

A P A R E N T ' S G U I D E

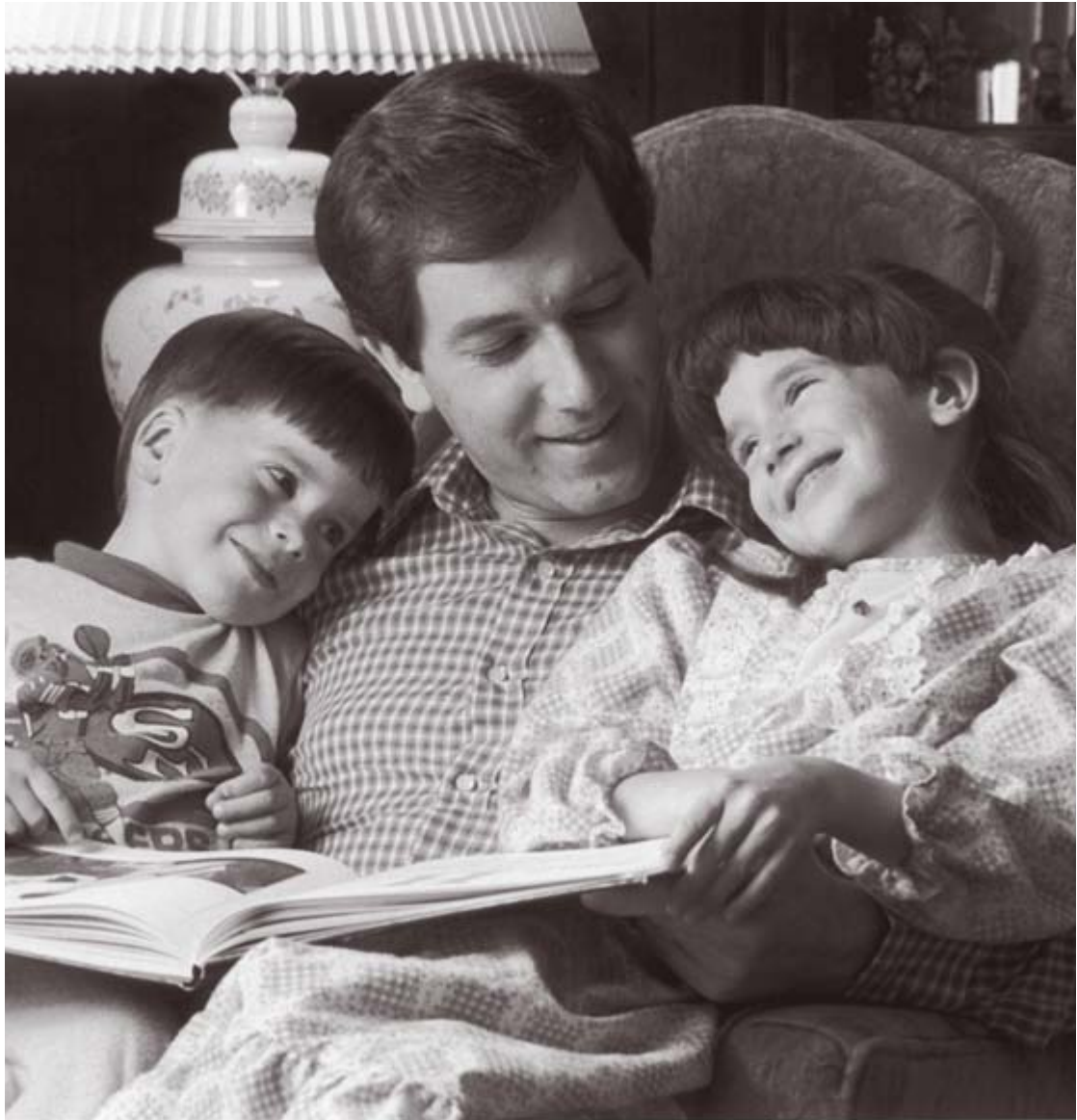


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to teach your children by being prayerful,
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You should feel encouraged and positive
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"walk uprightly before the Lord"
(D&C 68:28).*

Introduction

The Lord has placed on you as a parent the primary responsibility to teach your children. Though this is a great responsibility, it is also a divine privilege to have Heavenly Father's children entrusted to your care. One of the most important concepts that the Lord expects you to teach your children is the righteous meaning and use of intimate physical relations between a man and a woman. This guide was prepared to help you teach your children about these physical intimacies and to prepare them to follow the Lord's plan in expressing their own intimacy.

Intimacy, as used in this publication, does not limit itself to the intimacies of physical association. Perhaps the deepest form of intimacy is experienced in the sharing of spiritual experiences and desires. All intimacies are intended to occur in righteousness. Intimacies that occur outside this realm reveal more lust and unrighteous dominion than they do the true expression of love as taught by the Savior when he said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). No one can construe such a statement to include any form of unrighteousness.

As you use this document, please keep in mind that lawful relationships bring true intimacy while unrighteousness brings distrust, insecurity, and loss of faith on the part of those persons involved.

When the term "physical intimacy" is used, it will refer to those relationships that usually include some form of physical contact between the persons involved. It does not always refer to a sexual relationship. The clasping of hands or the tender touching of a parent and child can convey an understanding of a deeply intimate nature that transfers a feeling of genuine love and commitment between the two. Such an expression not only does not require any sexual involvement between the

two to give authenticity to the desired message of love, but the message would be destroyed by sexual involvement. True intimacy requires mastery of lustful feelings or thoughts. Sexual involvement outside lawful marriage relationships destroys confidence and the assurance of commitment by one person to the other. Such relationships outside the sanctity of marriage destroy the ability of an individual to recognize true intimacy and trust in interpersonal relationships. Marriage covenants, whether secularly or ecclesiastically made, lose their efficacy when a marriage partner violates the trust of the other by adulterous acts of any kind.

Intimacy is related to the level of trust and confidence that exists between two people or within a family. Confidential matters between husband and wife are important in making their relationship unique and binding. When that trust is broken, the marriage partners feel betrayed and that which was formerly intimate has been made common. Intimacy between them may be greatly strained. This is particularly true when a marriage partner shares information with another person about physical relations between husband and wife.

Preparation for maintaining an appropriate level of confidence in marriage begins in the family. Here a child learns to treat family "business" at home rather than to share it with friends or neighbors. There are situations that occur between family members that are not discussed with persons outside the family circle. Commonly held confidences create a bond of love that encourages greater unity and develops greater loyalty among family members.

This guide supplements the information in the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* and offers you—

1. Basic principles on the purposes of families and the teaching of children (chapters 1 and 2).



2. Suggestions on how to teach children righteous intimacy throughout all the stages of their childhood and adolescence (chapters 3 through 6).

First, study chapters 1 and 2 to learn the principles that provide the foundation for the succeeding chapters. Chapter 3 explains ways in which you can teach infants and toddlers to understand and feel good about being a boy or a girl. Chapter 4 explains ways in which you can teach children from four to eleven years of age the physical and spiritual information they need to know about human intimacy. Chapter 5 suggests ways in which you can help your teenagers understand and properly deal with their growing attraction for the opposite sex. Chapter 6 explains ways in which you can help young adults to make their courtships most valuable and prepare for the intimacies of marriage.

This guide is written for all parents to use, regardless of their circumstances. If you are a single father or mother, you face many challenges in rearing and teaching your children by yourself. The Church organization and its members—bishops, priesthood quorum members, and Young Women and Relief Soci-

ety workers—are all available to help you. But even so, no one can replace you in teaching your children. This guide will help you in most situations to fulfill your responsibility to teach your children about the Lord's plan for human intimacy.

As you study and apply the truths in this guide, do not become discouraged if your children do not respond in the way you would like them to. Do not become discouraged when you meet with difficulty in helping your children apply these principles. Perfection does not come immediately. Many parents are disappointed at times throughout their children's growing-up years. But you can strengthen your ability to teach your children by being prayerful, thoughtful, loving, and consistent. You should feel encouraged and positive about teaching your children to "walk uprightly before the Lord" (D&C 68:28). Be kind to yourselves as you and your children struggle toward perfection while sometimes falling short. The Lord will bless you with his peace and wisdom as you help your children to live correct principles.





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for your children until they can leave home—
you are training infinitely precious
children of God to someday be worthy
to receive all that the Father has.*

Intimacy does not occur in a vacuum, isolated from other human relationships, from values, or from our perceptions of ourselves and others. It is only one part—although a very important part—of our relationships with others. To understand intimacy properly, we must understand the proper nature of the family and of our relationships with others and the values that influence those relationships. We must understand our true roles with regard to each other. Teaching human intimacy to our children is only one of many ways in which we help them to prepare for eternal life. But it is a very important responsibility we have toward our children.

This chapter will help you review and better understand the ultimate and eternal purposes for which you are raising your children and will explain how the teaching of human intimacy fits into these purposes.

An Earthly Family Is a Preparation for an Eternal Family

Our Heavenly Father's work and glory are "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life" of his children (see Moses 1:39). When explaining the glorious potential of each of his children, he said that if they do all things he requires of them, "they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19). In other words, if we are true and faithful in all things, we will be able to become like God our Father and live forever in the family unit, working as he does to bless and exalt our children.

This understanding of God's purposes and our potential is a great blessing to you as you raise your earthly family. Everything you do in your family here on earth

should prepare you and your children to be like our Heavenly Father and to live in and lead eternal families. You are not simply caring for your children until they can leave home—you are training infinitely precious children of God to someday be worthy to receive all that the Father has.

The broadest, most general relationship we have with each other is as brothers and sisters. In this role we relate not only to the other children of our earthly parents but also to all the other children of our Father in Heaven. We are brothers and sisters to all. We also relate to others in the more restricted but more complex roles within our earthly families—brother or sister, son or daughter, father or mother, husband or wife.

In our attempts to fulfill these roles properly, we have perfect role models: God our Father and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Since a major purpose of our mortal existence is to become like our Heavenly Father through following the example and teachings of his Son Jesus Christ, and since eternal life with our Father will be lived in family units, the ultimate goal of a man or boy is to become an effective husband and father, and the ultimate goal of a woman or girl is to become an effective wife and mother.

We reach these goals by following the models set for us by our Heavenly Father and our Savior. How do they fulfill these roles? How do they act in relationship to us? Many passages of scripture describe their actions and attitudes toward us, but few are as expressive as these: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39); and "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). They love us, and they want to help us become worthy to return and live with them and help us become able to

feel all the joy that they feel. They do everything they can to bring that about, including the great suffering and sacrifice of the Atonement.

How different that is from the attitude of Satan, who said to the Father, “give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1), and who rebelled against God and sought to destroy the agency of man—all for his own gain. “And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18). The way Satan tries to make us miserable is to tempt us to be like him, selfish and self-centered, thinking only of our own gain—just as he tempted Cain (see Moses 4:29–33).

The philosophy of the world follows Satan: “Do your own thing.” “What’s in it for me?” “If you think it’s right, it’s right.” “If it feels good, do it.” As a result of such thinking, people turn away from God and focus on themselves, doing just what Satan himself wanted to do—setting themselves up as the judges of what is right and wrong and taking to themselves all honor and glory. They treat other people largely as a means to their own gain, their own pleasure. Ultimately, they are miserable, because happiness is the result of becoming like God, not like Satan.

The adversary’s role was absolutely opposite to the role of the Savior. Jesus said he would do all that was required to redeem mankind without seeking any honor to himself (see Moses 4:2). He did it because he loved us. He offered himself as a sacrifice without expectation or desire for himself. He did it because he loved the Father.

Christ, as our Savior, set the perfect example of brotherly love. He encourages us to righteousness. Everything he does and has done is to help us toward immortality and eternal life. He sacrificed all to help us achieve that end. He knew that this would include the incomprehensible suffering involved in the Atonement, but he offered himself willingly and lovingly. He had no desire for power or the admiration of men.

If we are to emulate the love of Christ, we must have the same objective: “I do what I do because I love you, not because I have any selfish gain in mind or any anticipation that credit shall come to me. I do what is best for you in an eternal sense—what will help you return to our Heavenly Father.” If all of our roles are fulfilled with that in mind, they will be fulfilled in righteousness and result in unconditional love for each other and in helping each of us obtain immortality and eternal life.

Your ultimate goal within your family should be to prepare your sons and daughters to be worthy of the great blessings the Lord has promised them if they are true and faithful. One of the gravest responsibilities a person ever takes upon himself is that of preparing a child for these eternal possibilities.

Children Are Spirit Brothers and Sisters Entrusted to Your Care

When the Lord asked Cain, “Where is thy brother?” Cain’s retort was, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (See Genesis 4:9, Moses 5:34.) The answer, for us, must be a resounding yes. How are we our brother’s keeper? By virtue of our determination to encourage him toward righteousness, to help him achieve eternal joy in the kingdom of our Father.

As you teach and train your children, contemplate the relationship you had with them in the premortal life. There we were all brothers and sisters of the same Father—members of the same family. Remember Christ’s example when you deal with your children. Always be aware that these spirits are really your brothers and sisters and that you have the responsibility to help them become like our common Father. You are the keeper of your brothers and sisters—with special responsibilities for those of your brothers and sisters who are your children—and you should be determined to encourage them toward righteousness.

Ways to Prepare Your Children for Their Eternal Possibilities

If your goal in your earthly family is to help your children become like their Heavenly Father and be worthy to be eternal fathers and mothers, what can you do to reach this goal? There are many things you must do, of course, but there are three very important ideas that relate particularly to giving your children an eternal understanding of the role of human intimacy:

1. Teach your children what a righteous parent is, by example and precept.
2. Teach your children the roles that God has ordained for men and women to fill in this life and throughout eternity.
3. Teach your children to use their procreative powers in the way God has commanded so that they can establish righteous families here and be worthy to lead families in eternity.

Teach Children What a Righteous Parent Is

By your example and by your teachings, you should make sure that your children understand what a righteous parent is and does. As you obey the Lord’s commandments and serve him and your family, you help your children to prepare for their roles as fathers and mothers in the eternities.

Our roles as fathers or mothers are like our Heavenly Father’s role—to help our children attain immortality and eternal life. It does not matter whether the family is structured in the ideal form with both father and mother, or whether the family is temporarily incomplete, with a single parent—the objective remains the same. Furthermore, children have a similar role. Chil-

dren honor and encourage their parents to righteousness because they love them. The expression of love unfeigned and a desire to help others achieve immortality and eternal life are constant throughout all the roles that we fill.

The most fundamental responsibility you have as a righteous parent is to bless your children. You create conditions and circumstances, opportunities and privileges, that will encourage the spiritual success of your children. This, of course, is also what God does for his children. Your teachings, behavior, activities—everything you do—should bring the blessings of righteousness into the lives of your children. The Lord often says, “If you do what I require of you, I will bless you” (see D&C 82:10, 130:20–21; Mosiah 2:22).

As a righteous parent, you also protect your children against the adversary—against untruths and sin. You do this by teaching your children the doctrines of the Lord and instilling in them faith in the Lord and confidence in the correctness of his commandments. You also do this by being an example of righteousness. Children tend to do what they have seen their parents do. An example of a righteous parent becomes one of their greatest protections against the adversary. The prophet Nephi said that “whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24).

As you teach your children the word of God, you will be offering your children spiritual protection that will last throughout their lives. You will have provided for them truths by which they can judge their own actions. Knowing the truth enables both parent and child to communicate more effectively. Knowing the truth takes the chance out of decision making. Only when the truth is known is one actually making a choice; otherwise, he may be simply guessing at the course he should follow.

A righteous parent gives and explains the laws of the Lord to his children. Through prayerful study of the scriptures and the writings of the living prophets, you can come to know and understand the laws of God. Inquiries of the Lord through prayer will enable you to know how to reach the heart of your child with the truth of the Lord’s laws. Prayer is the parent’s as well as the child’s avenue of communication with our Heavenly Father. With careful, attentive effort, in prayer and study, a parent is more likely to apply the Lord’s laws appropriately. Parents should do all they can to ensure that what they require of their children is in accordance with His laws. Doing everything in your home the Lord’s way will enable your children to follow you in righteousness.

The Lord said, “Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that



teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents” (D&C 68:25).

You must not only provide the law of the Lord to your children, you must help them keep on the correct course. Counseling them in love when you see that they are straying from the Lord’s laws will help them exercise their agency with understanding. The use of agency includes the consequences resulting from our decisions. Correcting a child—“reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:43) and then showing an increase of love toward the child—is an opportunity to teach the great principle of repentance. An understanding of repentance increases a child’s appreciation for Christ and initiates awareness of the justice and mercy of God. It also helps parents strive to judge the acts of their children righteously and justly. This means not only teaching the law and reproving when the law is broken, but offering mercy and forgiveness when your children repent and try to do better.

