

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try to make a potentially awkward subject more natural:

- **During bath time**, as you wash each body part with a cloth or sponge, call it by its correct name. Then, talk about what that body part helps us do.
- **When dressing or undressing your preschooler**, review their body parts with them— again, using the appropriate terms. But this time, ask them who has permission to see or touch that body part.
- **Grab some crayons and a sheet of paper**. Go ahead and draw the outline of a human body and sit down with your preschooler. Then, using the crayons, help your preschooler fill in all the details that make them *them*—pointing out all their unique qualities—the color of their skin, hair, eyes, and lips. From head to toe, talk about how special and wonderful God created them.

This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application. To discover more ways to help your preschooler develop healthy habits, check out <http://PhaseGuides.com>.



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SEXUAL INTEGRITY

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Wait a minute. A conversation guide about sexual integrity for toddlers and preschoolers? Do parents really need this? Actually, there are many reasons to help a child feel comfortable talking with you about their body. That's why it's important that you start the conversation early. During this phase, your role is to . . .

INTRODUCE
them to their body



So they will . . .
DISCOVER THEIR BODY
AND DEFINE PRIVACY.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your child in the phase they are in, by giving you some words to say to navigate the critical issue of sexual integrity. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal for your preschooler in mind:

SEXUAL INTEGRITY

Guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

IN THE NEW BABY PHASE, SAY THINGS LIKE . . .

"God made your strong little legs."

"God made your elbows."

"God made your vagina/penis." *(Use correct names of body parts as you bathe and change your child—experts suggest that learning proper words can protect your kid from potential harm as well as create a positive view of their body.)*

IN THE FOLLOWING PRESCHOOL YEARS, SAY THINGS LIKE . . .

"That's your nose. Those are your eyes. That's your vagina/penis."

"No, girls don't have a penis." *(If your child notices that someone's body is different than their own, talk about the differences.)*

"Close the door when you go to the potty."

"Babies grow inside their mama until it's time to be born."

"It's okay to tell someone 'NO' if you don't want them to touch you."

"It's polite to look away when someone is changing their clothes."

**"Your penis/vagina/bottom/nipples are private,
and we don't show them to people."**

"If someone touches your private parts, come and tell me right away."

"Sometimes the doctor might touch a private part to make sure you are healthy. It's okay when I'm with you."

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The preschool years are the years you want to embrace their physical needs, so include lots of hugs and cuddle time as you talk. This conversation is the perfect opportunity to inspire a healthy self image, so answer their questions honestly and encourage them to keep asking them. This is the beginning of great conversations in the years to come.

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

- **Dads, set up regular "dates"** with your daughters, and moms, set up regular "dates" with your sons. (If you're a one-parent household, seek out an extended family member or trusted friend of the appropriate gender and invite them to participate whenever possible.) These outings can be as infrequent as once a month and as informal as a quick fast food run. While you're together, model respect and etiquette for your child, and insist they do the same. Talk about acceptable and unacceptable treatment of the opposite sex while you build a healthy one-on-one rapport with your kid. (If you don't have someone of the opposite gender you feel comfortable with to do this, you can always take them out and have a discussion about how they should be treated on a date and in a relationship.)
- **Role-play with your child.** For younger elementary, you can use stuffed animals or dolls to represent the characters. Choose from the scenarios below or come up with some of your own. Ask your kid what the characters should do. Talk through their reasoning and affirm appropriate responses.
 - » A friend of the same gender asks to see your private parts or show you theirs.
 - » A friend of a different gender asks to see your private parts or show you theirs.
 - » An adult you don't know tells you they need your help—all you have to do is go somewhere with them.
 - » An adult you do know wants to touch or see a part of your body covered by a bathing suit.
 - » Someone asks you to keep a secret from Mom or Dad.
- **Leverage existing resources** to begin a conversation about sex and body image with your elementary schooler. Study your child to know which approach to take—whether you should read the resource together or let them read it alone and follow up with them after. The goal is to establish trust and transparency as you begin the journey of healthy conversations about sex and dating throughout the remaining phases with your child.

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SEXUAL INTEGRITY

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Your kid is growing fast and learning new information every day. They have questions about things you've forgotten—like fractions. They have questions about things you don't remember every knowing—like state capitols. But the hardest questions they may ask may be questions about the thing that put them on this planet to begin with. Don't panic. The conversations will get more complicated as they get older, but for now it's basic (even if it does feel awkward at times). During this phase, your role is to . . .

INFORM
them how things work



So they will . . .
**UNDERSTAND BIOLOGY AND
UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY
GOD MADE US.**

This guide is designed to help you meet your elementary kid where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of sex. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind:

SEXUAL INTEGRITY
Guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

TO ELEMENTARY-AGE KIDS (K-3), SAY THINGS LIKE:

"Can we talk more about this another time?" *(Always finish the conversation with room to pick it back up again later.)*

"It's always okay to tell someone 'NO' if you don't want them to touch you."

