /feminine pad?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Are they noticing changes in themselves or their peers? Did they hear something on TV or are they just curious? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

Possible Responses:

- "A period, also called a menstrual cycle, is the process by which a female becomes physically capable of having a baby."
- "A girl will get her first period (menstrual cycle) sometime during puberty and will continue having menstrual cycles for the next 30 - 40 years."
- "Each menstrual cycle occurs over a period of about 28 days and has three phases: a buildup of tissue and nutrients in the uterine lining, ovulation and finally menstruation (the shedding of the uterine tissue and lining)."
- "A period is a natural process and is nothing to be afraid or embarrassed about; all girls have a period when their bodies mature."

Practical Suggestions

Though it may seem too early, now is the time to start talking about the future. Your child is making friends of their own and is spending more time away from home at sleepovers, scouts, sports, etc. Prepare your child for the challenges that come with this kind of independence by:

- Providing opportunities to practice being responsible (i.e. prepare an evening meal for the family, help shop for groceries, do their own laundry, etc.)
- Teach and practice how to make a good decision (i.e. the POP method –

Name the Problem, list your Options, Pick a solution).

- Continue to monitor their media. Preview movies, music and video games, comment on inappropriate TV shows or commercials. Children are affected by seeing and hearing sexually-explicit material. Continued vigilance on your part models what you expect from your children not only when they're home, but especially when they're away from you.
- Remind them to talk to you about any uncomfortable feelings or situa-

tions that enter in their Circle of Grace.

- Your child's Circle of Grace lesson is on the Internet. Review the lesson's parent take-home sheet with your child.
- Open dialogue and involvement with your child regarding internet/social networking usage is essential to their internet safety.

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

Parent Resources

- **Tell Me Now** DVD- 22 minutes, presents age-appropriate information about puberty and sex to 3rd to 5th graders in an entertaining and fast-paced format. Designed to be viewed with your child. Includes educational guide, DVD and activity booklet.
- <http://www.medinstitute.org/products/item124.cfm>
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout
- The Archdiocesan Anti-Pornography teaching sheets for parents/ ministers are on our website under Safe Environment (www.archomaha.org). This site also has a pamphlet, *7 ways to protect your family from pornography* that has important internet safety information.