In all things live a life that is as Christlike as possible. Live just the way you expect your children to live.

Teach Children the Eternal Roles of Men and Women

President Spencer W. Kimball has said, “[Men’s and women’s] roles and assignments differ. These are eternal differences—with women being given many tremendous responsibilities of motherhood and sister-



hood and men being given the tremendous responsibilities of fatherhood and the priesthood—but the man is not without the woman nor the woman without the man in the Lord (see 1 Cor. 1:11)” (“The Role of Righteous Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 102).

President Kimball also explained, “The Lord organized the whole program in the beginning with a father who procreates, provides, and loves and directs, and a mother who conceives and bears and nurtures and feeds and trains. The Lord could have organized it otherwise but chose to have a unit with responsibility and purposeful associations” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1973, p. 151; or *Ensign*, July 1973, p. 15).

While many of the responsibilities of men and women are the same, the Lord has assigned to his sons the responsibilities of holding the priesthood, of providing for their families, and of presiding in righteousness over them. The Lord has assigned to his daughters the responsibilities of helping to create earthly bodies for his spirit children, of nurturing and caring for those children, and of sustaining and counseling with her husband.

Help your young children understand that being a man or a woman is part of a pattern of life established and approved by their eternal Creator. You teach your children to be proud of being a boy or a girl primarily by being secure and happy yourself with your masculinity or femininity and by demonstrating love for your spouse. As a child interacts with parents who are secure in these ways, he learns that men and women have a natural and complementary affection for each other and that each parent contributes in unique ways to his or

her comfort and security. The child learns that both masculinity and femininity have value and develops a sense of happiness and security in being a boy or a girl.

The following ideas may help you understand the weighty assignments the Lord has given to his sons. He has given them the priesthood, which is his power given to men to act in his name. But this power is not given to men merely to give them authority. On the contrary, the Lord makes clear that “no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). The purpose of having the priesthood in the home is to bring the powers of heaven into the lives of the family members. Through his priesthood, the father is able to receive revelation, inspiration, and understanding in behalf of his family. He can perform sacred ordinances for his family and bless them in many ways he could not if he did not hold the priesthood. He has been given this power so that he can bless his family.

The Lord has also given his sons the responsibility of providing for their families. A father is responsible to provide all that his family needs—shelter, clothing, food, and whatever else is necessary for the physical comfort of the family members; compassion, counsel, direction, comfort, and means for the family members to develop their individual potentials.

A father is also to preside over his family. One who presides is one who takes responsibility for the outcome. A father doesn’t just take the lead; he is responsible for the welfare of his family and accepts that responsibility willingly and anxiously.

The Lord has given equally weighty responsibilities to his daughters. A woman’s greatest assignment is to give mortal tabernacles to the spirit children of God and then nurture and bless them so they will return to their Father in Heaven. She also may receive inspiration and understanding in behalf of the family. While she is pregnant, she nurtures the child with her own body, sacrificing her own comfort, and in some cases even her own health or life, to give life to another. The fact that numberless women have made this sacrifice does not lessen the unfeigned love each woman shows when she is willing to become a mother. While the child is growing, a nurturing, consoling, compassionate feeling develops between the mother and child that is not duplicated elsewhere. The child is literally flesh of her flesh, and the natural affection that exists between a creator and his creation exists in its strongest earthly form between a mother and child.

Teach Children the Proper Use of Procreative Powers

The relationship between a man and a woman is so significant that our Heavenly Father himself placed

Adam and Eve together as husband and wife. After placing them under commandment to obey him, he commanded them to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth (see Genesis 1:28). He gave them the responsibility to bear children, care for them, and teach them the plan of salvation.

That great commandment applies to all parents today just as it did to Adam and Eve. Keeping that commandment is essential to the plan of salvation by which all the sons and daughters of God can return to Heavenly Father and receive the blessing of eternal life. The proper use of the power each person has to create life is, therefore, vital to the fulfillment of the Lord's plan. From the beginning of family life on the earth, one of Satan's major objectives has been to get men and women to abuse this power to create life. He wants to persuade them to defile themselves during this earthly probation so that they will not be able to fully magnify their primary roles of husband and wife, father and mother. If he can persuade your children to misuse their procreative powers, he may succeed in keeping them from becoming all that God has planned for them.

The Lord placed upon parents the responsibility to teach their children to understand the proper use of procreative powers. This responsibility cannot be given to another. These powers are to be used only within the sanctity of lawful marriage relationships. As a parent, you can best help your children to see their procreative powers in a pure, chaste, and divine perspective, rather than in the strictly physical view of the world.

You can best teach your children that intimacy between husband and wife must be guided by righteous attitudes toward each other. The most sacred intimacy must be shared in a relationship characterized by genuine love. If we truly love others and desire their eternal joy—if we are our brother's keeper—our intimate relations as husband and wife will uplift rather than degrade. Immorality, which stems from a desire for selfish pleasure, will be unthinkable. Lust is selfish. It therefore draws a man and a woman, a brother and sister, into an unlawful or an unrighteous association with each other. Lust dulls the senses and encourages people to increasingly bizarre efforts to feel pleasure. Lustful men and women, married or not, will be preoccupied with selfish mental or physical gratification of their appetites without feeling the joy of natural affection. Virtuous behavior, however, does not reject the feeling and joy of the physical senses but provides a full and satisfying enjoyment of them. Genuine love—love unfeigned—leads us to lawful and righteous relationships, to compassionate but chaste relationships outside of marriage, and to righteous intimacy within marriage—within the bounds the Lord has set.

Three gospel principles must be understood before we, as individuals, can overcome the effects of our

fallen nature in mortality. First, we live in a fallen state. Because of our flesh, we are subject to the temptations of self-indulgence, selfishness, and pride. Second, we are all dependent upon the Savior and his atoning sacrifice to redeem us from our fallen state. No one can fully overcome the effects of his environment and culture until he relies upon the Savior. Third, we can overcome the effects of the Fall through the ordinances of the gospel and spiritual rebirth. When an individual receives the Holy Ghost and seeks the gifts of the Spirit, he becomes more Christlike in his nature—kind, pure in heart, meek, and charitable.

Choose books about human intimacy carefully when you teach your children or when allowing others to teach your children about this subject. The tendency of much current literature is to focus on the processes of sexual behavior and to neglect the social and spiritual consequences of improper behavior. Unless information on human relationships strictly accords with the revealed word of the Lord, it will be at best incomplete and at worst sensual and devilish in content and purpose.

In seeking knowledge about human intimacy, let yourself be guided by the thirteenth article of faith:

“We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

Later sections of this guide will give you specific information that you can use with your children during each stage of their development.

Conclusion

As a parent, you have been given the tremendous responsibility of teaching your children to fulfill faithfully the roles of eternal mothers and fathers that the Lord has promised to those who are faithful. Always remember that your children are your brothers and sisters, spirit children of your common Father, given into your care. Teach your children, by example and precept, what a righteous parent is, teach them to value and understand their eternal roles as men and women, and teach them to use their procreative powers within the bounds the Lord has set.

Teach your children that we have been given marvelous procreative powers. We can follow Satan's path and use these powers solely for our own pleasure—and reap a harvest of misery, our own and others'. But if we understand our God-given roles, we will understand that these powers will bring us true joy only when they are used to fulfill God's purposes and when they are used in the way that God intends.



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is the foundation for the
unity of feeling the Lord said
characterized his people
(see D&C 38:27).*

As you teach your children about intimacy, keep in mind the following principles that enhance learning:

1. Share the responsibility to teach with your spouse.
2. Teach your children by example.
3. Be consistent in your behavior.
4. Counsel with your children.
5. Pass righteous judgment on your children.
6. Provide a positive emotional climate in your home.
7. Hold family home evenings regularly.
8. Share your thoughts and feelings with your children.
9. Break the routine.
10. Express your love to your children regularly and frequently.

You can use these principles in all your efforts to teach in the home. Keep them in mind especially as you teach your children about human intimacy.

Share the Responsibility to Teach Your Children

Parenthood is a shared responsibility of a united husband and wife. Nowhere is this more true than in your responsibility to teach your children about intimacy. Together you should ask for and receive inspiration for the family, form family rules, supervise children's work, create learning opportunities for each child, and correct your children. When you and your spouse agree with each other as much as possible, showing mutual respect, family government is more consistent and stable. Unity between husband and wife is the foundation for the unity of feeling the Lord said characterized his people (see D&C 38:27).

Effective, loving parental teaching can be done by a single father or mother, even though it is more difficult.

But single parents do need help. The Church organization exists to organize our brotherly and sisterly efforts to strengthen each other, and this extends to help with teaching and setting examples for children. When one of us is weakened by a failed marriage or the death of a spouse, we may expect by right of eternal covenants that the Savior's church, through the natural affection of our brothers and sisters, will help us (see D&C 83).

Even so, no one replaces the parent. A mother, when without a husband, presides. In the absence of a father, she is the head of the family. She must make every effort to magnify her role as mother and head of the home and fulfill her responsibility to teach her children. She must be able to expect that, as needed, bishops, Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthood quorum members, and Primary, Young Women, and Relief Society workers will help her and support her.

Parents or single parents, male or female, should see the Church organization and its members as resources to them in teaching correct principles, conduct, and relationships to their children. The Church is but an extension of the family. It is organized by our Heavenly Father and is composed of our earthly brothers and sisters. Its primary purpose is to exalt the family and the individual.

Teach by Example

President Brigham Young said: "Parents should never drive their children, but lead them along, giving them knowledge as their minds are prepared to receive it. Chastening may be necessary betimes, but parents should govern their children by faith rather than by the rod, leading them kindly by good example into all truth and holiness" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941], p. 208).

Behavior that a person has learned by example during early formative years has a powerful influence on his behavior the rest of his life. Parents have the power to set children on a course that is likely to influence them through each succeeding stage of their development. Through personal agency, children may later modify the consequences of a good or bad example, but they will respond most often according to the example they observed in their homes.

The Savior testified about the highest of examples:

“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, there also doeth the Son likewise.

“For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel” (John 5:19–20).

To the best of your ability, use the power of a worthy example.

Be Consistent in Your Behavior

The scriptures tell us that God “is the same . . . yesterday, today, and forever” (D&C 20:12). Our Heavenly Father’s undeviating truth in word and deed permitted the Savior to trust his Father’s teachings and submit to the will of his Father. Similarly, our children will be more likely to believe our teachings and follow our examples if we strive to be consistent.

We *all* fall short of perfection. We intend to react with calmness to spilled food, a poor grade in school, or a late arrival after a party. Yet we sometimes become angry. But there is a reliable antidote to our own occasional immaturity in dealing with immature children. It is striving to be consistent in responding properly. If, in the spirit of love, we can be as predictable as possible in doing good, sooner or later, we can minimize the effects of our weaknesses.

Consistency is more valuable than extreme behavior of any kind. We cannot expect to moderate the effects of extreme anger by extreme expressions of love. Strive constantly to keep negative emotions under control.

One father reacted angrily to his daughter’s failing grades in school. His worry about her future overcame his resolve to reason with her. They exchanged harsh words and parted with painful feelings. After calming down, this father went to his daughter and, embracing her, said that he loved her and that his emotions were caused by concern, not dislike. They shed tears, and the bond between them was strengthened. Over the next several months, the father consistently expressed his love for his daughter, and she improved in her schoolwork until she became an excellent student.

This father was not yet perfect in setting an example, but he was consistent in expressing love. His children will be blessed even more as he learns to remain calm more consistently.

Counsel Your Children

To counsel with your children means to listen to them, give them advice, and teach them. This is very important, for as your children mature, your words become almost as important as your example. By giving your children spoken or written instructions and advice, you can prepare them to exercise their agency wisely, answer their questions, and help them understand the things they see in the world.

In a council, participants discuss, listen, and ponder, striving to arrive at righteous agreement. In the Grand Council in Heaven, we were counseled in the details of the eternal plan. We know that the words of our Heavenly Father and the Savior are truth spoken with kindness and infinite love. Earthly parents should follow this example. Fathers and mothers counsel (advise, teach) their children as they sit in council (ponder, listen, discuss) together. It is inconceivable that their counsel is given rudely or harshly, although they must sometimes be solemn and stern as they deal with children who may be rebellious.

Counsel is often one way. Many times information and feelings need to be exchanged in a council. In a *council* we can consider a matter together with everyone being able to speak freely without fear and without feeling they need to be in agreement in order to be accepted by the others. Counsel from a parent to a child is most effective when it follows listening in a council, when a parent gets a child’s viewpoint before expressing an opinion.

The following story illustrates how a father listened and understood:

“You were late coming home from school today,” John’s father stated. “I was getting worried.”

John answered, “I was at Brett’s house. We weren’t doing anything much.” But later he asked, “Dad, why would people want to take their clothes off and have their pictures taken?”

“That is a question I have always wondered about, too, John. Did Brett have some of those pictures at his house?”

“Yes. He gave me some. They are in my room.”

John’s father asked, “How did you feel about sitting around with your friends and looking at pictures of naked people? Did it seem right to you?”

“I knew it wasn’t right, Dad, but I didn’t know how to get up and leave. I was afraid the rest of the kids would think I was stupid.”

“So you went on looking because maybe you were curious—and besides you didn’t want the others to laugh at you.”

“That’s it, Dad.”

“I’m proud of you for knowing it was wrong.”

“The people in the pictures were doing some other things, too,” added John.



“Do you want to tell me more about it? Maybe I can help you understand. I want you to know, son, how I feel about that kind of thing. To me, people who take such pictures and pose for them are doing something very wicked. They make something evil of our bodies. Our bodies are good. They are like Heavenly Father’s.”

John’s father now had the opportunity to explain his own beliefs and the harmful effects of pornography. He and John also discussed how to deal with future situations and what John needed to do to repent. John needed to feel that he had paid a price that would relieve his guilt. John decided to burn the pictures and to fast and pray with his parents the next day.

Afterward, John’s father told John, “I’m happy that you would come to talk to me. It wasn’t easy for you, I know. I’m proud of you.”

John’s father did not act shocked and indignant when John first explained what had happened, and he did not shame John. He did not immediately begin to give advice. Instead, he encouraged John to tell freely about his own feelings and fears, and then he used the opportunity to explain his own feelings and values to John. He also praised his son for knowing right and wrong. He sat in council with his son, who was free to express himself. Then John’s father was able to provide counsel without causing undue fear or feelings of defensiveness.

Our children are responsible for their own behavior. Give them the opportunity to sit in council with you, however informal and spontaneous. Give them clear counsel to guide them, and let them practice following that counsel. They must feel the weight of decision making and, at times, the pain of error.

Pass Righteous Judgment

In words that all of us hunger to hear regarding ourselves, the Father said to and about his Son, as Jesus appeared to the Nephites, “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name” (3 Nephi 11:7).

Your role as a parent requires that you pass judgments on your children and correct them as necessary. Some reports are not about accomplishments but about failures. Here you can be most Christlike. Without excusing or minimizing the problem or sin, you can react with concern, candor, and practical steps to correct the error or help your child repent of the sin. In the story related previously, John’s father understood John’s need to repent and pay an appropriate price for involvement with sin. He exercised righteous judgment and counseled John with directness and candor, while at the same time demonstrating a redemptive, forgiving love for John. His motive for judgment was not selfish or vindictive, but came from a desire to help John become worthy to return to his Heavenly Father.

Husbands and wives are to share the duties of the family without giving passing or failing marks to each other. Both mothers and fathers must teach and give counsel to their children. However, the head of the family is a presiding role and calls for judgment:

“There is no higher authority in matters relating to the family organization, and especially when that organization is presided over by one holding the higher Priesthood, than that of the father. . . . The patriarchal order is of divine origin and will continue throughout time and eternity. . . . This patriarchal order has its di-



vine spirit and purpose, and those who disregard it under one pretext or another are out of harmony with the spirit of God's laws as they are ordained for recognition in the home" (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], pp. 286-87).

Influenced by the consistent, loving example of the Savior and by the counsel of his wife, a father is to give counsel to and receive counsel from his children as they meet in a council as a family. In all situations he is to exercise benevolent judgment.

You will better be able to correct your children if you teach them that certain consequences follow certain actions and that they must accept responsibility for their actions. Consider how one set of parents helped their daughter understand this.

Their lovely teenage daughter had struggled for years with poor teeth, many cavities, and other problems. Her family and her dentist helped her to understand that her naturally soft teeth were the cause of her problems. Her parents talked with her about the family finances and helped her understand the serious drain her dental work was on the family budget. Eventually her naive annoyance with dentists, family, and inherited tooth weakness gave way to a sense of responsibility. She began a serious program of flossing after *every* meal (it became a family joke) and avoiding major sugar sources. One year later she had only a small cavity, a dramatic improvement. But the consequences went far beyond teeth. Her sense of self-respect increased. She was healthier, and she knew from undeniable evidence that there are laws that, when obeyed, bring blessings.

