

Teaching Children about Human Intimacy

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"Practise virtue and holiness before me continually"
(D&C 46:33).

Parents have the responsibility to give their children wholesome attitudes and a sound understanding about sexuality and chastity.

Parents Are Responsible to Teach Their Children

The First Presidency stated: "Parents have a God-given duty to teach their children to understand the laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 68:25–28). Parents cannot properly shift this duty to other persons or organizations. . . .

"Many public and private schools are offering instruction on human sexuality and related subjects. Parents should be aware of the content of such instruction, so they can supplement it with appropriate teachings of moral values and responsibilities in the home. . . .

"Where schools have undertaken sex education, it is appropriate for parents to seek to ensure that the instruction given their children is consistent with appropriate moral and ethical values. . . .

"We ever pray that parents will be blessed in fulfilling their sacred responsibilities to teach and care for their children"
(First Presidency letter, 19 June 1986).

The Church has published *A Parent's Guide* to help parents in teaching their children the righteous meaning of intimate physical relations between a husband and wife.

The guide explains its purpose in these words: "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. . . .

"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 Society workers—all are available to help you. But even so, no one can replace you in teaching your children" (*A Parent's Guide*, pp. 1, 3).

We Should Teach Children Wholesome Attitudes about Sexuality

Human sexuality is a sacred subject that is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. From the beginning, the Lord has taught that a man shall "leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Paul the Apostle said, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Elder Boyd K. Packer once told a group of college students that "romantic love . . . is not only a part of life, but literally a dominating influence of it. It is deeply and significantly religious. There is no abundant life without it. Indeed, the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom is unobtainable in the absence of it" (*Eternal Love* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973], pp. 4–5).

Brother Bruce C. Hafen said: "Properly understood, the scriptures and the prophets counsel us to be virtuous not because romantic love is bad, but precisely because romantic love is so good. It is not only good, it is pure, precious, even sacred and holy. For that very reason, one of Satan's cheapest and dirtiest tricks is to make profane that which is sacred" ("The Gospel and Romantic Love," *Ensign*, Oct. 1982, p. 66).

The best place for our children to understand and develop wholesome attitudes about physical maturation and chastity is in the home.

Opportunities to teach arise naturally when parents encourage children to share their experiences. "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" (*A Parent's Guide*, p. 29).

Much parental teaching, whether done consciously or not, occurs naturally through example. Thus, "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.

“ . . . 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” (*A Parent's Guide*, p. 21).

Through such examples, combined with other instruction, children learn the value of loving intimacy in family life.

Often we neglect or procrastinate discussions with our children because we are embarrassed or feel inadequate. Sometimes we may have negative feelings because we were not properly taught. It is important that we overcome these feelings and not transmit them to our children. We may not know how to approach the subject of sexuality because our parents did not teach us properly, and we do not have an example to imitate. *A Parent's Guide* contains basic information to use as answers to questions our children may ask and suggests ways to discuss the information.

“In matters of human sexuality, honesty and accuracy are important. . . .

“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” (*A Parent's Guide*, p. 30).

We Should Teach Children the Law of Chastity

President Ezra Taft Benson declared: “The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 4; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 4).

Children should understand the serious consequences of not living the law of chastity. Adultery, fornication, and other impure practices lead to a loss of the Spirit and bring much unhappiness and sorrow in their wake. Immoral behavior can inflict heavy damage on individuals, marriages, and families and can lead to disciplinary action by the Church.

Other serious consequences of immorality include the risk of pregnancy, the possibility of an unwanted marriage, or the chance of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. The threat of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is significantly higher when there is homosexual behavior or sexual activity outside of marriage.

Alma taught his son Corianton that being unchaste is second only to murder in seriousness (see Alma 39:5). "Perhaps there is a common element in those two things—chastity and murder. Both have to do with *life*, which touches upon the highest of divine powers. Murder involves the wrongful *taking* of life; sexual transgression may involve the wrongful *giving* of life, or the wrongful tampering with the sacred fountains of life-giving power" (Hafen, "The Gospel and Romantic Love," p. 65).

The Lord commanded, "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22). This commandment suggests the sacred and uplifting character of mature intimacy within marriage—the positive side of the principle of chastity. It is good for children to understand that marital intimacy has divine approval, not only for the purpose of procreation, but also for the development of eternal love. This special form of romantic fulfillment, authorized only in marriage, is worth waiting for.

We can help our youth perceive the truth of Elder Packer's statement: "Oh, youth if you could know, the requirements of the Church are the highway *to* love, with guardrails securely in place, with guide signs plainly marked, with help along the way. How foolish is the youth who feels that the Church is a fence around love to keep him out. How unfortunate to resent counsel and restraints. How fortunate is the young person who follows the standards of the Church, even if just from sheer obedience or habit, for he will find rapture and a joy fulfilled" (*Eternal Love*, pp. 5–6).

Living the law of chastity brings self-respect, respect for others, a clear conscience, companionship of the Holy Ghost, self-mastery, trustworthiness, and worthiness for a mission and temple ordinances.

Most parents realize that the moral standards of society are declining. This change has eroded much of the public support and many of the natural social barriers that traditionally discouraged adolescents from improper sexual experience. Thus, parents should not be naive about the risks their children may be facing, nor should they be too shocked at the evidence their children show them of a sexually permissive society. Rather, parents should prepare themselves to feel comfortable talking about sexual matters with their children in a straightforward way. Because of today's sexual openness, children must be warned in matter-of-fact ways about the pressures they will face. But they must also be reassured that they have the agency and the spiritual power

within them to control the emotions and the behavior leading up to intentional sexual arousal. They should be taught to properly bridle their passions (see Alma 38:12).

The most powerful source of protection for our youth against the temptation to be immoral is a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. Spiritual strength and understanding come from a child's personal feelings about God. These can be a force strong enough to offset the tantalizing emotional pressure young people feel in today's world.

Parents teach religious values to their children throughout their lives. This teaching is most effective in the same loving, secure atmosphere that is so vital to teaching wholesome attitudes about sexuality. "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. . . . See adolescence as a time of spiritual power, and help your teenagers to see it in this way as well" (*A Parent's Guide*, pp. 42-43).

We cannot ignore our sacred responsibility to teach our children about their divine powers of procreation. We need to teach them from infancy about the Lord's intended purposes for our physical bodies. Parents can overcome feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy by teaching with plainness and reverence and by explaining biological facts in the context of the Lord's eternal plan. In the wholesome atmosphere of the home, sons and daughters can learn how they become partners with Heavenly Father in providing bodies for his spirit children.

Suggestions for Teachers

1. Explain that the sisters can find help in teaching human intimacy to their children in *A Parent's Guide* (31125); in the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* (31106), pages 177-78 and 253-60; and in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* (34285).
2. Review Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 11:11, and the statements of Elder Packer and Brother Hafen to establish the importance of romantic love. Ask: How can we help children to understand this wholesome view of romantic love? What are the blessings associated with living the law of chastity?

3. Ask: In what situations might parents naturally be able to teach children about sexuality and morality? The sisters may want to discuss situations in which they have been able to teach effectively. Discuss the importance of instructing children approaching the age of puberty even before they ask questions.
4. Ask: What false teachings about sexuality and morality do our children receive from the media and from their society? What can we do to counteract these influences on our children?