

The Life Cycle: Adolescence



Adolescence



The[♂]ology
of the BO[♀]dy for families
& single people
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

Universal Truths about Human Sexuality for People of All Ages
With extensive references to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

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Adolescence

What the Church Says

621 Just as puberty was a period of self-discovery, adolescence is the period of self-projection and discovery of God's personal vocation for each person to marriage or virginity for the sake of the Kingdom, as well as the kind of work or service to society that can be accomplished based upon one's natural gifts (Cf. TMHS, 98).

622 Parents are critically important at this stage, which is the culmination of their mission of education for love. Adolescents need assistance and support in prayer and dialogue to discern and more clearly hear the voice of the Father calling them to a particular vocation in life. The length of this stage of life varies according to each child's unique personality, maturity, and rate of development and "tends to be longer today than in the past" (Cf. TMHS, 98).

Vocation

623 Our Lord called everyone to be holy by following Him; therefore, every person has a vocation to holiness. Young people need to know that their free will gives them the ability to accept or reject the path of holiness, and that they will either reap the good fruits of choices they make now or suffer the consequences for the rest of their lives. Adolescents require guidance from their parents as well as the support of properly formed priests, religious, and marriage and family associations so they can better understand the various paths of holiness open to them within the Catholic Church (Cf. TMHS, 99, 100).

624 Catechesis and formation within and outside the family must promote the value of virginity and celibacy—along with the vocation of marriage—as essential to the life of the Church and society; both of which depend upon the holiness of family life that is built up within the home (Cf. TMHS, 101).

Parents' Example

625 Parents must understand, live and teach the uncompromised truth of sexual morality which is "the indissolubility of marriage and the relationship between love and procreation, as well as the immorality of premarital relations, abortion, contraception and masturbation" (Cf. TMHS, 102).

626 As sexual problems or challenges become evident, a parent's example and prudent advice about prayer, frequent confession, and worthy reception of the Eucharist will help their children experience the beauty and strength of remaining pure and chaste. Parents' love for the truths of the Catholic faith will give them an ability to explain why the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexuality must never be separated, and why premarital sex and artificial contraception are evil (Cf. TMHS, 102).

The Problem of Masturbation

627 Masturbation is a sin and serious disorder that cannot be justified. However, the immaturity of this stage of life can diminish the deliberateness of the act. Inner personality conflicts and the selfish vision of sexuality promoted by many cultures should be addressed and overcome (Cf. TMHS, 103).

The Problem of Homosexuality

628 Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and are serious sins that cause deadly effects to the body and soul. Tendencies toward homosexuality—like any other tendency toward sinning against chastity, such as lust, premarital sex and adultery—should be addressed immediately at this stage of life. Love and respect for the dignity of the person suffering from tendencies toward homosexuality mean parents should seek help from truly Catholic experts and obtain therapy, if necessary. This condition is a trial and cross for those affected, but, like everyone else, persons who have homosexual tendencies are called to holiness by remaining pure and chaste (Cf. TMHS, 104, 105).

The Cultures of Life and Death

629 A healthy culture of the body accepts sex and the human body as something attractive, pleasant, and a gift from God who desired that man and woman—within the marriage covenant—experience true romantic love that lasts forever. Adolescents often have problems accepting themselves and their bodies and need this positive view of reality, rather than a negative view which looks at the body crudely as unclean, evil or animalistic and to be used, as such, for selfish pleasure (Cf. TMHS, 106).

630 Participation in the culture of life through Church associations, movements, communities, and volunteer or missionary activities will provide young people with a lived experience of an attractive culture of life beyond the family home (Cf. TMHS, 106). It will also help them avoid an excessive closing in on themselves (Cf. TMHS, 108).

Friendships

631 Although adolescents enjoy more autonomy in their friendships and time spent outside the home, parents can and still must intervene to protect them from destructive personal friendships and romantic attachments that threaten virginal chastity (Cf. TMHS, 107).

Wisdom of Parents

632 Adolescents breathe in the cultural atmosphere around them, and so parents must help them discern the differences between the culture of life that the Catholic Church cultivates and the culture of death the world promotes (which are conflicting views on sexuality). Disordered use of sex will progressively destroy the goal of finding true love which most young people desire. Love is not related to feelings of self-gratification but rather pertains to the decision of self-sacrifice and self-discipline for their good and the good of their future spouse (if they have a vocation to marriage).

633 Adolescents are very astute and can easily perceive contradictions between what their parents say and do; because they are strongly attracted to the truth, they can easily detect hypocrisy. When it comes to chastity, if a father or mother—by word or example—communicates the message, “Do as I say and not as I do,” they will likely end up destroying their own marriage, family, and their children’s future as well.

