



parent tips



How to Talk About Sex

Where do your students go with their questions?

Think about that one for a moment. At school, they hear someone mention something about a sexual act or position. Believe me. It happens more than you think. Or they're watching a movie at their friend's house and one of the characters makes a crude sex joke about something they haven't heard before. Now your son or daughter is wondering about it. Where do they go for answers?

The number one place young people go to for answers today is Google.

Some parents may feel uncomfortable discussing sex and romantic love with their children, but it's important to remember that students may have no other reliable source of information. Do we really want Google dictating our children's view of sex?

In author Shaunti Feldhahn's book, *For Parents Only*, she asked teenagers about their communication with their parents. Three out of four kids in her survey said they would like to share things with their parents, as long as they were sure they wouldn't overreact. In other words, "I'd like to ask Mom this question, but I'm pretty sure she'd flip out."

Think about how the conversation might happen:

"Hey mom, what is oral sex?"

"WHAT?!?!? Where did you hear that?? Was it from your friend Becca? I knew she was bad news and I shouldn't let you hang out with her again!"

The plain truth is, the key to talking to our kids about sex is creating a climate that cultivates calm and continual conversations. Our kids might be a little more inclined to approach us with these questions if we can prove to our kids that we're not only a good source of discovering the truth, but a safe source.

Don't get me wrong. This doesn't require us to "sell out," set morality aside and just tell them believe what the world is telling them. "Have sex whenever it feels right!" That won't do them any favors in the long run. Instead, we need to open the doors of communication in our home so we can be advocates of the truth. Sex is a bigger deal than "2 consenting adults," and porn will try to shame our students to isolation, and distort their view of intimacy. The Bible is God's Word given to us for connection with him and direction for our lives. Let's make sure to put ALL of our advice through a Biblical lens. Don't know what God says? Check this attached resource! Let's also make sure our words are soaked in prayer before the topic is even brought up. This is a battle for our student's identities. Let's be prayerfully prepared for it and let's get to these practical steps.

1. **Talk about it early and often**

Remove some of the 'awkward' by making it more common. Plus, this isn't a topic that can be completely covered in one conversation, so don't feel the pressure to explain everything in a perfect way the first time you talk about it. Porn has also become a common topic for kids as young as 7 years old to explore on their own. One goal is to normalize sexual conversations with you. Begin talking about sex early so that you can establish important building blocks for the future, when they are more interested in the action of sex. Having a common report between you and them will make your advice not as awkward as if you wait until later in life. In many schools, Sex Ed starts in 4th & 5th grade. Talk early and often.

- Say, "I know schools teach about sex in school, has your school done that yet?"
- Say, "Just so you know, if you are ever curious about sex I am always open to the talk."
- Say, "Remember when you were younger and I said that babies came from _____? When did you realize that was only partly true?"

2. **Porn has no respect for age or gender**

NYU professor Jonathan Haidt says that our students are 'pornified' by the age of 8. Research now shows that the majority of young women struggle with this just like the vast majority of young men. Porn destroys a view of healthy intimacy and can distort the value of a healthy relationship. If we ignore this issue, we are ignoring a major threat to our children's identity. So, what do you do? Here are my quick suggestions:

- Talk early and often about sex
- Do not give them privacy on devices.
- Don't let devices stay in bedrooms overnight.
- Be aware of sex scenes in movies. This could spark interest to search for it.

3. **Don't freak out – make yourself a safe place for them**

Watch your face and tone. The calmer you can be, the more comfortable and safe they will feel. This is a BIG DEAL, if someone does not feel safe they will not open up again. So, no matter what they ask about or say they've done, keep your face calm and breathe. Don't freak out on them. You can freak out later away from them, but the safer your demeanor is, the more likely they are to come back to you in the future.

- Say, "I hear you, and thank you for coming to me."
- Say, "I appreciate you trusting me with this, how can I best support you?"
- Say, "Thank you for having the courage to be honest with me."
- Don't say, "I just don't know what to say..." (This could lead them to feel ashamed for telling you)

PLUS, if you are a safe place then you can bring up consent and abuse. Hopefully, this prevents situations of abuse in the future. It also gives a safe place to bring up abuse if it's occurred in the past. Be prepared for a kid to say "I was drinking at a party, blacked out, and woke up in a random bed." Don't focus on the alcohol, get your child in counseling asap. If something has happened in the past say, "I am so sorry. We are going to process and figure this out." Help them set physical boundaries so they know what consent even looks like. We can not be fully equipped to be ready for every situation. The most important thing is for our children to feel comfortable coming to us with their questions, anxieties, and shame. After your conversations end by saying, "I am not 100% on what we can do for next steps, but we'll figure it out and I can talk with your youth pastor to help us."

