

Parents First

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

Church Teaching *Power for Good*

As your child develops physically their sexuality gives them two great new powers. The Church calls these “fecundity” (or procreation) and “unity”. A physically mature human being has the power to aid God in the creation of new life (CCC 373) and the power to create a very intimate bond with another human being. The

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graces given in the Sacrament of Marriage strengthen these powers, sealing the bond between the couple, making it indissoluble and giving the couple special grace to help them welcome and raise their children (CCC 1640). The abuse of these powers can lead to a variety of disordered acts including lust, masturbation and fornication among others (CCC 2351-59). When

these powers are abused, they can be lost or diminished in a variety of ways, leading to an inability to form close bonds or even to be able to have children. While society and the media often encourage these acts or call them normal, these acts often lead to slavery to sin in the form of pornography addiction, poor lifestyle choices, and other destructive behavior. These acts lead to an understanding of others as objects rather than persons making the possibility of genuine intimacy almost impossible. This is why it is vital that children, even from a very young age, be given guidance in self-mastery and chastity in this regard (CCC 2346-50).



Growing in Virtue

Temperance is the virtue of balance and self-control. As your child enters these years of dramatic change, help them to develop mastery over their own wants and desires. A good way to do this is to replace a bad behavior with a good one. Strong sexual desires can be controlled with exercise; overeating can be controlled by engaging in the practice of music or the arts; anger and frustration can be tempered by care for a pet or other animal. In each of these things, it is important to find balance. Without it, even a good habit, like exercise, can get out of control.

Fortitude is the virtue of moral courage. As your child gets older they

may find that it can become a bit scary to do the right thing. From time to time doing good may have consequences that cause pain. If I watch my weight, I will have to go hungry. If I defend a classmate, I may be ostracized. Be certain that you help your child by acknowledging your awareness of these things. Let them know that you are proud of them for taking the more difficult path. The more they grow in this virtue, the easier it will be to practice.

Culture Alert...

1 in 7 children who use the Internet have been sexually solicited—2005 (Internet Filter Review)

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 wet dream?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e. Did they experience this themselves or hear their peers talking about it? Did they see 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:

- Boys' bodies go through changes as they mature preparing them for fatherhood.
- A wet dream, also known as a nocturnal emission, is a normal occurrence for boys.
- Sometimes, while sleeping and without realizing it, a boy may get an erection followed by a release of semen.
- Nocturnal emissions are the male body's natural way of releasing semen.

Practical Suggestions

Your child is beginning to develop sexually; therefore, it is important to help your child understand the Church's teaching on masturbation at an early age.

➤The act of masturbation is disordered and is a misuse of God's gift of sexuality.

➤Having your child understand this now will help them when they experience temptation. This is especially important if they are exposed to pornography on the internet. (Viewing pornography while masturbating is one of the key elements in becoming addic-

tive to Internet pornography.)

➤When your child asks a question, resist the urge to provide an immediate response.

➤You can learn a lot about your child and about the real intent of their question by simply asking a few clarifying questions before answering. For example, if your child asks, "Is masturbation wrong?" respond with "Why do you ask?" followed by "Tell me what you think masturbation is." Then really listen to their reply.

➤Sometimes adults can get so caught up in the process of formu-

lating the best possible answer that we don't take the time to find out what it is that our child really wants or needs to know.

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

Parent Resources

- Teresa Tomeo's (with Molly Miller & Monica Cops) *All Things* series for Catholic Tweens, Bezael Press, 2009
- Circle of Grace Parenting and Sexuality Handout