



AWAKE! NO. 5 2016



HELP FOR THE FAMILY | PARENTING

Teaching Your Child About Sex

THE CHALLENGE

Just a few decades ago, parents had at least a good *chance* to be the first to talk to their son or daughter about sex. And they could explain things gradually, according to the child's age and need.

That has all changed. "Children are being exposed to sexual messages at increasingly early ages, and the sexual content of children's media is on the rise," says the book *The Lolita Effect*. Does this new reality help children or hurt them?



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Explicit content is everywhere. In her book *Talk to Me First*, Deborah Roffman writes that "conversations, advertisements, movies, books, song lyrics, TV shows, texts, games, billboards, and phone and computer screens [are] so laced with sexual imagery, language, and innuendo that many [teens, preteens, and even young children] must conclude, at least unconsciously, that sex must be . . . the absolute most important thing."

Marketing is partly to blame. Advertisers and retailers peddle sexy clothing for children, training them from an early age to put undue emphasis on appearance. “Marketers know about young children’s vulnerabilities, and they exploit them,” says the book *So Sexy So Soon*. “All these sexual images and products are not intended to sell children on sex” but “on shopping.”

Information is not enough. Just as there is a difference between knowing how a car works and being a responsible driver, there is a difference between having knowledge about sex and using that knowledge to make wise decisions.

The bottom line: Today, more than ever, you need to help your children train their “powers of discernment” so that they can “distinguish both right and wrong.”—[Hebrews 5:14](#).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Get involved. No matter how awkward it may be, [talking to your children about sex](#) is your responsibility. Accept it.—*Bible principle: [Proverbs 22:6](#)*.

Have small discussions. Instead of having one big talk, take advantage of casual moments to communicate, perhaps while the two of you are traveling in your car or doing a chore. To help your child open up, ask viewpoint questions. For example, rather than saying, “Are *you* attracted to ads like that?” you could say, “Why do you think advertisers use those types of images to sell products?” After your child answers, you could ask, “How do *you* feel about that?”—*Bible principle: [Deuteronomy 6:6, 7](#)*.

Keep it age appropriate. Preschoolers can be taught the proper names of the sex organs, as well as how to protect themselves from sexual predators. As they grow, children can be told basic facts about reproduction. By puberty, they should have come to understand more fully the physical and moral aspects of sex.

Impart values. Start teaching your child—at an early age—about honesty, integrity, and respect. Then, when sex *is* discussed, you have a foundation to build on. Also, state your values clearly. For example, if you view sex before marriage as improper, say so. And explain *why* it is wrong and harmful. “Teens who say they know that their parents disapprove of teens having intercourse are less likely to actually have sex,” says the book *Beyond the Big Talk*.

Set the example. Live by the values you teach. For instance, do you laugh at obscene jokes? dress provocatively? flirt? Such actions may undermine the [moral values you are trying to teach your children](#).—*Bible principle: [Romans 2:21](#)*.

Keep it positive. Sex is a gift from God, and in the right circumstance—in marriage—it can be a source of great pleasure. ([Proverbs 5:18, 19](#)) Let your child know that in time he or

she may be able to enjoy that gift, without the heartache and worries that come from premarital sex.—[1 Timothy 1:18, 19](#).

KEY SCRIPTURES

- “Train a boy [or, “child; youth,” footnote] in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”—[Proverbs 22:6](#).
- “You must impress [God’s commandments] upon your sons.”—[Deuteronomy 6:6, 7](#), footnote.
- “Do you, however, the one teaching someone else, not teach yourself?”—[Romans 2:21](#).

A PARENT’S ROLE

Despite common perceptions, children—including teenagers—are more influenced by their parents than by peers. “Children always look first to the immediate adults in their lives for guidance and for framing the world in a way they can relate to and understand. They go elsewhere only when they know or sense that we are not willing to be present or available. . . . What decades of research demonstrate should be no great surprise: families who sustain this kind of connectedness around issues such as sexuality raise healthier children who make better decisions, take greater responsibility for their actions, and perhaps most important, postpone potentially risky behaviors.”—*Talk to Me First*.

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