

Parents First

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

Church Teaching *True Liberty*

The word “sophomore” means “wise fool.” The use of this term in academia is meant to remind us that having knowledge and having the discretion to know when and how to use it are two different things. Often students at this age have left the naivety of their freshmen year behind, but they still have a lot to learn. In some cases they may have learned to act in a generally virtuous manner or developed the ability to embrace certain virtues but likely have not mastered any of them. This is often due to the fact that, while they have learned the concepts, they have little experience with being truly challenged (CCC 1803-4).

As your child gains the privilege to drive, perhaps holds down a job, or begins to participate in adult level activities and organizations, they may begin to notice that it was easier to do the right thing when mom and dad were watching. This is a good time to dis-

cuss with your child the difference between true freedom, the ability to do what is right, the ability to do as I want

The virtuous person is always free to do what is right.

without regard for the good (CCC 1731, 1740). The virtuous person is always free to do what is right, but the person with bad habits is always a slave to their emotions, whims, and appetites (CCC 1733, 2339). Any person can know how to drive. A license shows that I have trained and shown myself responsible and controlled enough to be trusted. In a similar way, anyone can abuse their sexual powers in a variety of ways; only a chaste person “governs their passions and finds peace” (CCC 2339).

Growing in Virtue

Charity is also the virtue known often in Scripture as love. Love as it is understood in the Church is not just a strong emotional feeling but rather a virtue that requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. St. Paul reminds us of this virtue often at weddings (1Cor. 13) when we read his description of true love as opposed to infatuation. Genuine love is not blind. It

knows the costs and chooses to accept them, even when it means death on a cross.



Culture Alert...

- Sexual Lyrics in popular songs linked to early sexual experiences. www.sciencedaily.com
- A study reported in Pediatrics magazine found that sexually active boys aged 12 -16 are four times more likely to smoke and six times more likely to use alcohol than are those who describe themselves as virgins. Among girls of the same age, those who are sexually active are seven times more likely to smoke and 10 times more likely to use marijuana than are those who are virgins. www.TroubledTeens.com

The theological virtue of hope is directed at our salvation. It is a balance between despair at our own wretchedness and presuming that God will give us the gift of His glory. The sins against this virtue are common at this age where some teens will act sinfully, presuming that God will forgive them later, while others fall into deep despair and insecurity not trusting in the good things that God wants to give them. The former will justify any action but the latter may fall prey to flattery and bribery. Knowing your child well at this stage will help you to help them to find the balance that is the hope God intended.

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: Why should I stay a virgin?

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: Did they read something or hear peers talking about it? Are they experiencing some peer pressure? Did they see something on TV or the computer? The information your child provides to these questions will help frame your answer in a way that is meaningful to them.

Possible responses:

- “Even though it may seem like a hardship right now, remaining a virgin is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and your future spouse.”
- “And it can actually be freedom from stress. Most teens say high school is pretty tough, lots of homework and other pressures to deal with. By remaining chaste and abstinent you can make your life a little easier by not having to worry about the many risks that come from engaging in sexual behavior before marriage.”
- Some of the risks of pre-marital sexual behavior are:
 - Getting pregnant/ fathering a child as teen
 - Getting a bad reputation
 - Broken trust with your parents, family or friends
 - Damaging your relationship with God
 - Sexually transmitted diseases or infections
 - The emotional baggage that comes with hooking up and breaking up
 - Broken hearts
- Staying focused: Prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments can give you the strength you need to remain chaste.

Practical Suggestions

Most parents want their children to save sex until marriage but are unsure how to talk about it. Some parents may feel hypocritical because they did not remain abstinent. Some just don’t know where to start. No matter what your hesitations may be, here are some ways you can encourage your teen to remain abstinent:

- If you are married, model faithfulness, if you are single model abstinence
- Create and regularly discuss a family dating policy that describes

your rules and expectations about dating

- Help your teen set and maintain specific sexual boundaries and limits
- Use examples from TV shows, movies or new stories to talk to your teen about the benefits of abstinence or the potential negative consequences of teen sex
- Discover your teen’s love language (e.g. *The Five Love Languages*) and be generous with your expressions of love and affection



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



ARCHDIOCESE of OMAHA

Office of Evangelization & Catechesis

3212 N. 60th Street, Building A
P.O. Box 4130
Omaha, NE 68104
402.557.5610 ext.2104
402.554.8402 (fax)
www.archomaha.org

Parent Resources

- *If You Really Loved Me: 100 Questions on Dating, Relationships and Sexual Purity*, by Jason Evert, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009
- *Theology of the Body for Teens: High School Edition*, Ascension Press, 2006
- Family Life Media Center: <http://www.archomaha.org/pastoral/flo/media.html>. Select resources