"I'm so glad you asked me."

"God made your body, and we want to take good care of it."

"God made sex and designed it to be a good gift for a husband and wife."

"Sex is private, it's not something we watch or look at."

"When a girl starts to become a woman, she will . . ."

"When a boy starts to become a man, he will . . ."

TO ELEMENTARY-AGE KIDS (4-5), SAY THINGS LIKE:

"Can we talk about this more another time?"

"Pornography is dangerous because it often becomes an addiction that can limit your ability to enjoy real sex later." *(Talk about why pornography can be harmful.)*

"Sex can be dangerous outside of marriage."
(Caution sexual activity.)

"I'm so glad you asked me."

"I don't like to hear someone say that word because . . ."
(Refine the words they use for bodies, sex, and people.)

**"What kinds of things have
you heard about sex?"**

"Where did you hear about . . . ?"

"What do you think that means?"

"You are beautiful/handsome just the way you are."

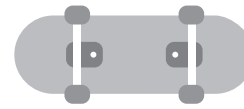
JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The elementary years are the years to honor their questions with appropriately forthright answers. Remember, you capture their heart when you help them learn with concrete examples, so be simple and direct. Encourage the conversation, but don't force it. You want to keep this conversation going!

To enhance the conversation, here are a few things your family can try:

- **Intentionally point out the difference** between the media's portrayal of sex and dating versus real life. Don't make this a formal, one-time talk, but begin a conversation that you pick back up whenever you watch a movie, pass a billboard, or walk by a magazine stand together. Ask your middle schooler what seems real, appropriate, or likely to them as compared to the slanted way sex and dating are widely depicted.
- **Practice reaction management.** In this phase, your middle schooler might ask you some questions or tell you stories that shock you. Remember that they're gauging your reaction to decide whether or not you're a "safe" place to bring their comments and concerns. It's okay to say, "Wow. That's a serious—but a REALLY good—question/story. Can I think about it before I get back to you?"
- **Find out where their closest friends** and/or teammates attend student ministry and get your middle schooler connected there. This may be the most important phase of all to have like-minded adults and role models in your student's life. They need to know they can discuss potentially uncomfortable topics such as sex and dating with a safe grown-up who is not their mom or dad. But don't stop there—stay involved in what's being taught to your middle schooler. Subscribe to the ministry's podcast, website, or newsletter. Get to know their leaders. When they do a sex and/or dating series, follow up with your middle schooler and continue the conversation at home.

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Middle School

SEXUAL INTEGRITY

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Your middle schooler is changing fast. Changing their friends, changing their style, changing their interests, and yes—changing physically. As with any change, you have three options. You can resist it, and inevitably fail. You can ignore it, and become increasingly disconnected. Or you can talk about it, and probably suffer a fair amount of eye rolls. It's ok, you'll both survive. During this phase, your role is to:

INTERPRET
what is changing



So they will . . .
**RESPECT THEMSELVES AND
GROW IN CONFIDENCE.**

This guide is designed to help you connect with your middle school student where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of sexual integrity. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep the end goal in mind:

SEXUAL INTEGRITY

Guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

TO SIXTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"You don't need to wear something like that to get attention."

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?" *(Always finish the conversation with room to pick it back up again later.)*

"That's a good question. I'm so glad you asked me." *(Answer questions about sex in detail; if you don't, the internet will.)*

"I'm here if you want to talk."

"I love the way your eyes shine when you laugh." *(Increase positive affirmation and affection.)*

"Thank you for sharing that with me; you are brave to share that." *(Take what they say and feel seriously.)*

"God made your body on purpose and you are beautiful" *(Counteract the negative things they are thinking about themselves.)*

TO SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"What does it mean to honor God with your body?" *(Help them personalize boundaries.)*

"That's a good question. I'm so glad you asked me."

"I'm here if you want to talk."

"Who do you know that is dating?"

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?"

"If you ever feel like someone is wanting you to do something you don't want to do, you could always say . . ." *(Help them script responses to difficult situations.)*

"When Jon commented on your post, what did he mean by . . . ?" *(Stay curious about what's happening in their world.)*

"What does dating mean to you?"

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The middle school years are the years to affirm their personal journey. Remember, they may not always act like it, but they need you now more than ever. Encourage their questions by being available and relaxed. Keep your cool if a question catches you off guard and be sure and take what they say and how they feel seriously. Keep the conversation going by staying curious about their world and what concerns them.