Remember that you and your spouse should be united in your judgment of your children.

Provide a Positive Emotional Climate

The emotional climate in the home establishes either a positive or a negative learning environment. Climate means "the weather you can expect in a certain place." What is the "weather" in your home? Is it warm, comfortable, secure; or is there too much thunder, lightning, and cold? Occasionally a teaching moment will arise out of an atmosphere of tension and anxiety, but most effective teaching moments occur in loving, peaceful, respectful circumstances, when the "feeling" is right and when the climate in a relationship is peaceful.

Hold Family Home Evenings Regularly

One way to improve the emotional climate of your home is to consistently hold family home evenings. A well prepared but relaxed family home evening presentation is one of the most effective ways for you to teach your children. President Harold B. Lee explained:

"More and more, it is clear, brothers and sisters, that the home and family are the key to the future of the Church. An unloved child, a child who has not known discipline, work, or responsibility will often yield to

satanic substitutes for happiness—drugs, sexual experimentation, and rebellion, whether it is intellectual or behavioral. Our intensified efforts around Family Home Evenings which we have not only urged members to hold, but concerning which we have supplied more and more help for families, hold much promise if we will but use these opportunities. There is no better place to teach and learn about marriage, love, and sex than in the home as these can properly combine in a sanctified temple marriage. There is also no better place to deal with the doubts of our young than where there is love—at home. For love can free our youth to listen to those whom they know they can trust! . . .

"As important as our many programs and organizational efforts are, these should not supplant the home but support the home" (address delivered at Regional Representatives' seminar, 1 Oct. 1970).

Outlines of lessons, resource materials, and numerous suggestions for family home evenings are available in the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* and the Church magazines. Of course, the scriptures are the most important written resources. Make a plan to use and study them.

Family time together in family home evening activities is precious. Do not allow it to be tampered with by any other people, activities, or distractions.

Share Your Thoughts and Feelings

The Savior demonstrated throughout his mortal ministry that it was important for him to report to his Father in Heaven frequently, honestly, and humbly. We can suppose that our Father in Heaven encouraged complete and fearless reporting. You should strive to have this same kind of reassuring relationship with your children so that they will come to you with honest and trusting reports.

Children, like adults, need to report their efforts. They enjoy telling us of their success, but they also need the comfort that comes from telling their failures to a sympathetic listener. It is impossible to overestimate the blessings a child receives who is able to report in some manner to interested, patient, and accepting parents. If you deny this opportunity to a child, he may withdraw from you and stop communicating with you.

You also need to share your thoughts and feelings with your children. You need to share of yourself with your children. For instance, you can—

1. Share your reasons for doing what you do. One day your children will be parents. Help them to understand why you decide as you do, why you act as you do, and how you feel as a parent.
2. Share your goals for them and for your family. If your children know these goals, they will better be able to understand your intentions and correctly interpret your actions.

3. Share your values. You could say something like, “The most precious things in my life are my family and the gospel. These give me the motivation to get up every morning and try to do my best.”
4. Share the experiences of your life and your life history. Share experiences that you have had regarding early family life, jobs, friends, Church callings, interesting events, and spiritual experiences. Keep a personal journal that will allow you to share your ideas and actions with your posterity.
5. Share your testimony formally at family home evening or on fast Sunday or informally during teaching moments.
6. Share humor or stories. Enjoy spending some part of each day with your family.
7. Share your time and activities, including such things as private moments, vacations, fishing trips, hobbies, camping, sports, table games, music, and art. As you share your time through these and many other ways, you will build warm feelings of unity, foster effective communication, and help your children to observe the connection between how you act and what you say.

Break the Routine

Parents need an occasional break. Because parenthood requires so much time and energy, you and your children will benefit from regular breaks in the routine. You will be better able to teach if you regularly take time to refresh yourself. Dates for mother and father; weekends with a relative or friends for the children; solitude for each family member with a book, a hobby, or a household task; and some form of recreation are very important in keeping perspective and emotional balance. You need time for yourselves; even though you are expected to invest yourselves deeply in your family. Even the Savior got away on occasion from the stress of working in the service of the people.

Express Your Love

Love is the most powerful motivation in teaching the basic values of the gospel. In 1 John 4:19 we read, “We love him, because he first loved us.” This fundamental statement is a guide to your relationships with your children. Your children must know that you love them. They will love you because they know (or in some sad cases, hope) you love them.

At times you must express love in a firm and stern way. But even after you have rebuked your children, if you then make sure they know that you love them, they usually accept the guidance and teaching they receive. The Lord said:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

“By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

“That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death” (D&C 121:41–44).

All parents know that they should teach their children with love. Yet some do not express love very well. Some are embarrassed or simply never bring up the subject. How do you express your love for each other in your family? Does everyone know that he is loved, and does he show that he cares for others? Is it possible for you to express your love more openly? The following example shows what can happen if parents do not show love for their children regularly and frequently:

A seventeen-year-old girl who had been participating in immoral relationships explained that she never felt her mother loved her. When she started dating, she said, “Every time I went somewhere, she would question me as if she believed I was immoral. I didn’t like it, and we would get into a fight. Later I was so mad at my mother that I didn’t care what I did. She suspected me of doing it, so I thought I would just as well go ahead.”

This girl is not excused from her sin. She has her agency, and she chose to be unchaste. But what might have happened had her mother loved and kissed her daughter as she left to go on a date, and if afterward she had invited her daughter to share her experiences in a private, respectful way? If parents show and express their love and give accurate information without nagging and repeating themselves endlessly, children are more likely to listen and be influenced for good.

Conclusion

Effective teaching in the family is well within the abilities of dedicated parents. Guaranteeing a child’s perfection is not. As parents, keep two facts in mind. Constantly strive for perfection in your efforts to love, understand, teach, and set an example. Then, do not condemn yourself when, despite your best efforts, a child chooses to travel wrong paths.

Children have their own agency. The greatest parents who have ever lived could not overrule the personal agency of their children in heaven or on earth. Lucifer chose to rebel. Cain, Laman, and Lemuel rejected their parents’ teachings. Others, such as Alma and the sons of Mosiah, rebelled for a time causing heartache to their parents. While we may succeed easily with one child, we may struggle desperately with another, even with the same effort and love. We must not become discouraged or give up on a child who makes the wrong choices. We must continue to strive with him and hope.

Parents also make mistakes. We can be sure that we will fall short from time to time. If we make mistakes, either due to ignorance or even our own sinful weakness, there are remedies. We can reach out to children throughout their lives. Many parents have had sweet reconciliations with their adult children.

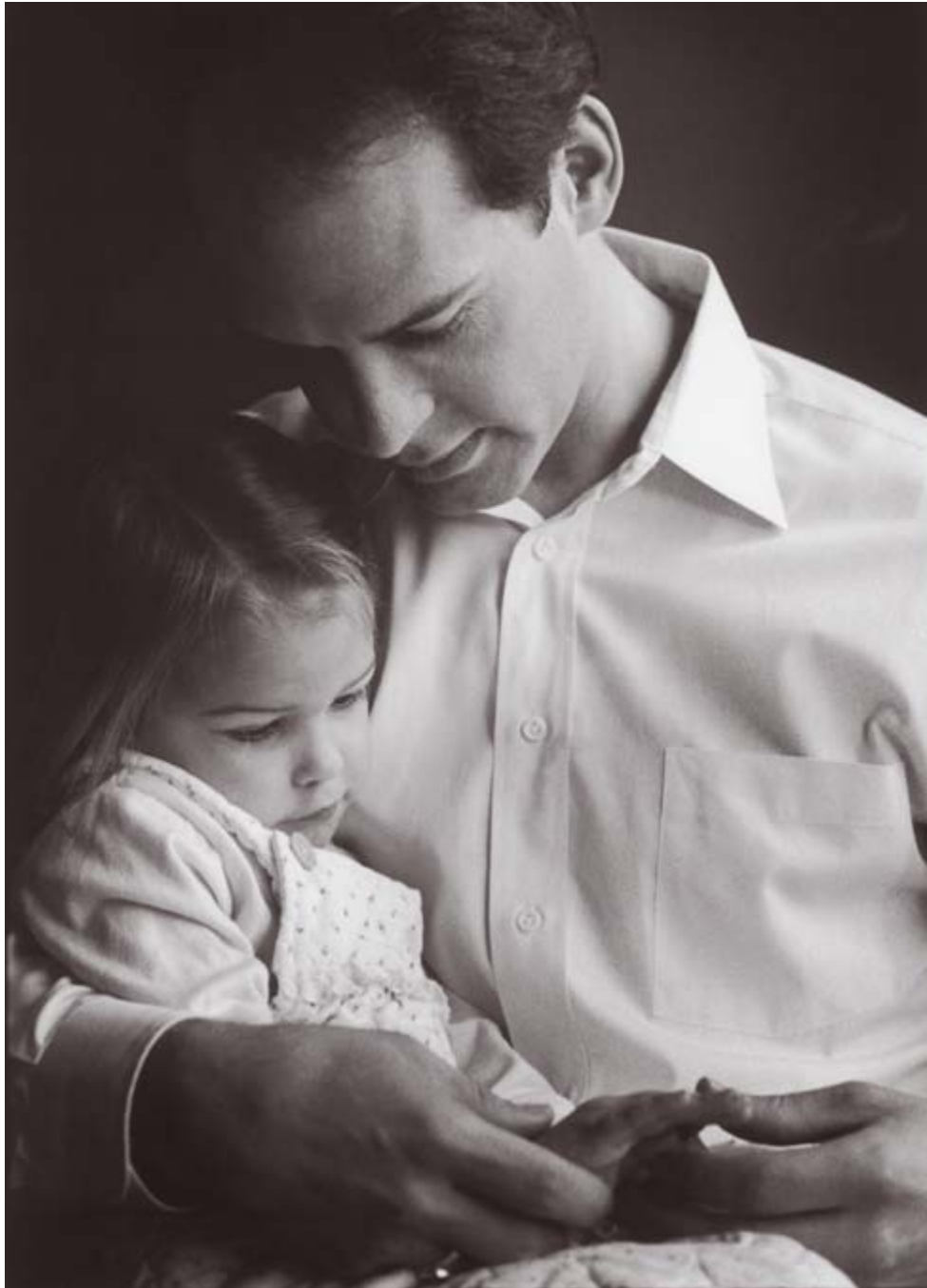
Do your best and continue doing it. Although their anguish was extreme, father Adam and mother Eve did not collapse over Cain's horrible behavior, nor did they give up as they saw others of their children follow him during the hundreds of years they lived. They rejoiced in the goodness of their virtuous daughters and sons. They labored unceasingly with those who became car-

nal, sensual, and devilish.

Most parents are successful in teaching correct principles to their children. Most children are successful in correctly applying those principles and experiencing happy, fulfilling, honorable lives. You too can expect to have success with your family.

Earnest parents know how priceless is the Savior's redemption. They rely upon his perfect, redeeming love, sealed by his sacrificial offering. There is no greater love than his love for us and his love for his Father. As you strive to emulate the methods of your Heavenly Father and beloved Redeemer, you will truly and effectively teach correct principles in your family.





*One of your important goals
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Teaching Infants and Toddlers: from Birth to Approximately Three Years

3

The period of life from birth to approximately three years of age is the time when a child becomes aware of gender—of being a boy or girl. As you read this chapter, remember that one of your important goals is to help your child understand that he or she is a son or daughter of God. Children are privileged to be males or females by divine creation. Help them feel that whichever gender they are, they are of great worth. Teach them that their gender influences their goals and that, depending upon their gender, their goals are to become effective fathers or mothers. Such early gender identity removes uncertainty about the worth of the child and builds security regarding his future.

This section should also help you understand how you can lay a foundation for your children to build upon in developing intimate relationships. The relationships that you build with your children during their early years will have a tremendous influence on the way they feel later about developing their own intimate relationships. While your children are very young, you can teach them the value of loving and being loved. During this period, you should also be careful to react properly to your young children's discoveries of their bodies.

Help Children Understand and Accept Their Gender

From the very beginning, the child's life is influenced by gender as he or she learns the central role of being a male or female person. Children learn various roles associated with being male or female. Though these roles are eternally significant, it is a fairly simple task to learn them unless we are harmed. A child needs to understand that he or she is acceptable as a boy or as a girl. Therefore, there is a crucial distinction to be made between *being* male or female and *feeling good* about gender.

You have the power and the responsibility to convey acceptance to the child regardless of its gender. When you treat a son or daughter warmly and approvingly, that child will increase in self-esteem as he or she increasingly enjoys being a boy or girl. This occurs naturally if there is acceptance and love within the home.

When trying to develop such acceptance and love with your children, consider the following counsel that President Joseph F. Smith gave to fathers to use with their sons. It can be applied just as well to mothers and daughters:

“Fathers, if you wish your children to be taught in the principles of the gospel, if you wish them to love the truth and understand it, if you wish them to be obedient to and united with you, love them! and prove to them that you do love them by your every word or act to them. For your own sake, for the love that should exist between you and your boys—however wayward they might be . . . when you speak or talk to them, do it not in anger, do it not harshly, in a condemning spirit. Speak to them kindly; get them down and weep with them if necessary and get them to shed tears with you if possible. Soften their hearts; get them to feel tenderly toward you. Use no lash and no violence, but . . . approach them with reason, with persuasion and love unfeigned. . . . Get them to feel as you feel, have interest in the things in which you take interest, to love the gospel as you love it, to love one another as you love them; to love their parents as the parents love the children. You can't do it any other way” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], p. 316).

In two-parent families, the child needs acceptance by both parents to begin to establish gender security. In homes where the mother feels good about her role as a family builder, she will make the child feel well

accepted. The mother and child are constant companions. Mother is a coach and tutor, involved in the numberless trials, errors, and successes of this developmental period. The father, on the other hand, comes home from his employment and tends to interrupt the routine. Often he interrupts with play, sometimes with duties, and on occasion with discipline. If he is a mature parent, he brings home with him encouragement and approval for what the mother and children have done that day; if immature, he brings tension.

In cases where a parent is missing through divorce, death, or excessive activities outside the home, it is crucial that a substitute give enough example of the missing gender behavior, including approval and love, to partially overcome the child's loss. When fathers fail or are missing, mothers must be able to call on their extended family and the Church for help. Elder Harold B. Lee emphasized the importance of the mother and the need to help her be with her children:

"Keep the mother of your home at the 'cross roads' of the home. There is a great danger today of homes breaking down because of allurements to entice mothers to neglect their being at home as the family are coming or going from the home. Now I recognize the necessity of some mothers being required to earn suste-

nance for their family. I am recognizing that, but [we all] should take care lest [we] fail to lend all aid possible to permit the mother of small children to be with them, if possible, in planning the nature of work or the schedule of time" ("Woman's Glorious Purpose," *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1968, pp. 12–13).

It is in this early stage of life, as the roles of male and female are acquired, that the foundation of sexual health is laid or sexual distress begins. By age three most children should have firmly accepted their identity as male or female. When family unhappiness has led them to feel unaccepted, they may become confused about their self-esteem and their gender role. Loving, consistent parenting helps children accept themselves and their gender identity during these three years. Unkind parenting can plant seeds of self-doubt and even confusion about the gender role. These seeds can germinate into personal problems in the following years unless parents change and show increased affection and acceptance.

Develop Close, Loving Relationships with Children

President George Albert Smith once explained that "our children are the most precious gift that our Father



bestows upon us. If we can guide their feet in the pathway of salvation, there will be joy eternal for us and for them” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1915, p. 95).

To guide their feet properly, we must show natural affection to children from the very beginning. Infants need to be physically and emotionally cared for. They need continual intimate contact with their parents. It is in this intimate closeness that their future relationships begin to develop.

To develop close, loving relationships with infants, keep them clean and fed, and meet all of their needs kindly and consistently. From this steady, predictable care, infants develop a sense of emotional security and learn that they can trust other people. Constantly give approval to them. Watch, applaud, hug, and kiss them when they lift their heads, turn over, crawl, sit up, or stand.

Be kind and patient as infants learn to do things for themselves. Harsh correction could diminish their self-esteem and make them anxious about trusting others. For instance, if a little girl tries to feed herself and constantly spills her food and her father habitually becomes angry, she may come to believe that she is bad because she spills. She may also learn to fear men. Her father’s challenge is to find a clean spot on which to kiss her and to encourage her to keep trying day after day until at her own pace she develops the needed skill. If she throws down the food in anger, her father should simply ignore her anger and temporarily remove the food from her reach. Patient, kind acceptance of young children’s efforts to learn will help them have good feelings about themselves and feel confident in loving their parents.

