

Important

“In giving life, parents cooperate with the creative power of God and receive the gift of a new responsibility -- not only to feed their children and satisfy their material and cultural needs, but above all to pass on to them the lived truth of the faith and to educate them in love of God and neighbor. This is the parents' first duty in the heart of the ‘domestic church.’”

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 5

“Parents in particular have the duty to let their children know about the mysteries of human life, because the family ‘is, in fact, the best environment to accomplish the obligation of securing a gradual education in sexual life. The family has an affective dignity which is suited to making acceptable without trauma the most delicate realities and to integrating them harmoniously in a balanced and rich personality.’”

Educational Guidance in Human Love, 48

“Puberty, which constitutes the initial phase of adolescence, is a time in which parents are called to be particularly attentive to the Christian education of their children... Parents should pay particular attention to their children's gradual development and to their physical and psychological changes, which are decisive in the maturing of the personality. Without showing anxiety, fear or obsessive concern, parents will not let cowardice or convenience hinder their work. This is naturally an important moment in teaching the value of chastity, which will also be expressed in the way sexual information is given.”

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 87-88

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are receiving this booklet because you have pre-teen in Religious Education. This is a blessed and challenging time for you and your child, as you are called upon to nurture your son or daughter to develop spiritually and morally while he or she is developing physically. If this is your oldest child, talking with your child about puberty might still seem a daunting task for you. We have developed this booklet to assist you in the task that the Catholic Church upholds to be your “duty and right to be the first and principal educators” of your own children, especially in the sensitive area of sexuality.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, it is important for parents to educate their children about the dignity of married love by offering information to them that is appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Christian formation requires a positive attitude toward sexuality based on the value of chaste living. Since modern children are bombarded with media influences that trivialize human sexuality and public schools teach about it as simply a health issue, it is very important that your children learn about God’s plan for human sexuality within the culture of their own families before they pick up information and attitudes that misrepresent the meaning of sexuality.

It is important to create the Christian context for information about anatomy, hygiene, and sexual activity so that the spiritual and moral dimensions of human sexuality do not get overlooked by your child. This will ensure that the young person will receive the message about the holiness of the human body and be prepared to resist cultural pressures to engage in behavior that is not emotionally healthy or pleasing to God. A child can be free to learn about the intimate aspects of human life from a trusted parent, who has guided all of the other aspects of his or her spiritual, emotional, and physical health since birth.

We recognize that you may not yet know what exactly to tell your child about his or her bodily changes, or maybe you are not feeling clear enough on the Church's teachings to pass this wisdom to the next generation. We recommend that you read our booklet yourself as your first step.

When you have a chance to speak privately with your child, simply remove this outer cover and offer the booklet to him or her to read. Let your child know that you will create special opportunities to discuss this next big phase of his or her life without interruption or embarrassment. You may want to consider planning two conversations — one to talk about physical changes and the other to discuss making good decisions. Some parents prefer to schedule time to read the booklet together. Every family relationship has its own uniqueness, so it is up to you to decide what works for your own situation.

If you are a parent in a shared custody situation, you may wish to make sure that both homes are prepared for these changes.

You may want to keep this booklet available as a resource for when your child experiences these changes or for when he or she has questions. We pray that you experience joy in your child's growing into adolescence, always certain of God's grace and the support of the Church community to help you in your vocation as a parent.

In Christ's Service,
Diocese of Joliet Family Life Committee

Quotes from Catholic Documents

“Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.

“In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the body. Indeed Christian parents, discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality.

“In view of the close links between the sexual dimension of the person and his or her ethical values, education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality.

“For this reason the Church is firmly opposed to an often widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles. That would merely be an introduction to the experience of pleasure and a stimulus leading to the loss of serenity-while still in the years of innocence-by opening the way to vice.”

Familiaris Consortio, 37