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It

When having a conversation with your teenager, here are a few tips to consider:

- **Normalize conversations about sex and dating** in your household. That's not to say you should make light of either topic, or that it's okay to tease your student about crushes or relationships with the opposite sex. Instead, create a safe place for your student to voice their concerns or questions by maintaining a consistent dialogue about sex and dating. How? Initiate conversations on these topics, while also allowing conversations to happen naturally. That means you may be caught off guard when your teenager brings up sex and dating, but even if you are surprised, react in a way that lets your teenager feel safe and encourage them to continue coming to you about these important topics.
- **Remember, they are their own person.** You knew that already. You probably realized that when they hit the terrible two's. But remembering this in light of sex and dating is different. They will make mistakes and make choices you wouldn't make and will probably disappoint you. Whether they get too serious with a boyfriend or girlfriend, go too far physically, become depressed when they feel like the only one not dating, engage in pornography, or send or receive inappropriate photos—chances are, your student isn't going to handle sex and dating perfectly. When that happens, your response is key. Avoid shame and silence. Your student needs you to talk to them, to reassure them, and most importantly, to forgive them.
- **Acknowledge the awkwardness.** Sometimes, as kids get older, it becomes harder to discuss sensitive topics like sex with their parents. They're likely not going to tell you everything. Don't take it personally. Instead, invite other adults you both feel comfortable with, to join in the conversation—who will say the same kinds of things you would say.

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High School

SEXUAL INTEGRITY PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Your high schooler has only a few short years until they're out of the house—and don't you both know it! They're becoming increasingly independent, and you're shifting as a parent from authority to influence. In push and pull, just remember you still have a critical role to play when it comes to helping them grow with sexual integrity. Don't disconnect. Now more than ever you need to be available for them. Even though the conversations may be challenging, they need for you to show up. During this phase, your role is to . . .

COACH
them toward healthy
relationships



So they will . . .
**ESTABLISH PERSONAL BOUNDARIES
AND PRACTICE MUTUAL RESPECT.**

This guide is designed to help you meet your high schooler where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of sex. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind for your teen:

SEXUAL INTEGRITY
**Guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate
boundaries and mutual respect.**

TO HIGH SCHOOLERS, SAY THINGS LIKE . . .

"If you ever feel pressured to do something you don't want to do, you could always say . . ." *(Help them script responses to difficult situations.)*

"Don't give someone control of your life."

"What kind of friend is Peyton?" *(Stay interested in their relationships and ask follow-up questions.)*

"Thanks for telling me."

"How often do you still talk with your other friends?" *(If your teen is dating, ask questions to help them think objectively about the relationship.)*

"How do they make you feel about yourself?"

"What do you think about that?" *(Give them a safe place to process values with you.)*

"What are your favorite things about him/her?"

"Do you think he is good for her?" *(Let your teen process their thoughts of other healthy/unhealthy relationships they see)*

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?" *(Always finish the conversation with room to pick it back up again later.)*

"Even if he texts you that he's here, invite him in to say hello." *(Create opportunities for boyfriends/girlfriends to connect with you.)*

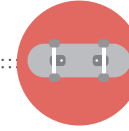
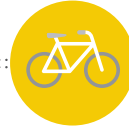
"Have you talked about whether you plan to stay together next year?"

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. The high school years are the years to mobilize their potential, so encourage their questions and affirm their sound decision-making. Keep the lines of communication open by asking questions that help them clarify their values and boundaries. Remember, your role as a coach is to encourage and affirm their growth.

SEXUAL INTEGRITY

Guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect



INTRODUCE them to their body

So they will . . .
DISCOVER THEIR BODY & DEFINE PRIVACY

INFORM them about how things work

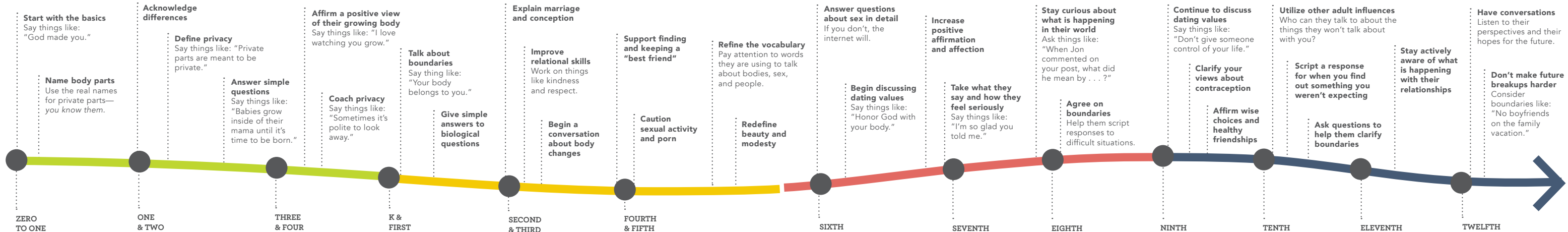
So they will . . .
UNDERSTAND BIOLOGY & BUILD SOCIAL SKILLS

INTERPRET what is changing

So they will . . .
RESPECT THEMSELVES & GROW IN CONFIDENCE

COACH them toward healthy relationships

So they will . . .
ESTABLISH PERSONAL BOUNDARIES & PRACTICE MUTUAL RESPECT



EMBRACE their physical needs

ENGAGE their interests

AFFIRM their personal journey

MOBILIZE their potential