

FOR PARENTS ONLY

Tips for Helping Your Teen Navigate Today's Sex-Saturated Culture with Faith, Hope, and Love

“Parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children.”
-Pope St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*

You want the best for your child but life gets extra challenging when your son or daughter enters adolescence. So, how can you guide your teen in making wise choices about sex amid a culture that has become hostile to traditional Christian values? There are no guarantees, but there ARE some things you can do to help your child understand (and hopefully embrace) God's plan for love, chastity, and sexuality as they grow through their teen years and into young adulthood.

Parents, YOU Have the Most Influence!

- “... the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. In analyzing the research responses, the researchers found numerous parent-teen “mirrors” showing a clear and accurate reflection between what the parents did and believed and what their teens did and believed.”¹
- Increased communication with adolescent children (by mothers in particular) about the social and moral consequences of sexual activity reduces the likelihood of adolescents engaging in sexual intercourse.²
- “The more attentive the dad—and the more he knows about his teenage child's friends—the bigger the impact on the teen's sexual behavior, the researchers found. While an involved mother can also help stave off a teen's sexual activity, dads have twice the influence.”³
- A strong sense of parent-child ‘connectedness’—as perceived by the child—is a primary protective factor in reducing adolescent risk-taking behavior.⁴
- Adolescents whose parents talk with them about standards of sexual behavior—including to say ‘no’ – are more likely to be abstinent.⁵
- “Different settings of faith formation impact emerging adults' ability to sustain a relationship with Jesus Christ; however, faith formation by committed parents has the greatest impact.”⁶

¹Theisen, Michael, “Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth,” *Family Faith Resource Booklet*, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc., Washington, D.C., 2012.

²Vincent Guilamo-Ramos et al, “Parental Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Accessibility: Parent Adolescent Communication and Adolescent Risk Behavior,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, No. 5, Dec. 2006, pp. 1229-1246.

³Linda Carroll, “Devoted Dad Key to Reducing Risky Teen Sex,” <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31086977/#.XT8LSEd7n3g>, June 5, 2009

⁴Resnick, MI, et al. “Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, September, 1997.

⁵Aspy, Cheryl, et al., “Parental Communication and Youth Sexual Behavior,” *Journal of Adolescence* 30, 2007, 449-466

⁶McCorquodale, Charlotte, et al. “A Faithful Challenge: A Longitudinal Analysis of the National Study of Youth and Religion Sample of Catholic Adolescents and Emerging Adults in Light of the Outcomes of Adolescent Catechesis,” *A Research Report Produced for The National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis*, 2010, p. 24.

CONNECT with genuine warmth and concern that your teen can experience daily:

- 1 Build a 'bank account' of affection and trust:**
 - Spend time together.
 - Eat together.
 - Have fun together.
 - Work together.
 - Attend Mass together and pray together.
 - Serve others together.
- 2 Express love and affirmation clearly and often:**
 - Praise an accomplishment every day.
 - Use physical touch that is comfortable for your teen.
 - Write a note to them expressing your son or daughter's unique qualities.
- 3 Get to know the person behind the mouth:**
 - Acknowledge your teen's opinions and ideas.
 - Listen for the message behind the feelings.
 - Express feelings honestly and respectfully.
 - Be courteous and expect courtesy in return.
 - Use conversation openers like: "Tell me about your ..."

COMMUNICATE what you believe about love, sex, and marriage.

- 1 Be an excellent example:**
 - Present yourself as a person – not your 'sexiness.'
 - Be pure in your own thoughts, words, and actions.
 - Express sexual desire with respect, reverence, and restraint.
 - Enjoy intercourse as a wonderful celebration of married love and children as a gift of that love.
- 2 Listen with your head and your heart:**
 - Listening means BOTH people are being understood.
 - Be ask-able. Don't react to off-the-wall questions, opinions, and ideas.
 - Help your teen to express and defend their ideas respectfully.
- 3 Be proactive in teaching your teen about chastity:**
 - Leave stuff around (books, music, etc.) that supports your beliefs.
 - Seek opportunities to reinforce / give credibility to your beliefs: youth groups, role models, faith-based conferences, etc.
 - If it's offensive to your sense of chastity, say so, and don't be shy about excluding it from your family—no matter who else tolerates it!
 - Don't wear out your welcome in preaching about sex. Let it be two-way discussion rather than a one-way lecture.

CO-PILOT so your teen will be able to navigate the culture on their own.

- 1 Say yes as often as possible.**
 - Say no only in non-negotiable situations.
 - Remember: rules without relationships lead to rebellion.
 - Don't be confused about who is the parent, though.
- 2 Don't sweat small stuff, i.e. don't nag about ...**
 - Weird clothes (if they are modest);
 - Contrary ideas (if they don't harm others);
 - Messy rooms (if they aren't a health hazard);
 - Minor infractions (let your teen deal with the consequences).
- 3 Motivate your teen to go from control to self-control**
 - Provide opportunities for your teen to demonstrate maturity, responsibility, and respect.
 - Exercise daily and vigilant supervision.
 - Protect your teen from too much sexual temptation.
 - Offer to be a scapegoat ("My parents won't let me." or "They would ground me for life!")
 - Hold family meetings and have your teen offer reasonable guidelines for dating, etc.
 - Encourage and support your teen in making a chastity pledge.

It's a fact - parents have the greatest ability to influence the sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of your teen. More than their friends, their school, or the media.

You'll be a positive influence if you: Foster a strong, close relationship with your teen ♦ Act warm, approachable, and caring ♦ Are credible and respected ♦ Provide moderate supervision and control ♦ State clearly defined values regarding chastity/abstinence ♦ Encourage communication in a trusting environment.

We hope that some of these suggestions will provide encouragement to you as a parent as you guide your teen in their important journey towards adulthood.

A Parent's Prayer

Lord, please give me the grace to teach _____ to have **respect** for his/her body and other persons' bodies. Help my teen to grow in **reverence** for your creative plan of designing us male and female in your image. Give me the courage to challenge my son/daughter to practice **sexual restraint** so that all he/she thinks, speaks, and does will be pure and modest.

Gracious God, please help _____ grow in the virtue of chastity so that he/she may bring honor and glory to you and your gift of sexuality. *Amen.*



Providing a Catholic framework on the truth and meaning of sexuality, love, and family.

Web: www.FamilyHonor.org

Email: famhonor@aol.com

Phone: 803.929.0858

Family Honor has a variety of programs for families, plus online and in-person courses for adults, and resources for parents and ministry leaders. Please let us know how we may serve you!

© Family Honor, Inc. Brochure used by the Diocese of Erie with permission of Family Honor. No part of this brochure may be reproduced in print or electronic form by any other entity or individual without the express written consent of Family Honor.