Through all stages of growth, children need parental encouragement. Punishment for failure will make them feel inferior and unwilling to develop close relationships. Pressure to progress faster than they are ready can create emotional frustration, for no matter how much they are forced, they cannot do more than their young motor skills and immature coordination will allow. A baby must learn by trial and error how to maneuver the spoon from bowl to mouth. Food will spill until the time when, after much practice, his brain gains control and coordinates his eye, arm, and mouth muscles.

How profoundly the Prophet Joseph Smith spoke when he expressed the yearnings of the human heart: “When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind” (*History of the Church*, 5:24).

Be loving when you correct your children. Do not withhold affection from them as a way to chastise them, for they may not learn to give affection to others. Physi-

cal or emotional abuse may teach a child that cruelty is the normal way to treat other people. Do not spank a child in this age-group with any force and never with an instrument. Also, avoid making a child fearful by locking him in a dark room or threatening to leave him alone. One couple sent their bright, energetic, and occasionally mischievous three-year-old out of the room when she became disobedient, but they never shut the door. The child was not cut off from the security of the voices, sounds, or lights in the rest of the house. When she regained control of herself, she wandered back to a warm welcome.

React Properly to Young Children’s Discoveries of Their Bodies

Except for the nine months within the womb, the most rapid and dramatic growth in human beings occurs during the first few years of life. Babies develop from nearly complete dependence to substantial independence. Each day brings increased physical skill and greater neurological maturity, allowing the child to discover more and more about his world.

One of the first things he begins to discover is his body. Male and female children will naturally discover and explore their genitals just as they do the rest of their bodies. The male infant’s genitals are very sensitive to touch. His penis responds to his diaper and to his parents’ touch as they bathe or clothe him. He will often touch and rub his own genitals. A little girl may also explore and handle her genitals. Your reaction to these natural explorations will influence the way a child later feels about his procreative powers. Do not either worry about or encourage the child’s explorations. Remain neutral, and the child will accept that these parts of his body are good, just as all the other parts are.

Two to four weeks after birth, the boy’s testes should descend from within the body down into the scrotum (if they did not descend at birth). This is important, for it is too hot inside the body for sperm to develop in the later years of puberty. If your son’s testes do not descend within a reasonable time, consult a physician. Be careful also to keep your children’s external genital organs clean and free from chapping.

Conclusion

When your children are very young, you should help them develop the foundation they need for building intimate relationships. Do this by treating them kindly and letting them build trust in you during their early years. Do not become impatient with their efforts to learn, for doing so will lower their self-esteem and make them anxious about trusting others. Also, react properly to young children’s discoveries of their bodies. Your children will then have the foundation they need to develop proper and loving intimate relationships in later life.



*The future ability to adhere
to eternal roles
depends on how well the
child learns to
be Christlike with others.*

The period of life between four and eleven years comes between two very intense stages of development—early growth and puberty. Speaking of these years, President David O. McKay said:

“The home is the best place in the world to teach the child self-restraint, to give him happiness in self-control, and respect for the rights of others.

“I feel that the first contribution of the home to the happiness of the child is to impress him with the fact that there are bounds beyond which he cannot go with safety; second, to teach him to be considerate of the rights of others; third, to have him feel that home is a place where confidences and consolations are exchanged; and fourth, to have him cherish the thought that home is a haven of seclusion and rest from the worries and perplexities of life” (“Home . . . and the Strength of Youth,” *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1959, p. 583).

These years are relatively free of rapid physical changes and emotional stress. Parents should enjoy this interlude. These years provide a time when you can help your children refine their characters and gain a proper sense of their role identity. Role identity refers to an understanding of oneself in *relation* to others. In contrast, gender identity involves an understanding and accepting of one’s own gender, with little reference to others; one’s gender roles usually focus upon the social interaction associated with being male or female. Parents can help children to establish during these years a good foundation for later intimacy by helping them understand true principles about how a son or daughter of God should relate to others in his or her gender roles.

Children have many things to learn during this

period. They are moving from a world of immediate gratification to a world of rules, delayed gratification, memories of the past, and wishes for the future. They develop social and speech skills. From a relatively few family-controlled relationships, they enter into an ever-widening circle of playmates in the neighborhood, in school, and at church. They learn in very significant ways about their bodies, about social and emotional relationships, and about spiritual relationships with God.

Male and female roles are an important part of this stage. Boys want to be accepted by their fathers and by other boys. Girls identify with their mothers and other girls. Sibling rivalry between brothers and sisters may occur quite readily.

Use this chapter to help you prepare your children for good intimate relationships later in life and to help you teach them about sexuality. The following ideas will help:

1. Teach your children to take good care of their bodies.
2. Teach your children how intimate relationships differ from other kinds of relationships.
3. Teach your children to accept and understand that basic differences between men and women are complementary in nature. To understand their role identity, children need to understand that each gender completes the purpose of the other’s creation.
4. Teach your children about sexuality as they become ready to learn.
5. Protect your children from physical and sexual abuse.

Teach Children to Care for Their Bodies

In contrast to the first three years of life, children grow gradually now. It is a time of learning how to care for their bodies, and what they learn may have much to do with self-esteem and social relationships. Boys and girls are similar in body strength and coordination. Internal sex organs are in a latent or dormant stage. This phase is the time to make sure your children establish habits of good nutrition, hygiene, grooming, and exercise. Help them develop appetites for healthy rather than junk foods. If you encourage them in frequent, vigorous physical exercise and play, they can develop enjoyable habits with lifelong benefits.

Principles of good care and hygiene apply equally to children who have physical handicaps or mental disabilities. Children with cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, scoliosis, or other problems can develop self-esteem as they exercise functioning parts of their bodies. They can develop respect for their bodies and increase overall health and attractiveness.

Whatever your child's situation, encourage him during this period to acquire habits of self-respect, hygiene, and attention to his body's condition.

Teach Children How Intimate Relationships Differ from Others

As your child moves into a wider social world, relationships with other people present major challenges. In the neighborhood or at school, he will meet other children whose values are quite different from his own. They will talk and act somewhat differently from him. Immediately he is faced with making rather complex decisions. If a playmate is dishonest, should the child report it, criticize it, ignore it, or urge honesty? How does a child respond to differing religious beliefs? Peer relationships and associations with adult authority figures outside the home may bring challenges to a child's limited social skills. While acquiring effective social graces is a lifelong endeavor, this is a special period of development in which parents should teach courtesy, honesty, fidelity, mercy, good humor, and spiritual integrity.

Interpersonal relationships may be divided into three basic categories: courteous, affectionate, and intimate. Children must learn the differences between these categories and what is proper within each. However, when both males and females are present there are complementing expectations. For instance, when both a boy and girl arrive at a door simultaneously, the boy is expected to act as a gentleman and open the door for the girl. Social deference by males to females complements both roles. Since both cannot exit at the same time, having the male take the lead in courtesy increases the comfort of both males and females and contributes to the respect each has for the other. It also builds feelings of self-confidence in each.

1. Courteous relationships are the basis of civilized behavior: saying "please" and "thank you," helping up a child who trips, not making fun of a child who is different, and cleaning up after oneself. Courteous attitudes and behavior enable people to live pleasantly with each other.
2. Affection is natural and is mostly associated with family relations. When affection is expressed, it should be remembered that it is more intense than courtesy, but it includes courtesy. We touch people differently when being affectionate than when being courteous. A handshake may be courteous; holding hands is affectionate. Your children need to see you being both courteous and affectionate. You can teach them how to be affectionate by hugging or giving them a gentle kiss, listening to a childish story, playing games with them, talking to and touching them gently, and telling them you love them. It is crucial that you continue the warm and loving acceptance that helped your children establish their gender identity in earlier years.

Children should learn that natural affection is desirable. In the absence of natural affection at home, the child may imitate the false affections he sees displayed by schoolmates or television actors. Often television and movies show people being aggressive, rather than kindly and affectionate, with each other. In particular, only occasionally will a child see on television healthy male-to-male or female-to-female affection. Frequently the language, voice tones, and body mannerisms shown by televised entertainment do not portray the gentle affection for which the Savior's followers ought to strive.

3. Intimate relationships are deeper and longer lasting than others and are more intense. Within such relationships are very strong emotions. To a large extent the child feels these emotions naturally. What he or she needs to learn at this stage is how to appropriately express them to others later, at the proper time. You and your spouse can be your children's best examples of intimate relationships. A father teaches intimacy to his sons and daughters by how he speaks to, touches, and generally treats their mother. The same pattern pertains to the mother. In some ways this relationship between you and your spouse is more important than the parent-child relationship in teaching your children about intimacy. Parent-child interactions can be quite subjective and emotional for the child, but children tend to be more objective when watching their parents interact. These observations greatly influence how a child feels about being male or female. The use of the term "intimate rela-



tionships” does not include or imply that incest is to be tolerated. Incest is not intimate in nature; quite the contrary. Incest is selfish and lustful and shares nothing of the love associated with intimacy.

You have a golden opportunity to demonstrate warm, mutually respecting relationships—courteous, affectionate, and intimate—and to answer questions about them. What the child wonders about is usually straightforward. You can answer questions about courtesies, about appropriate and inappropriate affection, about intimate relationships, and about sex or bodily functions; and usually your children will take your answers seriously and accept them naturally.

Teach Children to Accept and Understand Their Gender Roles

From ages four to eleven, each child is learning how to be male or female and about what being male or female means about their relationships with others. Toys, games, books, and friends revolve largely around gender. Considerable controversy has been aroused of late around such terms as *sexism*, *feminism*, and *machismo*, as if there is something wrong with being too male, too female, or too virtuous. President Spencer W. Kimball said, “I sincerely hope that our Latter-day Saint girls and women, and men and boys, will drink deeply of the water of life and conform their lives to the beautiful and comprehensive roles the Lord assigned to them” (“The Lord’s Plan for Men and Women,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1975, p. 5). For Latter-day Saints, the matter of virtuous role behavior ought not to be confusing.

There are many patterns of behavior that are appropriate for all people. Everyone, male and female, is invited to examine the character of Jesus Christ and emulate him:

“Christ is our pattern of righteousness. I urge you sons and daughters of God, who are in the image of your creator, to put your minds in the image of his, and to discipline and mold your spirits after the pattern of the Only Begotten. If you will do so, the Lord has promised that joys will follow eternally, and you need never fear having cheated yourself of what might have been” (Spencer W. Kimball, “On Cheating Yourself,” *New Era*, Apr. 1972, p. 34).

Among the traits Christ revealed as proper for men and women alike are faith, hope, charity, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, kindness, godliness, humility, diligence, and love. These virtues transcend gender. They are Christlike attributes to which both sexes should aspire. (See D&C 4.)

Spiritual gifts, as described in Doctrine and Covenants 46, are not restricted to one gender either. Included are gifts of knowledge, belief, administration, organization, healing, and discernment. Some females are gifted organizers, some are not. Some males are gifted teachers, some are not. There are all manner of character traits for boys and girls, men and women, to develop if they are to become righteous in all they do, in both their intent and performance.

But members of the Church must not be deceived about one immutable truth: there is eternal significance in being a man or a woman. The history of the gospel from Adam to this final dispensation documents equal

respect for the roles of men and women and the need for all men and women to develop their gifts to the utmost through living the commandments of God. But within that same gospel framework are some realities about differences between the two genders. This means that there are some exclusive things men are to do and some that women are to do. A most appropriate time for this development is the interlude between early childhood and adolescence.

President Kimball clarified the eternal significance of gender identity when he said:

“Some people are ignorant or vicious and apparently attempting to destroy the concept of masculinity and femininity. More and more girls dress, groom, and act like men. More and more men dress, groom, and act like women. The high purposes of life are damaged and destroyed by the growing unisex theory. God made man in his own image, male and female made he them. With relatively few accidents of nature, we are born male or female. The Lord knew best. Certainly, men and women who would change their sex status will answer to their Maker” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1974, p. 8; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, p. 8).

In the Grand Council in Heaven—a family council—we covenanted to accept and magnify, with increasing responsibility, the various roles of eternal life. We agreed to go beyond being brothers and sisters to the sacred mortal roles of daughters and sons, wives and husbands, and mothers and fathers. These roles are eternal and are ordained of God. They are not subject to revision by social scientists, by legislation, or by personal decision. Our Father’s covenants with us are on his terms, for he is perfect and knows precisely how we can attain virtue and do the most good.

There is nearly as much variation within each gender as there is between the genders. Each human being is unique. There is no one model except the Redeemer of all mankind. Development of a person’s gifts or interests is one of life’s most enjoyable experiences. No one should be denied such growth.

You should provide opportunities for your children to develop talents in various directions unhindered by improper stereotypes. But you should respect the divinely mandated roles special to the respective sexes. Teach your children that they will grow and be happy by accepting these roles and magnifying them.

Teach your daughters and your sons to seek opportunities to learn and to exploit every such opportunity fully. Girls and boys should learn all they can about every subject within their capabilities. They should nurture and develop their gifts (see D&C 46:11–26), striving always to achieve their full potential and to fill the measure of their creation (see D&C 88:19).

Girls ought to be taught the arts and sciences of

housekeeping, domestic finances, sewing, and cooking. Boys need to learn home repair, career preparation, and the protection of women. Both girls and boys should know how to take care of themselves and how to help each other. By example and by discussion, both sexes need to learn about being male or female, which, in summary, means becoming husbands and fathers or wives and mothers, here or hereafter.

There are, of course, realities to face also. Boys must learn basic domestic skills, and girls must be able to earn a living if necessary. In this imperfect world there are the widowed and divorced and those without the opportunity to marry. Their lives need to be as secure and complete as anyone else’s. But for all of the children of God, this life is primarily a probationary existence designed to prepare them for the eternal roles of husband and father, wife and mother.

If we are to be true to our eternal covenants, we ourselves must believe that the highest of roles, patterned after the highest of heavenly roles, are those of father and mother. Latter-day prophets have taught that there are important, unchangeable differences between men and women. Parents, by aspiring too much outside the home or through too much self-focused achievement, risk teaching their children that the roles of father and mother are not very desirable—or less so than the attainment of material goods, the honors of men, or even educational diplomas. President Joseph F. Smith aptly explained:

“After all, to do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all man-kind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman. One is universal and eternal greatness, the other is ephemeral. It is true that such secondary greatness may be added to that which we style commonplace; but when such secondary greatness is not added to that which is fundamental, it is merely an empty honor, and fades away from the common and universal good in life, even though it may find a place in the desultory pages of history. Our first care, after all, brings us back to that beautiful admonition of our Savior: ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you’ (Matt. 6:33)” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], p. 285).

Other statements from latter-day prophets also will help you and your children put these roles into perspective.

The First Presidency (Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and David O. McKay):

“The true spirit of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gives to woman the highest place of honor in human life. To maintain and to merit this high dignity



she must possess those virtues which have always, and which will ever, demand the respect and love of mankind. To know what these virtues are let everyone think of his own mother. With her picture in mind, each will agree that a beautiful and chaste woman is the perfect workmanship of God.'

"Woman possesses power to ennoble or to degrade. It is she who gives life to the babe, who wields gradually and constantly the impress of character to childhood and youth, who inspires manhood to noble ambition or entices and ensnares it to defeat and degradation, who makes home a haven of bliss or a den of discontent, who at her best gives to life its sweetest hopes and choicest blessings.

"Anything, therefore, is to be most highly commended and encouraged which has as its motive the ennoblement of womankind—beauty, modesty, sincerity, sympathy, cheerfulness, reverence, and many other sublime virtues must be hers whose subtle and benign influence is such a potent factor in the progress and destiny of the human race" ("Commendation," *Improvement Era*, May 1935, p. 276).

President Spencer W. Kimball:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. . . ."

"The bodies of men and the bodies of women were created differently so they complemented each other, so that the union of the two would bring a conception which would bring a living soul into the world. . . ."

"Now we must emphasize here that the Lord made man and woman, male and female to reproduce after their kind, and in the billions of unions there has con-

tinued to come a male or a female. Their bodies are still so formed that they will continue to the end of time in producing male or female, the spirit children of God. . . ."

"This was the normal, proper way to preserve the total program, to bring souls into the world and to give them opportunities for growth.

"Let no carnal mind decide in his or her feigned brilliance or pretended wisdom that a mistake was made. The whole program was intelligently organized to bring children into the world with love and filial interdependence. Had the superficial ideas of many mortals of today prevailed, the world, the human race, and all proper things would long ago have come to an end" ("The Lord's Plan for Men and Women," *Ensign*, Oct. 1975, p. 4).

President Joseph F. Smith:

"May the fathers in Israel live as they should live; treat their wives as they should treat them; make their homes as comfortable as they possibly can; lighten the burden upon their companions as much as possible; set a proper example before their children; teach them to meet with them in prayer, morning, and night, and whenever they sit down to partake of food, to acknowledge the mercy of God in giving them the food that they eat and the raiment that they wear, and acknowledge the hand of God in all things. This is our duty, and if we do not do it the Lord will be displeased for He has said so. He is only pleased with those who acknowledge His hand in all things" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1909, p. 9; see also D&C 59:7, 21).

