

# Parents First

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

## Church Teaching *Actions and Words*

As your child spends this next year preparing for the next stage of their God-given path in life, it might be reasonable to take some time with them in discernment of where that path will lead. For the time being, most will likely devote themselves to the single life but a few may already be preparing for a life of marriage, religious life, or even a vocation to the

priesthood. Regardless of the path that they will eventually choose, it is important to stress with your child that staying on the righteous path will make

the journey far easier than wandering in the wilderness of the world (CCC 1804). While the world tells them to "sow their oats," the virtue of chastity keeps them safe now, and helps them to experience more fulfilling relationships later, avoiding a duplicitous lifestyle. While many people will try to justify premarital sex and cohabitation as "practice for marriage," such choices actually help to practice a lifestyle that leads to infidelity and creates a habit of always leaving options open rather giving one's self fully to another person (CCC 2390-2391). By avoiding a licentious lifestyle now, a person can actually be faithful

*"Before you were conceived in your mother's womb, I knew you."*

*(Jer 1:5)*

to a spouse they have yet to meet.

In a similar way, we can also love a child that we have yet to conceive. The power of our sexuality is not only the power to create bonds of unity but also the power to transmit life (CCC 1652). People in our culture often use contraception in some form or other until they are ready to have children and then begin the

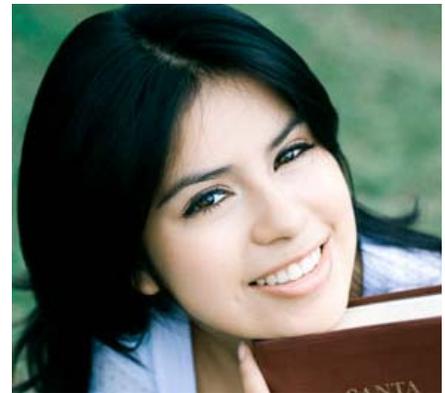
practice again when they are finished. Such practices are in reality saying to one's children and one's partner, "I love you, but only for the pleasure that you

give." These practices tell the other, not with words but with actions, that we only love them because they are convenient, because they came into our lives at the right time, and in the right place, in the right way (CCC 2370). Our culture tells us that when these things are not convenient, that we should divorce and find another spouse, that we should abort our children and replace them later when it's more convenient. The role of a Christian is to teach the culture, "for better or worse, sickness and health, richer and poorer" (CCC 1642) and "Before you were conceived in your mother's womb, I knew you." (Jer 1:5)

## Growing in Virtue

Charity is 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.

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 later 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.

### Culture Alert...

In general, individuals who engage in premarital sexual activity are 50 percent more likely to divorce later in life than those who do not. Divorce, in turn, leads to sharp reductions in adult happiness and child well-being.

[www.TroubledTeens.com](http://www.TroubledTeens.com)

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## Guidelines for Answering Questions

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- 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: I want to save sex for marriage but how can I when all my friends are having sex ?**

Know the context of the question (see above guidelines) i.e.: 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:

- “We’re proud of you for making this decision and we know, if you ask, God will give you the strength to stick with it.”
- “It may be true that some of your friends are having sex, but some may be exaggerating. National surveys report that 51% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders are not having sex.”
- “Regardless, you are making a positive choice for chastity and abstinence in a world that says sex outside of marriage is okay.”
- “To keep this commitment you’ll need friends who at least support you and at best share the same commitment.”
- “You’ll also need to be particular about whom you date. It will be easier to keep your commitment if you date others who also choose chastity and abstinence.”
- “Remember, prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments will help you remain strong.”

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## Practical Suggestions

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Even though your teen will be graduating from high school and may even be heading off to college soon, he/she still needs you.

- What your teen needs most now is to know that you are listening—that you hear, understand and want to share in their concerns and fears and joys.
- Your teen needs you to be a sounding board and a compass. Listen to their thoughts, concerns, hopes and dreams and continue to ground them by gently point-

ing them back to their faith and your family values.

- Continue to make time for each other and be ready for your teen to do more of the talking.

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



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### Parent Resources

- *Theology of His Body: Discovering the Strength and Mission of Masculinity and Theology of Her Body: Discovering the Beauty and Mystery of Femininity*, 2 books published as one, Ascension 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

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