

Parents First

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

Church Teaching *Spirit and Flesh*



Because human beings are composite beings, spirit and body, there already exists a certain tension in us; a certain struggle of tendencies between "spirit" and "flesh" develops (CCC 2516).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the life of a junior high-age child. It is also a reality that every person will struggle with for the rest of their lives. It is the "daily experience of spiritual battle" (CCC 2516).

As your child begins the transition to adulthood, they will often be surprised by the overwhelming emotions, called passions, that will often move them to act one

way or another (CCC 1763). When properly directed, the passions can move a young man or woman toward amazing acts of courage and self-sacrifice, strong dedication to the faith, and even profound and genuine love (CCC 1765). When misdirected, the passions can lead to rash action, misguided sentiment, and abusive behavior (CCC 1768). It is at this particular time in life when your child will need to begin to learn discipline with regard to emotions and desires. By doing so, they develop emotions that point them toward the good thus bringing their heart in line with their soul, allowing the body to be redeemed with the spirit (CCC 1770).

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Growing in Virtue

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 us 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 become.

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and his Church (CCC 1814). As your child begins to develop psychologically, they transition from a concrete understanding of the world to a more abstract understanding. Adolescence is a key time when children begin to question everything from household rules to religion. It is important at this stage to help your child develop the ideal of "faith seeking understanding." While our faith is a gift to us from God, we can nurture that faith by feeding it with reason and virtuous behavior. It is important at this stage that parents understand the distinction between questions about the faith in a genuine search to make faith stronger and intentional doubt of the faith which may make it weaker. Frequent and consistent practice of the faith is crucial as is the ear of a trusted and knowledgeable adult to field those questions.

Culture Alert...

Chance that an American parent requires their child to do their homework before watching TV: 1 in 12.

www.tvturnoff.org

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: Is sex a good or bad thing? or Why is sex bad? or What is the big deal about sex?

Know the context of the question (see the above guidelines) i.e.: Is this something that their peers are talking about? Did they see something on TV or the computer? Remember that today's culture promotes that sex is no big deal. It promotes the false assumption that what you do with your body has no effect on your person: a disconnect of the person from their bodies. The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

Possible Responses:

- "As Catholics, we believe that sexual intercourse is an awesome gift God gives exclusively to married couples as a way to express love for each other and to bring new life into the world."
- "Sometimes people misuse sexual intercourse by having sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse; or before marriage, it can cause some negative or life-altering consequences (i.e. broken relationship with God, unplanned pregnancy, sexually-transmitted disease, broken heart, bad reputation, guilt, etc.)"

Practical Suggestions

Continue to build a good relationship with your child. The time and effort you put into spending time with and getting to know your child at every age and phase of his development will really pay off. Regularly spending time with and being present for your child means you'll more likely notice and be able to support your child through the many emotional and physical changes that happen during puberty. Daily activities that could be used as relationship builders include:

- Do a chore together (wash the car, fold the laundry).

- **Eat at least one meal together every day.**
- Use drivetime or bedtime to get in the habit of doing a daily check-in. Use the following conversation starters... How was your day? Tell me 2 good things that happened today. Tell me 2 tough things that happened today. How did you notice God's love today? Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Tell me about one thing you learned/discussed at school today.
- Your child's Circle of Grace lessons about their God-given

uniqueness and that all relationships are called to be sacred. They will have a chance to discuss safe and unsafe situations. You will receive a letter that will give you valuable information to discuss unsafe situations with your child.

"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