President Joseph Fielding Smith:

"I get a great deal of comfort out of the thought that *if I am faithful and worthy of an exaltation, my father will be my father, and I will be subject to him as his son through all eternity*; that I will recognize and know my mother and she will be my mother in all eternity; and my brothers and sisters will be my brothers and sisters for all eternity; and that my children and my wives will be mine in eternity. I don't know how some other people feel, but that is a glorious thought to me. That helps to keep me sober" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56], 2:67).

President Spencer W. Kimball:

"The Lord said women have claim upon their husbands for their maintenance until their husbands be taken (see D&C 83:2). Women are to take care of the family—the Lord has so stated—to be an assistant to the husband, to work with him, but not to earn the living, except in unusual circumstances. Men ought to be men indeed and earn the living under normal circumstances" ("Sisters, Seek Everything That Is Good," *Ensign*, Mar. 1979, p. 4).



“And now, my beloved brethren, may I say something about the great priesthood responsibility of fulfilling our role of patriarch in the home. This role becomes more vital with each passing day, as new challenges to the strength and sanctity of the home arise.

“The family is the basic unit of the kingdom of God on earth. The Church can be no healthier than its families. No government can long endure without strong families” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, p. 67; or *Ensign*, May 1978, p. 45).

How, then, can you teach your children these eternal roles during the precious interlude years? Do it in the Lord’s own way. Work and play alongside your children in all the tasks and enjoyments of womanhood and manhood. When a parent is absent, Church members, brothers and sisters, must support but not supplant the single parent. Church leaders can help teach parents how to work alongside their children and even how to play.

Mothers work along with daughters to bake bread, sew, and plan family menus and budgets. Mothers perform compassionate services with their daughters as companions. And mothers and daughters engage in various mutually enjoyable activities. They sing, play musical instruments, compose music, write poems, and develop artistic talents in all their varieties with their daughters.

Fathers work with sons in repairing things around the house, maintaining the yard or car, and planning the budget. Fathers invite sons to help them perform service and let them observe priesthood blessings. And fathers hike or play ball or engage in other mutually satisfying activities with their sons.

Of course, mothers also teach sons and fathers teach their daughters. If a girl is intrigued with a saw and hammer, the father should help her become proficient. If a boy enjoys cooking, the mother should teach him to be a good cook. Parents should organize all these experiences around the child’s future role as either a mother or a father and should help their children develop their gifts to the highest degree, whatever those gifts may be. Parents should seek inspiration through the Holy Ghost to help them determine how best to help their children develop a proper sense of their role identity and an understanding of their ultimate good within those roles.

President Spencer W. Kimball has said:

“We understood well before we came to this vale of tears that there would be sorrows, disappointments, hard work, blood, sweat, and tears; but in spite of all, we looked down and saw this earth being made ready for us, and we said in effect, Yes, Father, in spite of all those things I can see great blessings that could come to me as one of thy sons or daughters; in taking a body I can see that I will eventually become immortal like thee, that I

might overcome the effects of sin and be perfected, and so I am anxious to go to the earth at the first opportunity. And so we came. There is a purpose in the building of this earth and in the creation of man, that he might have a place in which to live, to perfect himself, that he might become perfect and . . . raise himself, with the help of his Father, to godhood.

“Each one of you has it within the realm of his possibility to develop a kingdom over which you will preside as its king and god. You will need to develop yourself and grow in ability and power and worthiness, to govern such a world with all of its people. You are sent to this earth not merely to have a good time or to satisfy urges or passions or desires. You are sent to this earth, not to ride merry-go-rounds, airplanes, automobiles, and have what the world calls ‘fun.’

“You are sent to this world with a very serious purpose. You are sent to school, for that matter, to begin as a human infant and grow to unbelievable proportions in wisdom, judgment, knowledge, and power” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 31).

By teaching your children these eternal roles, you help them organize their thoughts and behavior around a nucleus of righteous values. These values naturally place sexual interests and information in an eternal perspective. As the child develops through adolescence and enters young adulthood, he or she is prepared to approach courtship, marriage, and sexual maturity with healthy enjoyment and virtuous integrity.

Teach Your Children about Sexuality

It is important that you teach your children about sexuality. The Lord has given the responsibility for the teaching of children to parents, and this is one area where children need accurate and morally correct information. The subject of sexuality is discussed so openly in today’s world that your children cannot avoid hearing about it. But most of what they hear will teach them the world’s abuse of the power of procreation. The home must be the place where they can learn the Lord’s plan for the use of this power and gain the strength to withstand the falsehoods taught by the world.

In matters of human sexuality, honesty and accuracy are important. Your children will hear of this subject in various ways. They may bring home offensive language, questionable stories, and blunt questions about sex. If they are to maintain gospel values, you need to answer their questions. Rationally answer, question, or seek sources of information together with the child. If ever there is a crucial time for open parent-child communication, it is during such conversations. This does not mean that you should force the child to confront details. The child’s own pace is usually the best indicator of how and when to proceed.

Although learning about sexuality can be traumatic for children, especially when what they are taught at home conflicts with some of what they encounter elsewhere, you can make it a rewarding time. As Latter-day Saints, be careful not to view the entire world outside the family as an ugly place. To be sure, we live in a time when corruption is rampant, but so did Enoch. There are also people about us who are good, kind, and decent. In this and other matters, parents need not be unduly afraid of outside influences if the home is a warm, loving refuge for its members. But if it is a place of pain from which to flee, then the world may be alluring to the child. President David O. McKay explained: "A child has the right to feel that in his home he has a place of refuge, a place of protection from the dangers and evils of the outside world. Family unity and integrity are necessary to supply this need" ("Six Small Essays," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1965, p. 757). If you teach your children by loving example to seek out that which is "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Article of Faith 1:13), then their experiences become a source of rich discovery.

To answer questions accurately, you must know the names of body parts and at least basic facts about body functions. Slang terms are not in keeping with the divine origin of our bodies. We are forbidden to refer to Deity with disrespect. Would it be pleasing to the Lord to refer to our bodies made in his image with disrespect? Neither should we be silly and use ridiculous words or terms. Teach sexuality by using correct, respectful language, information, and example.

Following is a brief summary of the physical aspects of human sexuality and of the development of a child in the womb. To obtain technical details of all the marvelous phases of human development, you and your children may want to study a medical text or a quality encyclopedia.

Conception occurs after the mother's ovary releases an egg, which enters her fallopian tubes. Millions of sperm are released into the wife's vagina through the husband's penis. These cells propel themselves up the vagina, into the uterus, and toward the egg. If one sperm enters the egg, conception has occurred. The egg then travels down the fallopian tubes and attaches to the lining of the uterus (womb). This lining and the egg pass off monthly through menstruation, unless the egg is fertilized by a male sperm cell.

The one cell of a single fertilized egg begins to change and to multiply dramatically until, about nine months later, the fetus has matured enough to live outside the mother's body as an infant. In its earliest stages, the developing organism is called a *zygote*; then it is an *embryo*. After that, it is often called a *fetus*. We shall refer to all prebirth stages as a fetus, a baby, or a child.

Within the womb, the fetus is protected somewhat from noise, disease, or injury by the amniotic fluid, which cushions and insulates. All in all, a normal pregnancy is a marvelous process.

How the fetus actually becomes male or female is important information for parents and children. Soon after conception, all children have internal and external sex organs in a simple form.

This differentiation between the two genders—male and female—progresses throughout physiological development until there are complete internal and external female or male reproductive organs. The reproductive organs that develop while in the womb for the male fetus include testes (where sperm cells are created after puberty), the penis (the male organ through which urine and spermatic fluid pass), and the scrotum (the sac below the penis into which the testes descend). The female fetus develops two ovaries (which contain all the egg cells she will have during a lifetime); the uterus (womb), a flexible muscle that can expand during pregnancy; fallopian tubes through which the egg passes to the uterus; the vagina (a canal leading from the outside of the body to the uterus, thus allowing sperm to pass up to the waiting egg, and the baby to pass down at birth); and labia (the tissues or lips that protect the vaginal opening). At birth the male or the female infant has reproductive organs but lacks reproductive capacity. This comes at puberty.

Be cautious to keep your own bodies and intimate sexual relations private. Children do not need to see or hear details of your private sexual life. They see and hear enough in the normal course of family life. They may feel threatened if a parent becomes too descriptive. Children usually learn subtly and cumulatively from ordinary daily contacts. There is much good that comes from drawing a veil between the children and yourself regarding private, intimate life. This is not a veil of fear or disgust, but one by which the body and its functions are robed in modesty and honor. The examples in the following paragraphs illustrate how you can use correct, respectful language and example.

A child may ask her parents about her "belly button." The parent briefly, but clearly, explains that the navel or the umbilicus is the point of attachment of the umbilical cord, which is the way the baby is nourished or fed inside the womb. If the child asks more, the parent answers more; if not, the parent does not. Some children will seek an explanation that includes conception and birth. Others will not.

Some of your children's playmates may refer to the elimination of bodily wastes by crude terms. If your child seems confused about proper terms, then first discuss and agree with your spouse about which terms are acceptable within your family. Then discuss them with your child. It helps if you have been using either

correct terms, such as “urinate,” or “bowel movement,” or reasonable substitutes, such as “going to the bathroom.” Gentle, humorous terms, such as “potty” may also be appropriate. The point is that body waste is an ordinary part of being human.

Remember that there is considerable sexual talk and play that can occur during this period. Playmates and young relatives may introduce such things.

If your child uses a shocking, vulgar sexual term, an angry response may keep him from talking to you further. You may have to consult with your spouse first and wait to cool down before dealing with the problem. Then, calmly and correctly explain why we refer to this sacred intimacy with the deepest respect. Frequently, there are language or vocabulary problems about sex long before the child actually wonders about the sexual process in any detail. If you have open communication, not forcing the issue, you can help the child understand all he needs to for his age. In some cases, the child needs simply to understand or be better informed. In others, he or she may also need to repent. The following experience illustrates how a father and mother effectively dealt with such a problem in their family:

A certain father walked in the door after work. After putting his lunch pail on the kitchen table, he warmly embraced his wife. Two children in the room noticed this out of the corners of their eyes, without completely losing sight of the afternoon television cartoons. He broke through to them long enough to extract a hello.

Dean, the ten-year-old, was missing. The father asked, “Where’s Dean?”

The television watchers gave full attention now.

“He is in his room,” the mother replied. “Let’s talk about it while you change.”

The parents went to their bedroom as giggles erupted behind them.

As she sat on the bed, the mother explained that Dean had called his little sister a vulgar name in front of all the children. “I sent him to his room until I could figure out how to handle it. I’m still figuring.” She then quietly stated the word and described the incident.

The father asked, “What do you think we ought to do?”

His wife smiled wryly, “You’re the head of the household. I’ve been awaiting your solution.” They both smiled, knowing how much they depended on each other at such times.

The father began to think out loud, “Ordinarily, Dean is a decent boy. I know that his friends at school these days are a bit rough though. What if I talked with him?”

His wife promptly agreed. The father went to Dean’s room so that the boy would feel as secure as possible under the circumstances. Dean appeared rather tense, even defiant. “I guess you know why I’m here, son.”

“Yeah,” was the sullen reply.

“Why were you unkind to your sister?”

“You mean why did I cuss at her?”

“No,” said his father, “I mean, why did you hurt her feelings? We’ll get to the cussing in a while. It worries me far more that her big brother was unkind to her. She really looks up to you.”

Dean was a bit off balance, for he had expected his father to be very angry about the bad language. His father had a temper that he had been trying with increasing success to control. The father briefly explained to his son how important it is to the whole family that their home be a safe place where no one was attacked physically or verbally. Dean had noticed his father becoming gentler and more patient lately, so he listened, although outwardly he appeared defiant. Then the father asked, “Do you understand about sex?”

The boy dropped his eyes, caught a bit off guard. He did not say anything, so his father went on, “The reason I ask is because the word you said today probably isn’t an accurate word to describe what you were discussing. I thought you might want to know the correct ones.”

There was a long silence. Then, Dean looked up shyly, “Some of the boys at school use that word a lot. They talk about things, too. Today they were telling where babies come from. Why is a baby in the mother’s stomach? Where does the food go? How does it get there?”

The father concluded that his son had real questions about conception and birth. So he explained the process in simple, basic terms. He began with a gentle question designed to give the ten-year-old culprit a chance to redeem himself a bit, “I’ll answer any questions you have, son, but answer one for me please. Who made our bodies first of all?”

“Heavenly Father” was the prompt answer.

“That’s right, son. Heavenly Father made Adam and Eve. Who did they look like?”

“Heavenly Father and Jesus, and I guess our heavenly mother too,” said the now attentive boy.

“Well, we really don’t know much about our heavenly mother, but we can expect that Eve looked like her and Adam looked like Heavenly Father. Who do we look like?”

Dean was a little impatient now, “Oh, Dad, we’ve talked about this before at family home evening.”

“I know, son. I just want to be sure you remember before I tell you some very important things.”

“We look like Heavenly Father, Jesus, and Adam and Eve,” replied Dean.

“Fine! That’s right. Now, as I explain some things about our bodies, remember who we are like. It is very important.” The boy nodded agreement, leaning forward.

“When a man and woman love each other enough, they get married. They agree to help each other be good and live together and treat each other kindly. One of their hopes is to have children.

“Mothers and fathers have children when the father’s sperm joins with the mother’s egg or ova. One sperm and one ova begin to grow into a baby. After nine months the baby is born by emerging through the mother’s vagina. All this is started when a mother and father love each other enough to have sexual intercourse. This expression of love is to be enjoyed only in marriage.

“Dean, sexual intercourse is the way parents create children. It was given to us by Heavenly Father. It is very good and very special. It is too sacred and too private to make fun of or to use the wrong words about. Mother and I do not talk about this outside our family. Do you have any questions?”

His father could not tell how much Dean had understood, although he was sure his son had listened. Dean dropped his eyes again, “No. I guess not.”

“You sound like you might. You can ask me,” the father urged.

“Well, how does the baby stay in the stomach?”

Patently the father explained that the stomach and womb are different and that food goes to the stomach through the throat and is eliminated through normal bodily functions. The womb is reached by the vagina and is like a soft sponge that can swell as large as the baby. Dean looked a bit overwhelmed, gave a little smile, and then asked, “Am I grounded for cussing?”

The father then realized that, for this boy, the biggest issue was bad language. Oh well, he thought, parenthood is a lifetime program. Hoping that in mercy he had enlightened his son, he dispensed justice.

“Yes, you’re grounded until 8:00 P.M. tonight for using improper language. But the thing that concerns mother and me the most was how you hurt your sister. What can you do to help her feel better?”

After a few minutes of discussion, Dean decided to take his little sister over to the school playground for an hour the next afternoon. Dad would act as chauffeur and would provide ice-cream cones after.

As he left Dean’s room, the father placed his hand gently on his son’s head and told him that he loved him.

This father and son experience, like all parent-child experiences, affected the entire family. It required listening, empathy, understanding, meaningful instruction, justice, and mercy. If you exercise patience in the manner described, you are more apt to build confidence and trust to support a loving bond of natural affection between yourself and your child. You will also become more adept at answering your child’s questions rather than merely passing on information and missing

a precious teaching moment. You also are less apt to overinform children by going into detailed answers to questions they have not asked.

Protect Children from Physical and Sexual Abuse

Unfortunately, it is most often during this time period that child molestation occurs. Under normal circumstances during this period a child continues to grow in self-esteem and in feeling good about being male or female. You have the power to promote your child’s self-esteem by accepting your son or daughter unconditionally as a unique person. If your child feels good about himself and his experience with you, then a foundation is laid for future identity and self-esteem. If he feels apologetic, confused, or resentful, then problems can arise ranging from moderate insecurity to serious self-doubt, self-dislike, and even sexual confusion leading toward sexual experimentation and sexual deviance, including gender role problems.

This period is so crucial that when a child is molested or abused, sexually or otherwise, it is essential for parents to deal with it immediately. It may be important to seek the help of one’s bishop or stake president if the abuse cannot be readily handled by the parents. When the experience is extensive or violent, then trustworthy professional help may be appropriate.

Abuse of a child by a parent results from a parent’s loss of personal control. A parent may feel frustrated at his or her inability to deal effectively with a young child or toddler in a given situation. Such frustration may result from a lack of understanding or the inability to communicate feelings or desires, or from disappointment in the behavior of the child. Parents should always keep in mind that—

1. The child is *only* a child and lacks experience and maturity.
2. The parent is only human and working toward perfection himself.
3. Love unfeigned is the most powerful force in the world because it brings the ability to direct one’s efforts toward God’s purposes rather than toward our purposes.
4. Their only purpose in dealing with a child is to bless the child with their efforts. If what they are doing is causing the child to be angry or to experience physical or emotional harm, then their efforts need to cease until they can determine a better course to follow.

