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Working on Trust (2): "Talking with children about human sexuality"

How should parents talk to their children about human sexuality? The second part in the series "Working on Trust" on educating children in freedom.

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"Working on Trust" is a series of videos intended to help parents in the education of their children. The

videos draw upon the teachings of Saint Josemaria, who was passionate about freedom and the educational role of parents.

Working on Trust (2): Open House for Dialogue

Speaking to children about human sexuality. In today's culture, children from a very young age have access to all sorts of material via smartphones and the internet. Increasingly they also interact with other children whose values and upbringings may differ from their own, providing them with a set of values around human sexuality that differ from those parents want to offer their children. Given this panorama, parents need to help their children learn how to make good choices. And making good choices involves helping them to be well-informed and able to discern what is good for

their body and soul versus what can be harmful.

Learning how to best communicate with your children about human sexuality is never a matter of “one size fits all.” Rather, it involves creating a certain level of trust and naturalness with children, adjusting to their age and what they are capable of understanding well and taking proper advantage of the unique relationship you have with your child.

Below are some questions that can help you get more out of this video, in screenings with your friends, in your school or at your parish.

Questions for dialogue:

— Is it ever too young to start speaking to your children about human sexuality? When is the best age to start?

— How can parents make it easy for their children to speak with them about these issues? Are there resources available that can be helpful to initiate these conversations?

— Should mothers just speak to daughters and fathers just speak to sons, or should both parents try to engage children of both sexes? How can parents know what is age-appropriate content to share?

— With a wide variety of sexual behaviors now openly discussed, legally protected and sometimes available to view for young children, how can Christian moral teaching on human sexuality be best taught to children? What can parents do to help their young and adolescent children survive and thrive in environments that condone a number of sexual practices antithetical to Christian living?

Some suggested action-steps:

— Make sure you and your spouse have a shared vision on when and how to discuss these issues with your children. Think about even adopting a strategy with certain goals in mind. Discuss these themes with each other regularly.

— Select some age appropriate movies, TV shows and/or documentaries that you can watch with your children that will naturally lead to discussing these issues.

— Pray daily for your children and their purity. Teach them to pray three Hail Mary's each night before bed, asking Our Lady to keep their body and soul pure for God. Remind them often that they are beloved children of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in them when they are in the state of grace.

— Try to speak more about the beauty of human love and make that the context whenever discussing human sexuality. For a Christian, human sexual relations are always an expression of committed marital love, open to human life.

— Encourage children and help them when trying to live with style, elegance and modesty. Support these efforts by shopping with them and trying to foster an elegant personal style in their attire.

Quotes from Sacred Scripture for reflection:

And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that

moves on the earth."

(Genesis 1:27-28)

"Jesus said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." *(Matthew 19:4-6)*

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body. *(1 Corinthians 6:18-20)*

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant

offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (*Ephesians 5:1-5*)

Quotes from Pope Francis for reflection:

“Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into objects to be used. Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviors that distort our capacity for love.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 282)

“Frequently, sex education deals primarily with ‘protection’ through the practice of ‘safe sex.’ Such expressions convey a negative attitude towards the natural procreative finality of sexuality, as if

an eventual child were an enemy to be protected against. This way of thinking promotes narcissism and aggressivity in place of acceptance.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 283)

“It is not helpful to overwhelm them [young people] with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality. Young people need to realize that they are bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth towards maturity.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 281)

“Sex education should also include respect and appreciation for differences, as a way of helping the young to overcome their self-absorption and to be open and accepting of others. Beyond the

understandable difficulties which individuals may experience, the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation... An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 285)

Quote from Saint Josemaria for reflection:

“This friendship, this knowing how to put oneself on the children's level, makes it easier for them to talk about their small problems; it also makes it possible for the parents to be the ones who teach them gradually about the origin of life, in accordance with their mentality and capacity to understand, gently anticipating their

natural curiosity. I consider this very important. There is no reason why children should associate sex with something sinful, or find out about something that is in itself noble and holy in a vulgar conversation with a friend. It can also be an important step in strengthening the friendship between parents and children, preventing a separation in the early moments of their moral life.

“Parents should also endeavor to stay young at heart so as to find it easier to react sympathetically towards the noble aspirations and even towards the extravagant fantasies of their youngsters. Life changes, and there are many new things which we may not like. Perhaps, objectively speaking, they are no better than others that have gone before, but they are not bad. They are simply other ways of living and nothing more. On more than one occasion conflicts may arise because

importance is attached to petty differences which could be overcome with a little common sense and good humor.”

- *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá,*
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