634 During these years, young people begin to take more responsibility for the direction their lives will take, make plans for the future, and get involved in projects and activities to advance their goals. There is a common

misconception about freedom: that adolescent children are entitled to begin making personal choices about what rules they choose to follow concerning life, family, society and God. Many parents, sometimes out of ignorance, appear to give implied consent to inappropriate displays of affection by their adolescent children towards the opposite sex. This can happen when parents allow them to form exclusive relationships or begin recreational dating as a kind of rite of passage towards adulthood. However, permitting an adolescent such freedom can expose them to early experimentation and sexual passions that can easily escalate to occasions of sin; this freedom can also expose them to immodest literature and dress, and other expressions of the improper use of sexuality outside of marriage. Rather than training their adolescent children for freedom, parents can inadvertently expose them to choices that lead to immorality, disobedience and the justification of sin.

635 The wonderful and natural zest for freedom and self-expression in the adolescent finds its healthy fulfillment in the daily practice of virginal chastity in mind, heart, body and soul. The question for parents is, “Who will you allow to form the standards of your adolescent’s behavior in sexuality?” Will it be the government, school, peers, popular culture, the “idols” of the entertainment industry in music, literature, television, and movies, or will it be Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church? To say that this decision will be a daily battle for parents and children is an understatement.

636 The bottom line is fairly simple: to dress or act in a way that, intentionally or unintentionally, arouses sexual feelings outside of marriage can be an occasion of either venial

or mortal sin; this truth has never changed. In the 1200s, St. Louis, King of France, home-schooled his 11 children and taught them that they should permit themselves to be tormented by every kind of martyrdom before allowing themselves to commit a mortal sin (Cf. From a spiritual testament to his son by Saint Louis found in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume 4, 1347).

637 The primary objective during adolescence is to reinforce the seven pillars of family chastity formation that have been cultivated deeply in the child’s soul during the years of innocence and puberty. Obedience and right order are learned within relationships with parents, and the Church and public authorities that represent them. The formation of conscience continues with the adolescent’s growing awareness of his or her own personal responsibility and accountability in using God’s gift of free will.

Frequent confession—weekly, monthly, or immediately, if the need—will strengthen the will and conscience in choosing good over evil. Strict avoidance of images and voices that encourage sexual sin—in music, magazines, movies, on the internet, in schools, and from peers—will help prevent a deformed conscience.

638 True love means sacrifice, and adolescents can channel their life-giving sexual energy by sacrificing selfish physical pleasures by getting involved in charitable service projects. Often a young person may have already met his or her future spouse, so they must mutually agree to refrain from sexual relations until they enter into marriage. Self-mastery and the acquisition of virtue come through obeying God and honoring and respecting their parents; and

also through physical, emotional and spiritual self-discipline learned in the process of attaining an education, a skill or mastery of a sport.

639 The vocation to holiness and eternal life with God are profoundly tied to the successful practice of chastity at this age. Heavenly life on earth can be closely approached only in a chaste marriage or virginity for the sake of the Kingdom, while sexual sins can lead to a life of misery on earth and the possibility of eternal separation from God. As parents prepare their children for the Sacrament of Confirmation, they should teach them what it means to be a soldier of Christ (in the battle between life and death, purity and impurity, true love and all that opposes it). Family prayer and frequent reception and adoration of the Eucharist—the foretaste of heaven on earth—will provide the graces needed for successful chastity formation during adolescence. Martyrdom should be considered a normal and daily desire in the sense of cultivating an adolescent’s willingness to suffer torture and death rather than commit a mortal sin.

640 As adolescents make plans for the future, parents can help guide their children in the decision-making process by helping them choose a truly Catholic college that is uncompromising on Church teaching on sexuality (and guide them to schools or campus ministries that profess publicly their faithfulness to the Pope). Despite the great number of colleges which profess to be Catholic, only a handful actually promote authentic Catholic values and teachings on human sexuality.

Putting this Knowledge to Work

641 During adolescence, parents should be aware of:

- Their child’s need to assume more responsibility for the decisions he or she makes, and to be accountable for the consequences.
- Their child’s need to begin thinking about career possibilities, higher education, what vocation in life to pursue, etc.
- Their own example of living chastely, as this will directly influence their child’s commitment to remain chaste until marriage.
- Their responsibility to reinforce Catholic teaching on sexuality.
- The potential for deviant behavioral problems in areas of sexuality (ie., masturbation, homosexuality, etc.) and how to address them.
- The need to continually reinforce the beauty and holiness of God’s gift of sexuality.
- The fact that adolescents often have trouble accepting themselves and understanding their God-given gifts; and, therefore, they will need your continued support and encouragement.
- The need for their continued influence over their child’s choice of friends.
- Attitudes of rebelliousness and the necessity to understand and resolve the reasons behind them.
- The fact that conversations with their children will begin to take on more adult characteristics.
- The growing need for their child’s independence and how your assistance and guidance will help them make a smooth transition to young adulthood.