A wise parent separates himself from the child at a moment when the parent feels such anger and frustration. Sending the child to his room or placing an infant in his crib until the parent has regained composure will often be helpful. If it is not sufficient for the parent to separate himself from the child to regain con-

trol, then a parent will do well to get himself and the child in the company of other adults. The presence of another adult or older child usually stimulates a change in the behavior and attitude of both the parent and the child.

If a parent is abusing a child, the parent should immediately seek the help of his priesthood leaders. He may also need to seek professional help. Rarely, if at all, does one who has become an abuser of children have the strength, control, or wisdom to overcome the problem on his own. Outside help is needed.

Parents are responsible to teach their children how to deal with abuse from others. When a child-parent relationship provides for open communication and mutual understanding, children are most likely to express their fears and concerns to the parent and alert the parent to the problem early, after a first or second experience. Communication about such a traumatic experience is very difficult for a child to initiate. This may be because they fear that all adults are abusers and that mentioning the matter will bring a repeat of what the child experienced at the hands of other adults. Lack of communication may also be the result of self-accusation on the child's part. He may feel that his own behavior was responsible for the abuse, and therefore, he may choose not to share the experience with anyone in an effort to protect himself emotionally or physically.

A sensible rule for parents responding to child abuse is that the child usually needs to be able to talk candidly and confidentially with at least one adult, preferably a parent, while being protected from the possibility of further harm. Children who are abused are likely to be so distraught emotionally that they will report the offense only to an adult they trust.

Sexual abuse of children is one of the ugliest and personally devastating experiences a child may have. A member of the Church who perpetrates such an heinous sin places his membership in almost certain jeopardy. Such behavior is not only an act of unrighteousness, it is the most gross exercise of unrighteous dominion.

When child abuse, including incest, is discovered, care must be taken to know and observe the laws of the Church and of the state in such matters. Priesthood leaders and LDS Social Services workers can be consulted in such cases.

Parents are not to abuse their children in any way—physically, emotionally, or sexually. Parents who deal with each other in kindness and in a thoughtful manner will create an attitude toward their children of loving concern and patience. Parents and children should learn that normal relationships consist of kindly words and caresses and that firm yet reasonable discipline generally will prevent child abuse. One of the surest preventives against child abuse is for the family to know

how to speak to and touch each other affectionately without harmful or sexual meaning.

Conclusion

The period of life from about four to eleven years is an interlude between the two rather profound periods of early childhood and adolescence. The child is in the home most of the time during this period of development.

Physical changes are gradual and seldom involve secondary sex characteristics. You should help your child feel good about being a boy or a girl. Under normal circumstances, children learn relationship skills and develop gender-based roles. Under abnormal circumstances, relationships can be damaged and roles warped.

The future ability to adhere to eternal roles depends on how well the child learns to be Christlike with others. A child should learn to be courteous to all people, affectionate with many, and intimate with a special few, all the while being true and reliable. Future social and emotional security depends on how clearly the child learns a gender role. True role definitions teach the girl that she is a daughter of God, working toward the roles of wife and mother here or hereafter. The boy learns that he is a son of God, working toward the roles of husband and father here or hereafter. These gender-based roles provide the perspective for successful future sexual intimacy.

Virtuous living (defined as purity of thought, word, and deed) becomes a way of life as your children see you living virtuously. No other goals can supplant that of virtuous living except at the cost of losing sight of the very reasons we came to this earth. Chastity and righteousness result from the pursuit of virtuous living. Misery results, sooner or later, if virtuous living is rejected.

It is relatively easy for you to sit in council and to counsel, urge, or even require children between four and eleven to behave virtuously. There is nothing wrong with expecting your children to be good long before they enjoy it. But there is much for parents to repent of if they shirk their duty and avoid the stress of such discipline.

You can teach virtues best throughout this period by being involved with your children, working together with them at ordinary household tasks, maintaining kindly family relations, enjoying recreation, and faithfully performing solemn, sacred priesthood and Relief Society duties.

This interlude, between the explosive growth of early childhood and the maturation of adolescence, is an ideal time during which children can learn and practice virtue. Few will depart from virtue permanently if they are taught in love. This will prepare them for adolescence.



*Your family should
always be the major source
of friendship and
support for your teenagers.*

Adolescence can be a very confusing and puzzling time for both you and your children. Just when your children are trying to learn who they are and where they belong in the world, their bodies begin the profound physical changes of puberty. Children take on the outward appearance of adults but lack adult experience, wisdom, and responsibility. They continue to mature emotionally and socially, but there are periods of confusion and inconsistency as they try to understand and cope with the changes in their bodies and the accompanying social changes that lead toward adult relationships. Parents can mistakenly attribute adult characteristics to adolescents who look like adults but are largely children. They need more time and experience before being expected to act and think completely as adults.

This section will help you teach your children to understand, put into proper perspective, and control the newly awakened desires for physical intimacy they will have during their teenage years. To help you do this, this section discusses the following ideas:

1. Prepare your teenagers for the changes that will accompany puberty.
2. Teach your teenagers that they can control their desires for physical intimacy.
3. Help your teenagers to have wholesome social experiences.
4. Help your teenagers see adolescence as a time for developing spiritual power.

Ideally, you should use the first eight to twelve years of a child's life to prepare him for his teenage years. If you wait until adolescence to teach your children about the changes of puberty and about intimate relationships, you may not be able to influence them as easily. Children often retain their basic character traits

through their teenage years. The kind, self-respecting child usually becomes a kind, self-respecting, and sexually well-adjusted young adult. The self-focused, unkind, self-indulgent child will often express these character traits in a sexual fashion during the teen years. If the principles discussed in the previous chapters have not been taught before this stage of development, it is much harder, although not impossible, to teach them to adolescents.

If teaching in the home has had its desired effect, your children will already have a Christlike respect for themselves and others. Long before a child becomes sexually mature, he learns virtue through dressing modestly, being clean in language and grooming, developing self-esteem, and being considerate of others. Your challenge is *to remind* your teenagers, by word and deed, of the principles of virtue that they learned earlier. If you have not done this teaching or if you were not aware of these principles earlier, then you must do all you can now to use the ideas described in the previous chapters. It is never too late to influence children; and with unconditional love and consistent concern, you can greatly bless the lives of your teenagers.

Prepare Your Children for the Changes That Will Accompany Puberty

You should prepare your children for the changes that accompany puberty before these changes actually begin. *Puberty* is the process by which hormones cause the body to change in ways that make procreation possible. These changes mark the passage from childhood to adulthood. The processes are clean, good, and divinely mandated. There is no certain schedule, but this process usually begins between ages eleven and thirteen and can continue through adolescence and into early adulthood.

At puberty, the girl begins to menstruate, her hips broaden, her breasts develop, body hair grows under her arms and in her pubic area, and she may gain weight. The boy begins to create seminal fluid and sperm cells. His shoulders broaden, his muscles expand, his voice deepens, and he gets taller and heavier. Body hair grows under the arms, on the face, and in the pubic region.

When puberty is complete, a person is capable of creating life through sexual union. A natural cycle or rhythm begins in both genders. Approximately every twenty-five to thirty days, an egg is released from the girl's ovary, and it attaches to the lining of the uterus. If it is not fertilized by a male sperm, it and the blood-rich lining of the uterus (but not the uterus itself) are expelled from the womb through the vagina. This flow of blood lasts about four or five days and cleanses the girl's reproductive system.

If your daughter's menstrual cycle is painful or excessive in length or volume, she should see a physician. Her mother should help her determine the most comfortable type of sanitary aid and teach her about proper hygiene and deodorizing. There are often mood changes connected with menstruation, but ordinarily they are moderate and should not interfere with normal activities.

In the boy, millions of sperm grow in the testicles within spermatic fluid. When the fluid and sperm fill the tubules and testes, they are automatically released or ejaculated. This usually happens during sleep and is called nocturnal emissions or "wet dreams." Sexual dreams are not always present, but they can trigger a nocturnal emission or ejaculation. In either case this is *not* masturbation.

The major chemical and hormonal changes associated with puberty affect the body in many ways. Skin oils and perspiration increase, requiring regular bathing and the use of deodorants. At this time dietary habits and grooming learned in childhood contribute to or detract from good health and appearance. Teenagers who brush their teeth, keep their bodies clean, eat wholesome food, and exercise regularly probably did so as children. If they did not develop those habits then, now is the time for them to learn, for these practices will influence their physical appearance and health as adults.

The changes evoked by the hormones during puberty are very significant, but remember that they are almost completely restricted to physical development. A child's temperament—whether he is aggressive or withdrawn, vigorous or passive, social or antisocial—is determined not only by hormones but by the learning that occurs primarily in the home before puberty. By the time they begin adolescence, children who have been taught

properly will have developed attitudes of trust, unselfishness, respect, and self-discipline. They will more likely be able to apply these attitudes to the intimate relationships they develop in their married life.

Teach Teenagers That They Can Control Desires for Physical Intimacy

The so-called sex drive in humans is not entirely the chemical or instinctive compulsion to mate that it is in animals. Rather, from the time we are born, we each need to be physically and socially nurtured. The changes of puberty permit us to experience remarkably heightened pleasures of touch and arousal. But we have the agency to control the emotions and behaviors leading up to intentional sexual arousal. We can control when, where, how, and with whom we express our sexuality.

Your teenagers will face great pressures to express their sexual feelings in sinful ways. This time in world history, like many others, is one of widespread corruption. No matter how decent the family environment, there will be external indecent influences on the young person. School associates, television, movies, and magazines are filled with sensual pictures and ideas. Your children will be enticed to be materialistic, haughty, fad conscious, and sexually self-focused. They will be taught to place education, money, or self ahead of marriage and family. They will be challenged about their basic male or female roles. They will be assaulted directly from all sides to be physically, sexually, and selfishly motivated.

Sex is a prominent subject during adolescence. Purveyors of evil know this and attempt to use it to sell movies, clothing, and cars. They will try to convince young people that it is important for a girl to be selected as a beauty queen, or for a boy to be elected the most popular or handsome boy at school. They will perpetuate the illusions that wealth, large houses, or expensive clothing are measures of worthiness; that talent or intellectual accomplishment makes one person superior to other people; and that athletic or performing fame automatically makes one worthy of imitation.

One example: masturbation is considered by many in the world to be the harmless expression of an instinctive sex drive. Teach your children that the prophets have condemned it as a sin throughout the ages and that they can choose not to do it. Throughout childhood, boys and girls have touched their own genitals frequently to wash and to dress. This is a behavior that usually has the same meaning as keeping one's feet warm in the winter, enjoying a swim on a hot day, or scratching an itch. We ought to be friendly to our bodies and appreciate the body's marvelous range of senses. This innocent touching is not the kind of behavior



warned against by prophets through the ages. The sin of masturbation occurs when a person stimulates his or her own sex organs for the purpose of sexual arousal. It is a perversion of the body's passions. When we pervert these passions and intentionally use them for selfish, immoral purposes, we become carnal.

Masturbation is not physically necessary. There is already a way by which the male system relieves excessive spermatic fluid quite regularly through the nocturnal emission or wet dream. Monthly menstrual flow expels the female's egg and cleanses the womb. For both sexes, physical or emotional tensions can be released by vigorous activity. Thus, in a biological sense, masturbation for either gender is not necessary. In a gospel sense, it is a sin: "Masturbation, a rather common indiscretion, is not approved of the Lord nor of His Church regardless of what may have been said by others whose 'norms' are lower. Latter-day Saints are urged to avoid this practice" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Love Versus Lust*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Provo, 5 Jan. 1965], p. 22).

Your teenagers will also be tempted to have sexual relations with others before they are married. They will see others doing so—through some schoolmates or through television, the movies, or magazines. They will be encouraged to believe that two individuals can engage in sexual relations whenever the urge strikes them and with whomever and in whatever ways they choose. To help your teenagers overcome these wicked influences, teach them that their bodies are good. Their

bodies were created by the Lord, who declared that his work was good. The crowning phase of creation was to give Adam and Eve their bodies, fashioned in the image of their Redeemer. These bodies are not to be abused in any way. Paul taught:

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

The scriptures often refer respectfully but plainly to the body and its parts. There is no embarrassment and often there is sacred symbolism. It is the world that makes the divinely created body an object of carnal lust. For example, it makes the female breasts primarily into sexual enticements, while the truth is that they were intended to nourish and comfort children. It promotes male sexual aggression in contrast to Christ's example of tenderness, long-suffering, kindness, and steadfastness in the home.

Shame about the human body, its parts and purposes, is justified only when a person uses it for carnal purposes. Teach your children that they will find joy in their bodies when they use them virtuously after the manner taught by Christ.

Also teach your children that they cannot separate sexual behavior from other aspects of relationships, roles, and values. This is one of the false assumptions of those who promote selfish and indulgent behavior. This is not only wicked, but it negates the true purposes of sexual intimacy, which are to create families and strengthen bonds between husband and wife.

Your children will see in movies and magazines and in the lives of some people around them those who seem to be able to break the Lord's commandments concerning sexual expression and still live happy, prosperous lives. Make sure they understand that they must not be misled by appearances, for "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). They cannot expect to break the laws of God in one area of their lives and have the rest of their lives unaffected.

Latter-day Saints subscribe to a total morality. They believe in being righteous in every phase of their lives. The boy who has learned to control impulses to steal or strike out in anger will be less likely later to steal a girl's chastity, or even later, abuse his wife or children. A girl who enjoys self-respect based upon development of a talent and esteem for her various womanly roles will be more inclined to appreciate spiritual truths. She will be less likely to desperately seek the attentions of lustful boys or accept the viewpoint of those who oppose marriage and the family.

Virtuous behavior leads to self-esteem, peaceful feelings, and a knowledge of right; carnal behavior leads to misery, unhappiness, and loss of the desire to do right.



This applies to all areas of life, and there are no exceptions. If teenagers develop virtuous habits and closeness to the Lord in all facets of their lives, they will carry these things over into their intimate relationships.

Set the example of virtuous behavior in every aspect of your life. Obey the traffic laws, live within your income, keep your house and yard neat and attractive, be moderate in dress and in consumption of material goods, serve faithfully in Church callings, vote in each election, give regular service in Church welfare efforts, read the scriptures daily, hold family prayer, speak courteously, be modestly but openly affectionate, and be chaste in dress and language. Have daily prayers, give blessings to your children, fast, and bear your testimony. As you do these things, you will show your children examples of correct behavior and help them translate abstract gospel principles into everyday actions. As you live in this way, you will also find the ability to maintain the Spirit of the Lord with you. Your children will learn that the Spirit will guide them into a pure and happy (virtuous) life. That Spirit will bring you personal peace and will provide an understanding of the teachings of the prophets.

Help Teenagers Have Wholesome Social Experiences

Before adolescence, children generally associate with others of the same sex. Now they should learn to interact properly with members of the opposite sex. When they do, do not speak of their awakening sexual interest as sinful or unclean. Adolescents should begin to notice each other and should find pleasure in social relationships. Their task is to refine their social skills so that they can kindly and considerately support one another.

Adolescence is a time when parents and youth leaders actually have the fervent attention, though not always the cooperation, of young people. The youth are alternately exhilarated and pained by their social life (or lack of it). They watch with intensity the behavior of adults because it is so pertinent now that they are participants, or want to be, whereas before they were somewhat passive observers.

While helping your teenagers become effective in their social experiences, do not make the mistake of distrusting them. Many adults fall into this trap because young people tend to be more eager than wise. But there are many ways in which you can help your children be trustworthy. Experience does teach valuable lessons. As a result of your experiences, you can bless your children by teaching them. But they also need to learn by experience. You need to share the learning and decision-making processes with them so that the young person will be prepared to leave the home and be effective as an adult.

Reemphasize family rules about such things as when to be home from a date, counsel about how to socialize with “in” groups, and explanations of the temptations arising from being together as couples more than two or three hours. But dictatorial methods seldom work with lasting effects. The teenager will rebel openly or secretly and count the days until he or she can leave home.

Make sure that family rules are clear and that rewards and punishments are consistent and prompt. Adolescents will question many things they formerly accepted, so now is a time to offer reasons for family rules. You may want to explain that a curfew hour of midnight on Fridays is based upon parental knowledge and judgment, not upon opposition to dating or social enjoyment. It is often helpful to have family councils where you and your children agree on family rules and rewards and punishments before situations arise where they are needed.

Consider this situation: John and Mary are the parents of Kristen. She has been asked to go on a double date to a dance fifty miles away on a Friday night. The dance ends at 11:30 P.M., so the teenagers cannot get home by midnight, Kristen’s usual curfew, unless they leave early. Kristen is frustrated. A lively family discussion ensues.