PLEASE contact someone from your campus staff for help on what to do next.

4. **Don't force consequences if they bring the conversation to you.**

It is a different story if you catch them hiding or lying. However, if they show vulnerability by bringing the conversation to you, I would encourage you to not give any consequences. Why? Because the value of open dialog vastly outweighs stopping them from one avenue to one action. Humans are brilliant at finding ways to do things that hurt us. They will find ways to sneak around you. Again, it's different if you catch them vs. them coming to you. So, if they show confidence in your advice or your presence for vulnerability, don't punish them.

- Say, "You know if you come to me with things about porn and sex I'm not going to punish you?"
- Say, "Thank you for being honest. How can I help you going forward?"
- Say, "As long as you are open with me, I won't take anything away from you unless you and I agree on a good boundary together."

5. **Wrap up conversations in the context of marriage**

Wrap all conversations in the right context: marriage. Whenever you're discussing sex and porn emphasize that sex is designed to take place only between a husband and wife. Stress how wonderful sex is between two people who have made a lifetime commitment to each other, and how that gift is meant for only them. Mention how painful and disappointing it ends up for those who have not made such a big commitment. Mention this in the context of porn hurting relationships more than helping them.

- Say, "God made sex to be the ultimate gift after a big commitment; marriage."

6. **Don't make a good thing seem bad**

Remember that sex itself isn't sinful, it's only the misuse of sex that's sin. Emphasize that sex was **God's idea**, He created it to bring great joy to people who use the gift the way He intended - within the context of marriage. Understand that your children are sexual beings from the day they're born and that the changes they go through during puberty are normal and positive changes. Help them accept and embrace the wonderful way God created them.

7. **Be honest about your story**

If you had sex before marriage, don't lie or avoid the subject. This gives you the ability to use your story to discuss the importance of waiting until after marriage to have sex. Did you ever struggle with porn? Talk with them about how God redeemed your story and freed you from it! If you were a virgin on your wedding night, explain why you're glad you waited. Explain (without divulging extensive details) your mistakes, the pain from those, and how God redeems our story.

- Say, "I saved myself for your mom/dad & it was not easy, but it was worth it."
- Say, "I made mistakes as well and was not a virgin. Take it from me, a lot of unnecessary pain will happen if you decide not to wait for God's timing."
- Say, "I used to struggle with porn also, but because God is faithful and gives me strength I was able to break the habit and become so much healthier and happier."

8. **Hear from them**

Hear from them about what they think about what you said, that way you know if they understand or not. If not, try to clarify. Avoid language that puts them down;

- Don't say, "You're not understanding because you're not listening."
- Don't say, "I already explained that."
- Say, "It's okay if you don't quite get it yet, let me try to explain it again."

9. Affirm how valuable they are over and over and over again

Emphasize their worth and value through God's eyes. What does God think of them? He loves us (1 John 4:19). How do we know that God made us with value? God was so specific when he made us (Psalm 139:14). How can we know that God will forgive us if we've messed up before? Because he is always faithful to forgive and cleanse us from shame (1 John 1:9). Emphasize their value from your eyes. Tell them specific things that you're proud of them for. Intentionally look for good things you see in them or express your love for them. What does this have to do with sex? Research shows the more adoration a young person gets at home, the less likely they are to look for affirmation physically in a relationship.

- Say, "I trust you."
- Say, "I believe in you"
- Say, "I am so proud of you."

10. In these conversations ask "How can I help/support you?"

ASK, "How can I help you avoid porn?"

ASK, "How can I help you set boundaries between you and people you date?"

ASK, "How can I best support you on this topic in the future?"

Before they get to the situation where they may have a sexual encounter, help them set up boundaries. This is a good time to talk about protecting themselves from sexual assault as well.

These tips will help us as parents be better prepared to lead and pastor our students to understand God's amazing plan for sex. We can't be 100% ready for every circumstance, but creating a climate of safety and adding continual communication in your home will provide you with the opportunity to share this explicit truth in a world full of explicit lies.