642 Vocation in life

- Adolescents need to know that they will be held personally accountable for the choices they make and that there are consequences—either good or bad—for every decision they make.
- It is critically important for young people to know that the effects of their decisions will be with them for the rest of their lives.

Both boys and girls should be made aware of the different possibilities that are available within a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, including:

- Introducing boys to opportunities as a diocesan or religious order priest
- Joining a cloistered community of prayer
- Joining a contemplative religious order
- Joining a religious order devoted to the poor
- Joining a religious order specializing in education
- Joining a religious order devoted to health care
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- For those who decide to remain single, parents should provide explanations and answers to questions about what it means to live a life of consecrated virginity.
- Career choices of service are nearly limitless.
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Discuss the vocation to marriage including:

- Opportunities to help less fortunate children through foster care programs.
- Permanent adoption of children in need of a home.
- Lay missionary work and activities that are available to families.
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Discuss associations of the faithful including:

- Third Order religious movements like the Franciscans, Carmelites, etc.
- Private associations of the faithful.
- Apostolates in service to the Church.
- Apostolates in service to families.
- Lay ministries in service to the Church, or to the poor and marginalized people in our midst.
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Explain single life of virginity and possible vocations:

- Lay missionary work
- Care for aging family members
- Visiting the sick and infirm
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643 Help adolescents discern their vocation by doing some or all of the following:

- Going to vocation seminars, dinners, retreats and camps.
- Participating in World Youth Days.
- Organizing family pilgrimages to holy sites.
- Discussing possible vocations with them in light of their gifts and talents.
- Meeting with bishops, priests, vocation directors, and religious brothers and sisters to learn more about the diversity of vocations within the Church.
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644 Parents must lead by example

- Your good example as a parent may yield either good or unknown results, since your children still have free-will to accept or reject your values.
- Your bad example as a parent will yield poor results with your children.
- During adolescence, children are attracted to good role models. Parents should be first in line and by far the most influential, but peers are also influential during this time; they can, and oftentimes do, rival parents in this regard.
- If you love and forgive unconditionally and teach your children to do the same, you will help them establish a solid foundation for living healthy and holy lives.
- Your frequent reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist will help your children better appreciate the sacramental life of the Church and

encourage them to live their own faith everyday.

- Children should see their parents praying as a way of life, especially outside of daily family prayer together.
- Children should regularly see their father and mother asking God for guidance in their daily decisions.
- Parents and adolescents together should look for opportunities to perform corporal and charitable works of mercy (i.e., to feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; visit the sick).
- Adolescents should witness their parents sacrificing to pay a tithe and offering their gifts, talents and treasures to the Church and the poor.
- Young people who are shown parental love, mercy and compassion will more likely be loving, merciful and compassionate toward others.
- Young people must witness the conviction of their parents—in living the truth of their Catholic faith—in order to help them cultivate that same conviction in their own lives.
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645 The problem with masturbation

- Point out that masturbation is a selfish and sinful use of God's gift of sexuality; a moral evil with grave consequences.
- Point out ways to either avoid the temptation or help them find ways to redirect their thoughts to things that are holy and pure like saying short prayers such as

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I love you; Help me to be pure and holy; Jesus, I trust in you; St. Joseph, come to my aid; Mother Mary, help me be pure, etc., until the temptation subsides.

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646 The problem with homosexuality

- Parents need to be aware of the disordered signs of homosexuality and get therapeutic help for their child from qualified medical professionals, preferably Catholic or Christian doctors or therapists.

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647 Promote and develop good attitudes toward the culture of life by encouraging your child to do the following:

- Become involved in any type of pro-life activity.
- Get active in Christian youth groups that embrace a culture of life.
- Read materials that promote the merits of

- honest courtship over casual dating.
- Participate in religious conferences.
- Attend youth-oriented retreats.
- Avoid secular music.
- Attend Eucharistic congresses and conferences.
- Attend Marian conferences.
- Engage in volunteer work such as in nursing homes.
- Explore opportunities for mission work or any other service activity that promotes self-giving.
- Fully understand the evils of abortion and contraception, and how they are interconnected.
- Pray daily for an end to abortion.
- Become involved with the care of younger children, such as baby-sitting.
- Participate in home-schooling enrichment classes and gatherings.
- Learn how to discern the proper use of the media in movies, television, music, etc.; parents should provide this guidance throughout the child's life at home.

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