Kristen exclaims, “You don’t trust me. I go to Church. I live the Word of Wisdom. I get good grades in school. I do what you want all the time. Now, when I want to do something, you won’t let me!”

Her mother explains, “You are a fine person. We are proud of you. We trust you enough to let you go so far away on a date. The problem is the curfew. Didn’t we all agree in family council that midnight was fair for weekends?”

Grudgingly Kristen replies, “Yes, but this is special. I have earned it.”

“You have earned many things, and we appreciate your efforts,” her father adds. “But you are arguing about something different. It is your safety we are concerned about.”

“Arthur is a safe driver. You’ve never objected to his ‘safety’ before.”

“It is the other drivers we worry about. Late on Friday night there are many drivers who are on drugs or are drunk. It is them we fear. They could harm you.”

“Anytime I go out there is danger. Why don’t you just ground me from all fun?”

Her sarcastic tone hurts her parents, but they weigh her usual cooperation against the emotions of the moment and do not become upset. Her mother then says, “Kristen, I can understand your disappointment. It is too bad there are ugly things in this world.”

Hoping that her mother’s obvious sympathy is a breakthrough, Kristen asks, “Just this once, please?”

Acting for both, since he and his wife have discussed this privately, John replies, "There is too much risk, especially on that narrow road. We love you too much. We will take the chance of agreeing to the date as long as you are home by midnight."

Kristen acts calmer now, but still she hopes, "Isn't there some way?"

Her mother answers her, "Your father and I are in agreement. You agreed in family council to this rule."

And, with good humor, her father adds, "Kristen, you are in a tough spot. We've been through this with your older brothers and sister. We've had a lot of practice discussing this kind of thing." Turning serious, he adds, "We love you too much to change this family rule."

Kristen leaves the room unhappy but with her self-respect intact. Even in her frustration she cannot deny that her parents care. She cannot ignore the fact that she had previously fully discussed and agreed to the curfew rule in a pleasant, calm family council.

Remember to be honest and objective in your parent-child discussions and hold your children responsible for rules they have already agreed upon.

There are a great many other things you can do to help your teenagers have good social experiences and thereby develop self-confidence and stay out of situations where temptations might arise. President Spencer W. Kimball said of activities for youth:

"The urge for group activity is normal to the younger set, when they are not prematurely and immaturely stimulated in other ways, and the recreational and social activities of the crowd can be wholesome and entertaining. Physical and moral safety is increased in the multiplicity of friends. Group homemade recreation activities can be not only great fun but most beneficial. Firesides may create friendships, and inspire the spirit and train the mind. Group picnics can discipline youth in gentle manners and fellowship and extend circles of intimate friends.

"Sports can develop the body in strength and endurance. They can train the spirit to meet difficulties and defeats and successes, teach selflessness and understanding, and develop good sportsmanship and tolerance in participant and spectator. Drama can develop talent, teach patience, and foster fellowship and friendliness. Group music activities have similar effects, and also can soften and mellow the spirit and satisfy the aesthetic needs.

"The properly conducted dancing party can be a blessing. It provides opportunity to spend a pleasant evening with many people to the accompaniment of music. It can create and develop friendships which will be treasured in later years. Alternatively it can become a restricting experience.

"Well-ordered dances provide favorable places, pleasing times, and auspicious circumstances in which

to meet new people and to enlarge circles of friends. They can be an open door to happiness. In an evening of pleasurable dancing and conversation, one can become acquainted with many splendid young folk, every one of whom has admirable traits and may be superior to any one companion in at least some qualities. Here partners can begin to appraise and evaluate, noting qualities, attainments, and superiorities by comparison and contrast. Such perceptive friendships can be the basis for wise, selective, occasional dating for those of sufficient age and maturity, this to be followed later in proper timing by steady dating, and later by proper courtship which culminates in a happy, never-ending marriage.

"On the other hand, for a youth to dance all evening with one partner, which we might call 'monopolistic' dancing, is not only antisocial but it circumscribes one's legitimate pleasures and opportunities. Also it can encourage improper intimacies by its exclusiveness. Dancing with dates, single or steady, should presuppose the exchange of partners, which we could call 'multiple' dancing" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], pp. 289–90).

When guiding your teenagers in their choices of activities, help them avoid activities that emphasize competitiveness, single dating, or undue concentration on athletic prowess or superficial beauty. Encourage them to avoid parties that include raucous music, dancing with the same partner all the time, cliquish groupings, passive videotape sessions, and other similar activities.

You can best help them avoid these undesirable activities by providing alternative, wholesome things for them to do. Make a full range of athletic activities available to your teenagers. They need not be proficient in a sport or activity to participate in it and enjoy it themselves. They will develop both social and physical skills as they participate in athletics.

Through your ward youth leaders or through your own efforts, provide group social activities as alternatives to early dating or activities that encourage teenagers to pair off. Not all teenagers date or even want to. Many young people do not date at all during their adolescent years because they are not interested or do not have opportunities. Indeed, as is so often obvious, some youth who do pair off exclusively in their early teens are emotionally and socially immature. That is one reason why the Church counsels youth to date only after age sixteen and even then not to pair off exclusively with one partner.

To help your teenagers better prepare for dating, teach them to think of others in a Christlike way. Teach them that we can enrich each other's lives. The highest purpose of anyone's mortal life is to bless others. Each of us has some gift or talent that, when developed prop-



erly, will bless someone else. Virtue urges us to be courteous and helpful and generous. Carnality whispers that we jostle, defeat, and take from others. The finest and, therefore, the ultimately enjoyable relationships develop when self-respecting people do all they can to enrich other's lives. Thus, for a teenager, the selfish version of dating is "going steady," long hours together in dark places, sexual arousal, and intense concern about clothing and surface appearance. The virtuous version includes both group activities and moderate pairing off; varied enjoyments, including vigorous physical exercise; mental stimulation; service; and spiritual challenges. Friendships are encouraged among all rather than limited to a select few. Other's interests are considered along with one's own, and there is peace of mind. A teenager will never be reluctant to discuss with

a parent a virtuous activity or relationship and will always feel good about it, having no feeling of regret.

Support and plan activities that allow everyone to dance or play the games. These may include moderate music, mixers, and cooperative games rather than games that emphasize competitiveness. Young men and women become more confident, kinder to each other, and more chaste in their conduct when they participate in well-planned activities. They also are less prone to judge themselves as failures because they do not date.

Feel free to call upon youth leaders to help you provide wholesome activities for your teenagers. That is one of the primary purposes of Church organizations. You have a right to expect strong support during this developmental period from the Aaronic Priesthood and the Young Women's programs. But you should not ex-

pect the Church to replace you in your prime responsibility, which is to counsel and direct the affairs of your family members.

Together, parents and leaders of young men and women in the Church can provide activities that focus on the needs and talents of the youth. For instance, if a young person is not participating in Church-related activities, parents and the youth leaders could work out an appropriate means of involving him. Young people can best develop their talents and skills when the family and Church work in harmony, using correct priesthood principles. These principles then serve as the foundation for governing self and family.

As you plan activities, remember also that the tendency of the world is to equate happiness with material things. Do not plan or support activities that require you or your teenagers to spend very much money. Also, make sure that youth activities do not take your teenagers away from family duties or outings. Your family should always be the major source of friendship and support for your teenagers.

Help Teenagers See Adolescence as a Time for Developing Spiritual Power

The emphasis that our society places upon physical sex has blinded many adults and youth to the fact that adolescence can be a time for developing great spiritual power. Your teenagers' naive idealism, which often frustrates more experienced adults, can be turned to spiritual growth if you temper it by wisely using your experience to teach them.

President David O. McKay explained the spiritual potential of youth:

"We hear a good deal of talk about our young people these days. Some say that they are indifferent, that they are losing their interest in the Church. I do not agree with this accusation. My experience with the young leads me to believe that there was never a time when youth more sincerely sought the truth, when they were more responsive to assignments made in the Church, when they were more observant of the ideals for which this Church stands.

"Oh, I am not blind to the fact that there are those who are wavering. I also know that there were young people during our youth who wavered. I realize that there are those who stand on the sidelines and, arrogating to themselves superior wisdom which they do not possess, would fain guide and dictate, but there have always been such. The great majority of our young people are desirous of living the truth.

"I realize the temptations were never stronger than they are today; but the young people who resist these temptations deserve all the greater credit. We hear about young boys and young girls who indulge in things contrary to the teachings of their parents and the offi-

cers of the Church, and contrary to the ideals of the gospel, but we too seldom hear about the much larger group who are exerting an influence for good upon their fellow workers and upon their associates.

"If time permitted, I might narrate several specific instances in which our girls have wielded an influence upon their associates and led not only members of the Church but also people outside of the Church to lay aside violations of the Word of Wisdom and to conform to the ideals and principles of purity of life.

"Generally speaking, youth are anchored. Sometimes they seem to waver and digress from the standards. Some of them, it is true, lose their virtue, the most benighting and cankering condition that can contaminate young people's lives. I know that there is a looseness in sexual morality which is dangerous, which is threatening. I know too that such breaking down of moral standards is manifested not alone among the young people, and I warn the Church to guard against unchastity. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world, the fundamental element in pure religion.

"No, we are not shutting our eyes to the dangers, but I want to tell you we must not shut our eyes to the virtues of the tens of thousands of those who are true and valiant" (*Gospel Ideals* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], pp. 415–16).

Parents often give far too much negative counsel to their teenagers. While it is true that you must solemnly warn your teenagers against all types of sin, you should place more emphasis upon the goodness of growing up. God himself, viewing his creation of this earth, pronounced it "good" (see Genesis 1:31). Teach your children that it is good to mature and that adolescence can be filled with beauty and power. Praise them for their spiritual development and maturity. Teach them also of Jesus, Joseph who was sold into Egypt, Moroni, Joseph Smith, and others who were teenagers when they began their ministries. These great leaders developed the foundations of their spiritual strength during their teenage years, and your teenagers can do the same.

Conclusion

Adolescence is a time of great physical, social, and emotional power. It is raw, untested, untempered power. With your help, they can have the righteous experiences that will allow them to mature into responsible and virtuous adults. When youthful boys and girls are given family, Church, and civic service opportunities, they readily develop a sense of responsibility. This vital process has far more to do with developing sexual virtue than does sex education.

Teenagers need to understand the body and its functions. This is especially so as the changes of puberty make obvious to all that the child is becoming a sexually

mature young adult. The sexual senses of the body are to be enjoyed in righteousness, and its sexual functions to be used to create and nurture life. All this must be within the sanctity of a loving marriage.

Despite all of the occasional tumult of the teen years, you can have a major influence on your children. Prepare them for the changes that accompany puberty. Teach them that they can control their desires for physical intimacy. Help them to have wholesome social

experiences. See adolescence as a time of spiritual power, and help your teenagers to see it in this way as well. Help them to develop and express natural affection—the affection that can develop naturally from a common spiritual creation.

Then ask Heavenly Father for guidance, for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost is the surest way of obtaining the counsel, enlightenment, and encouragement you need.





In proper courtship the partners must recognize that their first responsibilities are to encourage each other in righteous behavior and to sustain and support each other in righteous desires and ambitions.

Courtship and marriage are the culmination of the development that has taken place throughout the first eighteen to twenty years of life. Courtship allows your children to practice in a limited way the roles and virtues necessary in marriage. Marriage permits them to practice the roles and virtues necessary in eternal life.

Proper courtship is the phase during which your children will decide whether or not to marry a specific person. It should not begin before your children have nearly reached maturity. This is one reason why the Church counsels youth to date only after age sixteen. President David O. McKay explained:

“Ever be mindful that following childhood, youth has other obligations besides choosing a mate or having a ‘good time.’ He must determine first of all what kind of character he will develop. He must decide what his trade or profession will be, and if and when he chooses a wife, how he will support her and the children.

“‘Going steady’ may so enchant the couple that these other associated obligations may be given too little consideration” (“Ideals for Courtship and Marriage,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1960, p. 109).

In proper courtship the partners must recognize that their first responsibilities are to encourage each other in righteous behavior and to sustain and support each other in righteous desires and ambitions. The young man will do anything to protect the young lady’s purity. Each partner will unselfishly seek the best for the other while they learn to know each other well. The unmarried couple can talk together without being required to agree, inviting free discussion from both sides. Each partner is free to express his or her full personality and to discover the personality of the other.

If youth understand that they are children of God and are secure in their self-esteem, they are prepared to

enter into lawful intimate relationships when married. Without this understanding, courtship can be empty because the young people may be insecure, indifferent, or distrustful of their partner and may be selfish and self-indulgent in personal judgments.

If young people court one another without being sexually involved, they can more objectively determine whether they should proceed further or whether they should part and seek other more compatible companions. Tragically, courtship is often misused today by those who either live together for sexual privileges or by those who court hastily and marry foolishly. In either situation the purposes of courtship are not realized and the couple’s morality is corrupted:

“The world may countenance premarital sex experiences, but the Lord and his church condemn in no uncertain terms any and every sex relationship outside of marriage, and even indecent and uncontrolled ones within marriage” (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972], p. 175).

When couples respect each other enough to practice virtue in every aspect of their courtship, they lay a foundation likely to withstand the most serious assaults during marriage.

Ideally, courtship leads to a wedding in the temple. The reception following should be moderate and dignified.

Marriage is another phase of personal development, but it is a shared experience. Marriage permits young people to practice roles and virtues that are necessary for eternal life. President Lorenzo Snow related the blessings that can come from such a marriage:

“When two Latter-day Saints are united together in marriage, promises are made to them concerning their offspring that reach from eternity to eternity. They are

promised that they shall have the power and the right to govern and control and administer salvation and exaltation and glory to their offspring worlds without end. And what offspring they do not have here, undoubtedly there will be opportunities to have them hereafter. What else could man wish? A man and a woman in the other life, having celestial bodies, free from sickness and disease, glorified and beautified beyond description, standing in the midst of their posterity, governing and controlling them, administering life, exaltation and glory, worlds without end!" (*Deseret Weekly*, 3 Apr. 1897, p. 481).

The challenges and rewards of marriage come as two people learn to be one. It is no easy task for two previously separate individuals to learn what is needed to become physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually one while retaining healthy self-esteem. Becoming as one requires the best effort from both spouses. But since their goal is eternal life, all the effort is worthwhile.

The following ideas should help you teach your children the true principles of courtship and marriage. This is a time when talk and testimony must combine with example as effective teaching methods.

Prepare Your Children for the Physical Intimacies of Marriage

By the time people court and marry, most of their physical growth has already occurred. The quality of hygiene, grooming, nutrition, and exercise of previous years will largely determine the physical well-being of the couple and should be carefully evaluated during courtship.

Courting couples need to be discreet about what they discuss together because certain information is appropriately shared only within marriage. Besides, there is so great a need for consideration of matters other than physical functions (such as finances, religion, child rearing methods, friendships, relatives, career plans, and living arrangements, not to mention planning the wedding itself) that undue attention to sexual information can actually create problems. The whole point of virtuous courtship is to maintain spirituality while learning about each other as persons and putting temporal and mundane matters into proper perspective.

If the two people take care separately to inform themselves of the body and all its parts and functions and practice basic, virtuous courtesies together during courtship, their sexual adjustment after marriage will likely be all that they want it to be. In fact by giving proper attention to social, emotional, and spiritual matters, the couple will create in courtship a foundation upon which deeply pleasing intimacies are built after marriage.

God himself performed the marriage of our first

parents Adam and Eve and commanded them to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (see Genesis 1:28) that they might have joy in their posterity. He has ordained that all married couples should participate in the union that makes them one flesh (see Genesis 2:24).

Once the couple is married, sexual expression is ordained of God. The Savior taught that a man should "cleave to his wife" and the two should be "one flesh" (see Matthew 19:5–6).

President Kimball has explained: "It is the destiny of men and women to join together to make eternal family units. In the context of lawful marriage, the intimacy of sexual relations is right and divinely approved. There is nothing unholy or degrading about sexuality in itself [between a husband and his wife], for by that means men and women join in a process of creation and in an expression of love" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 311).

The courtesy and friendship the couple have shown during courtship are vital on their wedding night. The first night requires nearly perfect courtesy, consideration, and, in many cases, a gentle sense of good humor. They must be the very best of friends on this first occasion when they are able to begin to know one another completely. They may be ill at ease, even awkward, and would do well to smile at their awkwardness. Each must remember that the other person is vulnerable to embarrassment. And, they must realize that the greatest passions of marriage lie ahead, to increase over the years through experience and growth. A truth not generally known to newly married couples is that in virtuous marriages passions increase over the years between the couple. Couples can find great joy through fidelity, childbirth, rearing and teaching their children, providing a home, and striving to live gospel truths. President McKay explained:

"Let us instruct young people who come to us, first, young men throughout the Church, to know that a woman should be queen of her own body. The marriage covenant does not give the man the right to enslave her, or to abuse her, or to use her merely for the gratification of his passion. Your marriage ceremony does not give you that right.

"Second, let them remember that gentleness and consideration after the ceremony is just as appropriate and necessary and beautiful as gentleness and consideration before the wedding.

"Third, let us realize that manhood is not undermined by the practicing of continence, notwithstanding what some psychiatrists claim. Chastity is the crown of beautiful womanhood, and self-control is the source of true manhood, if you will know it, not indulgence. Sexual indulgence whets the passion and creates morbid desire.



It is the destiny of men and women to join together to make eternal family units.

—President Spencer W. Kimball

“Let us teach our young men to enter into matrimony with the idea that each will be just as courteous, and considerate of a wife after the ceremony as during courtship. . . .

“Fourth, minimize the faults, commend virtues. After the first thrill of the honeymoon is worn off, couples begin to see frailties, idiosyncrasies which they had not noticed before. Responsibilities of motherhood come to the woman. Difficulties in paying debts come. And so we become prone to find fault. Let us learn to control ourselves in that respect” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1952, pp. 86–87).

The honeymoon ought to be a time when the partners learn about one another’s minds, emotions, bodies, and spirits. It is not a time for sexual excess. It is not a fling of worldly diversions that is scheduled between the temple wedding ceremony and a return to serious living. For Latter-day Saints, the honeymoon and early weeks of marriage are a time for private discovery on all levels: physical, social, emotional, and spiritual.

In sexual matters, as in all other aspects of marriage, there are virtues to be observed: “If it is unnatural, you

just don’t do it. That is all, and all the family life should be kept clean and worthy and on a very high plane. There are some people who have said that behind the bedroom doors anything goes. That is not true and the Lord would not condone it” (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 312).

Both husbands and wives have physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs associated with this sacred act. They will be able to complement each other in the marriage relationship if they give tender, considerate attention to these needs of their partner. Each should seek to fulfill the other’s needs rather than to use this highly significant relationship merely to satisfy his or her own passion.

Couples will discover differences in the needs or desires each partner has for such a relationship, but when each strives to satisfy the needs of the other, these differences need not present a serious problem. Remember, this intimate relationship between husband and wife was established to bring joy to them. An effort to reach this righteous objective will enable married couples to use their complementary natures to bring joy to this union.



There are times when a spouse's emotional and physical needs would make it desirable for the other to be especially affectionate.

The intimate relationship between husband and wife realizes its greatest value when it is based on loving kindness and tenderness between the marriage partners. This fact, supported by valid research data, helps newly married couples recognize that the so-called sex drive is mostly myth. Sexual intimacy is not an involuntary, strictly biological necessity for survival, like breathing and eating. Sexual intimacy between a husband and wife can be delayed or even suspended for long periods of time with no negative effect (for example, when the health of one or the other requires it). Husbands and wives are not compelled to mate because their genes or hormones order them to do so. Sexual powers are voluntary and controllable; the heart and mind do rule. While sex drive is a myth, husbands and wives do have physical and emotional needs that are fulfilled through sexual union. If they perceive and appreciate their masculine and feminine natures as important, complementing, but not controlling, parts of their lives, becoming as one flesh can be one of life's richest and most rewarding experiences.

There are times within the marriage when complete abstinence is appropriate for extended periods of time, such as during ill health, difficult pregnancy, separation due to employment away from home, or a need to restore respect and mutually decent emotional and spiritual relationships. There also are times when a spouse's emotional and physical needs would make it desirable for the other to be especially affectionate.

Throughout the marriage, the husband is expected, in the name of simple decency, to understand and sustain his wife as she literally gives her body to create life.

Although no significant physical changes are likely for men after marriage, bearing children evokes very significant changes for women. These changes are so profound and complex that each couple should seek reliable medical information about them. Ideally, both will study this information before and then again during pregnancy. This study should provoke within pure hearts gratitude for the human body and its godlike parts. The objective is to increase virtue, not carnality.

The health of the fetus is directly affected by the health of the mother and father. Parents whose systems are free of harmful substances are far less likely to bear children with birth defects. These harmful substances include illicit drugs, such as LSD, marijuana, and cocaine, as well as alcohol, tobacco, and even some prescription medications. The prophets who have warned against polluting the fountains of life were speaking for the Creator in warning us that there are diseases, substances, and practices that can harm the child within the womb.

A healthy mother is an advantage to a developing fetus. Fundamental hygiene is important, including

regular bathing and clean, fresh clothing. Diet is crucial. The mother should eat healthy foods and liquids during and long before pregnancy so that the baby will receive good nourishment through the umbilical connection between the placenta and the uterus. She should exercise to maintain proper blood circulation and healthy respiration.

We would do well to ever remind ourselves of our first mortal parents. Instructing them, Heavenly Father commanded them to give attention to the whole range of their powers and passions. They were to subdue the earth, create and nurture posterity, become one flesh physically, cleave unto each other socially and emotionally, and learn to serve the purposes of God. They, as we, were endowed with bodies, parts, and passions after the image of the Creator. This implies that as we, the children of God, develop virtuously within marriage we will discover ever more profound enjoyments of all his creations, including our own emotions, bodies, and spiritual capacities.

Teach Children What to Look for in Potential Companions

Courtship is a time to discover if partners are socially and emotionally matched for an eternal relationship. Selfish, unkind habits may be hidden temporarily but inevitably will break through. Unselfishness, respect, generosity, and kindness may waver under the tension of courtship or the stresses of marriage but will also inevitably break through and dominate.

As many bishops know, there are too many heart-rending situations where couples ignored social and emotional danger signs during courtship in the vain hope that things would improve after marriage. It is far better to break up an engagement than a marriage. There is no comparison between the temporary annoyance of calling off a wedding and the enduring pain of a broken marriage. President McKay stressed this:

"In choosing a companion, it is necessary to study the disposition, the inheritance, and training of the one with whom you are contemplating making life's journey. You see how necessary it is to look for the characteristics of honesty, of loyalty, of chastity, and of reverence. But after having found them—'How, then,' you ask, 'may you tell whether or not there is any consanguinity, that something which will make you at least congenial in each other's company?' 'Is there,' you ask, 'some guide?' Though love is not always a true guide, especially if that love be not reciprocated or is bestowed upon a surly creature or a brute, yet certainly there is no happiness without love. 'Well,' you may ask, 'how may I know when I am in love?'"

"That is a very important question. A fellow student and I considered that query one night as we walked together. As boys of that age frequently do, we were



During courtship a couple practices the merging of two separate lives.

talking about girls. Neither he nor I knew whether or not we were in love. Of course I had not then met my present sweetheart. In answer to my question, 'How may we know when we are in love?' he replied: 'My mother once said that if you meet a girl in whose presence you feel a desire to achieve, who inspires you to do your best, and to make the most of yourself, such a young woman is worthy of your love and is awakening love in your heart.'

"I submit that as a true guide. In the presence of the girl you truly love you do not feel to grovel; in her presence you do not attempt to take advantage of her; in her presence you feel that you would like to be everything that a 'Master Man' should become, for she will inspire you to that ideal. And I ask you young women to cherish that same guide. What does he inspire in you? . . . When a young man accompanies you after a meeting, or after a dance, and he shows an inclination to use you as a convenience or as a means of gratification, then you may put it down that he is not prompted by love.

"Under such circumstances, no matter how fascinated you may be, young woman, no matter how confident you may feel that you love him, let your judgment rule and be master of your feelings. It may grieve you not to follow the inclination of your heart, but you had better be pained a little in your youth than to suffer pangs of torture later" (*Gospel Ideals* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], pp. 459-60).

During courtship a couple practices the merging of two separate lives. Couples should look carefully at one another's habits and preferences. Clothing, preferences, listening habits, language, hobbies, financial attitudes, personal grooming, manners and courtesies, actions around one's own family and parents, spiritual values—these and more predict much of what marriage will be. Ordinarily, couples may assume that the other person is behaving as well as possible and, therefore, after marriage some "slipping" is likely. Habits, good or bad, are not easily changed. No one is perfect. Courtship is a time to observe and weigh what the other person is like, at his or her best and worst. It is also a time to evaluate one's self, as President Spencer W. Kimball explained:

"How nice and easy would it be if we had a magic wand! But we haven't. You might take a careful inventory of your habits, your speech, your appearance, your weight, if it is heavier than most people appreciate, and your eccentricities, if you have them. Take each item and analyze it. What do you like in others? What personality traits please you in others? Are your dresses too short, too long, too revealing, too old-fashioned? Does your weight drive off possible suitors? Do you laugh raucously? Are you too selfish? Are you interested only in your own interests or do you project yourself into the lives of others? Do you have annoying mannerisms? . . .

Do you repeat old stories till they are threadbare? Are you too anxious or too disinterested? Can you make some sacrifices to be acceptable? Are you dull or are you too exuberant? Are you flashy or are you disinteresting? What do you do to make yourself desirable? Do you overdo or underdo? Too much makeup or too little? Scrupulously clean both physically and morally? Are you in the right place or have you pegged yourself? One young girl was getting into the twenties and without opportunity. I urged her to move from the home which she shared with several older girls, leave the office as steno, and go to college where she would meet people of the right age. Time passed. I happened one day to be on that campus sometime later and here she came to me, bubbling like a fresh new breeze, with a bright ribbon tying her hair and an optimistic and happy personality. A few months later I was invited to a temple marriage. It may not always work that well.

"What are your eccentricities, if any? I think nearly all people have some. If so, then go to work. Classify them, weigh them, corral them, and eliminate one at a time until you are a very normal person" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], pp. 295-96).

It is not an overstatement to say that marriage requires all a couple can do to succeed. That is a law of life for any priceless goal. A courting couple needs to look for each other's potential. There are enough disruptions in families, divergent life-styles, and differences in society and in the Church that young people may not meet others with similar backgrounds. They should be especially careful in this case to make sure a potential partner has the traits of good character, such as kindness, integrity, and diligence.

Conclusion

Virtuous living by couples who seek to learn the higher roles of a mother and father requires that they forsake unrighteous and worldly ideas and practices. There is little justification for marriage if its prime purpose is merely to legitimize sexual relations. There is every reason to enjoy sexual intimacies among the various intimacies of a virtuous marriage.

The earlier stages of human growth and development all lead to courtship and marriage, either here or hereafter. We serve worthy ends if we accept this goal. Parents should teach each succeeding stage of development by example and instruction. As they help their children through each stage, parents relive and refine their own earlier development.

The objective of parents is to prepare their children for successful courtships and eternal marriages. During a child's courtship, parents need to be in close communication with their children. Prayer and spiritual accountability are critical aids to the courting couple.



On the occasion of his daughter's engagement, a father interviewed her and her fiancé to determine their feelings and to offer some advice for the special months that would pass before the marriage. They discussed the daughter's happiness, ambitions, and anxieties. She spoke of how much she loved her fiancé and her joy at being with him. They discussed the cautions that should be observed so that the engaged couple would not spoil their love for and commitment to each other. They agreed that the goal of a temple marriage required continued virtue and the avoidance of unchaste familiarities.

The father asked the couple how he might help them maintain their virtuous path to a celestial marriage. The daughter reminded her father that he had always taught her that every person is accountable to Heavenly Father for their behavior. She said she accepted that responsibility. "However," she said, "it is sometimes hard to maintain that accountability when Heavenly Father is not where I can see him. But you are, Dad. I can see you. Would it be all right if we accounted to you weekly for our behavior? I know if we could, we would do just fine. How about it, Dad?"

The father was overwhelmed at the trust the young couple placed in him. He embraced them both and agreed to ask for an accounting each Monday night. After only a few weeks, the daughter told her father that knowing they would be talking to him each Monday to indicate they were maintaining their course in chaste living had enabled them to control all thoughts and desires that might be contrary to their objective.

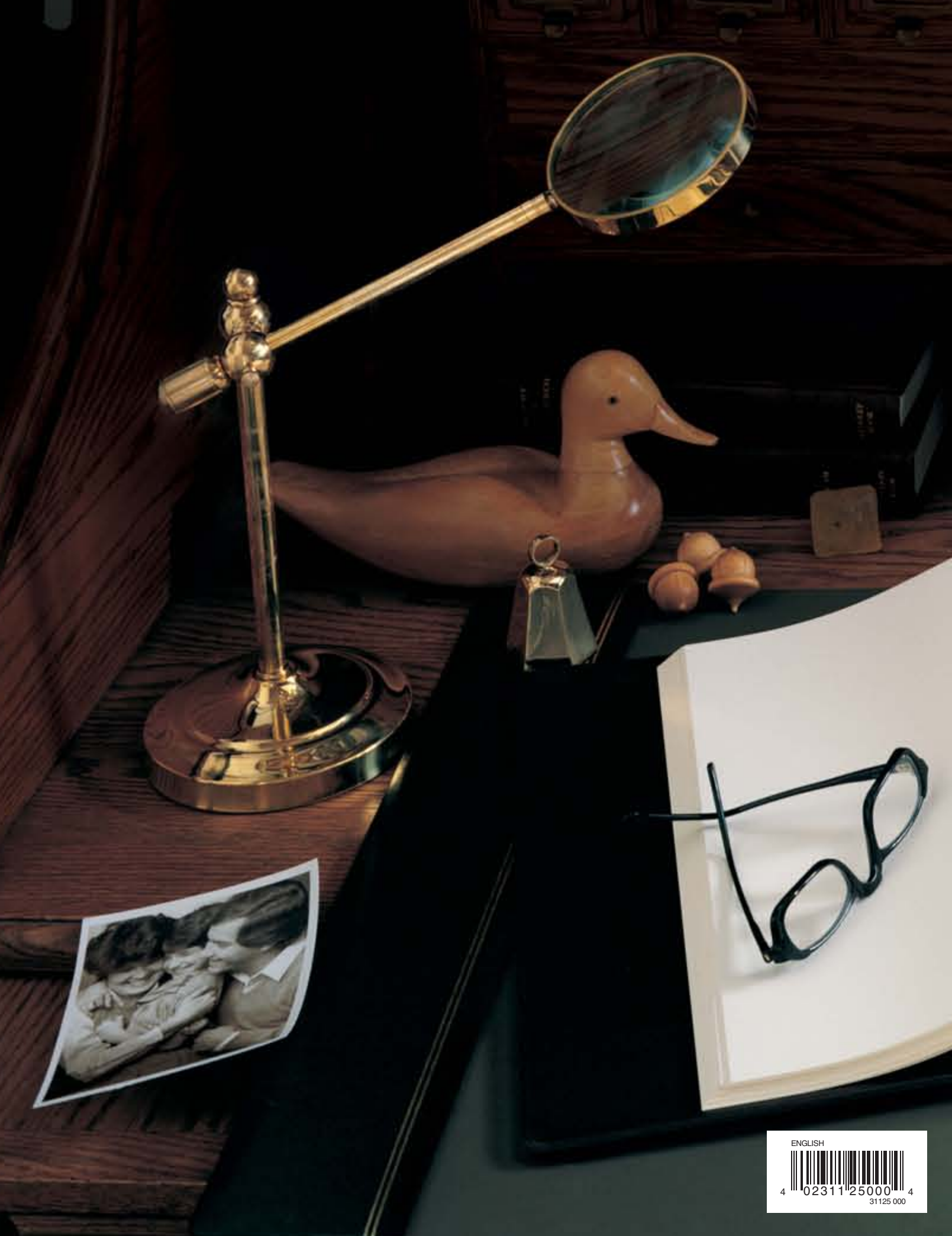
Spiritual accountability had been an early expectation in this father-daughter relationship. The holding power of that principle kept the daughter pure throughout her life. Parents often see the fruits of their early efforts with their children during the courting period.

Our mortal test is to learn to choose the lives and roles that lead to eternal families and exaltation. A loving Heavenly Father desires to reward us beyond our present comprehension, for it is his plan that in this life we begin to become like him. Such a course of living will enable us someday to acquire his knowledge, powers, passions, and joys. President Kimball expressed his hope that all of us would live worthy to receive these blessings:

"I sincerely hope that our Latter-day Saint girls and women, and men and boys, will drink deeply of the water of life and conform their lives to the beautiful and comprehensive roles the Lord assigned to them.

"I hope we shall not attempt to perfect an already perfect plan, but seek with all our might, mind, and strength to perfect ourselves in the comprehensive program given to us. Because some of us have failed, certainly it would be unfair to place the blame upon the program. Let us control our attitudes, our activities, our total lives, that we may be heir to the rich and numerous blessings promised to us.

"What God-given roles each of us could play in this great divine drama! What satisfying personal lives we can live! What beautiful families we can nurture and train! What a heavenly future is ours!" ("The Lord's Plan for Men and Women," *Ensign*, Oct. 1975, p. 5).



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