

The Life Cycle: Puberty



The **ology** of the **Body** 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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Puberty

What the Church Says

601 A child matures beyond the age of innocence as the physical, psychological and spiritual changes of puberty open up the horizon of a whole new world of discovery. The parents' attentive guidance, clear information and reassuring love will provide the child with the means to navigate through this stage of life. Pope John Paul II offered this insight into puberty:

This is a time of self-discovery and "of one's own inner world, the time of generous plans, the time when the feeling of love awakens, with the biological impulses of sexuality, the time of the desire to be together, the time of particularly intense joy connected with the exhilarating discovery of life. But often it is also the age of deeper questioning, of anguished or even frustrating searching, of a certain mistrust of others and dangerous introspection, and the age sometimes of the first experiences of setbacks and of disappointments" (TMHS, 87 quoting from John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 38; AAS 71 (1979), pg. 1309).

602 Without fear, cowardice or anxiety, parents must provide education concerning the genital aspects of sexuality in the context of chastity, procreation, marriage and the family so the child's personality can mature emotionally and spiritually in a healthy way (Cf. TMHS, 88). The loving relationship and daily confidential dialogue between father and son and mother and daughter are the very heart of sexual education at this stage for which there is no substitute. If the parents fail in this stage, the child's natural

curiosity will discover answers mostly in all the wrong places. Rather than an integration of sexuality in the personality, this stage might be the beginning of a growing disintegration of character and emotional stability.

Giving Suitable Information

603 In the heart of the family, suitable information about sexual activity, anatomy, and hygiene is to be presented in a timely and positive moral and spiritual light (Cf. TMHS, 94). Sexual activity and the marital act are reserved for marriage alone in accord with God's commandments and design for the family; God's commandments are designed to lead to a happy and blessed life on earth.

Formation of Conscience

604 A good formation of conscience during puberty means teaching each child that God has a special plan of love and vocation for him or her, that observing the moral law brings freedom, and that original sin has greatly weakened our ability to obey; however, the grace of Christ and His constant presence with us gives us all the power and strength we need to do good and avoid evil (Cf. TMHS, 95).

Answering Questions through Loving Dialogue

605 Young people during puberty are in a wonderful time of discovery; they have many questions and are naturally curious about sexuality. Parents need to be attentive to these questions and spend time answering them with well-reasoned arguments in favor of

chastity. They must also analyze with them the weaknesses of theories that inspire permissive and pleasure-seeking behavior. Scripture teaches that sexuality is a holy gift of God for sharing in His creative power and is not shameful or dirty; nor is one's sexuality to be used or abused for pleasure, or just for fun or recreation (Cf. TMHS, 96).

606 Young people at this age are extremely vulnerable and easily influenced by emotional, physical and visual stimuli. Advertising, television, music and the fashion industry often exploit this vulnerability in a negative way; parents must help their children to resist these and other social and peer pressures. When parents and children together practice good habits of modest speech and dress, it is more likely that young people will obtain the strength of character that comes from overcoming evil influences (Cf. TMHS, 97).

Specific Information for Boys

607 Boys, in particular, need a father's help in understanding the positive and noble purpose of the physical and physiological development of the genital organs before they receive distorted information from someone else. Being curious about girls, boys should also be given detailed and sufficient information about feminine bodily and psychological characteristics so they can learn proper respect for women as a gift of God. Information is to be presented serenely in the positive framework of God's plan for marriage, family, fatherhood and motherhood (Cf. TMHS, 91).

608 Boys are particularly vulnerable to erotic fantasies and temptations to engage in

sexual experiences. Boys require attention and correction so that they can recognize the nobility of the gift of their sexuality. And, they need to know the truth about sexuality in the right light and receive that formation from reliable sources (Cf. TMHS, 93).

Specific Information for Girls

609 As mothers follow the physiological development of their daughters, they can help them accept their femininity as a beautiful gift of God. The cycles of fertility and purification are to be viewed in light of God's design for life rather than being viewed as something negative such as a curse; understanding that God has a natural plan for fertility will help young girls see the evil of a contraceptive mentality. Detailed explanations about sexual union are not necessary unless specifically requested (Cf. TMHS, 90).

610 Girls can be encouraged to show consideration for a boy's visual orientation by maintaining modesty in speech, action and dress. Girls need to know the deep value and meaning of virginity in the eyes of God through the lives of the virgin martyrs whose noble feminine strength moved them to choose death rather than sin against chastity. These examples are especially desired in a world dominated by pleasure-seeking (Cf. TMHS, 92).

Wisdom of Parents

Daily Dialogue

611 Maintaining a constant daily dialogue with each individual child is extremely important during puberty as they open up to

the world around them and begin to take in a bombardment of conflicting messages regarding sexuality. Eliminating even the slightest stimuli that can arouse sexual thoughts is important so that the occasions of sin and the devastation it can cause are minimized. The media, advertising, “safe” sex education proponents, older peers and sexual deviants are all intensely interested in reaching children at this age and manipulating their vulnerability in sexual matters for their own purposes. If children are exposed to secular education, they could require many hours of individualized daily debriefings or deprogramming to deal with all they may have seen or heard during and after school. On the positive side, parents can also influence their children; they must continually form and educate each child individually in God’s plan for sexuality and help them sort through right from wrong, truth from lies, and facts from feelings.

Self-mastery

612 At puberty, a child’s conscience is not yet fully formed; and, they are quite vulnerable to being swayed by peer opinions, feelings, emotions and sensory perceptions (which they are still learning how to subject to reason and the will). Full of self-discovery, children in this age group need to practice sacrificial love and self-denial. One way would be to practice charity toward others, both in the family and outside the home. Self-mastery will be difficult but can and must be accomplished over time, and a parent’s constant encouragement and reward of virtuous behavior will help tremendously. Following the example of Jesus at 12-years-old, the child should be affirmed in their newfound independence, vocation and discovery of who they are; but, at the same time, he must also remain in right order by being obediently

submissive to his parents in order to mature in grace and wisdom.

613 Parents should continually remind their child that true freedom comes from listening to and obeying the voice of God the Father—in the sanctuary of the conscience—and not by following subjective feelings, emotions or personal opinions. Pride, immaturity, intense emotions, and the weakness of original sin again can easily delude a young person into thinking or feeling they are right and know everything.

Frequent Confession

614 Personal accountability for one’s actions and the possibility of meriting eternal life or death, based upon choices now, particularly in chastity, must be at the top of the daily priorities in life. Frequent confession will serve to heal, correct and maintain a child in a state of grace during this often tumultuous time. Stories of the many young martyrs and saints of chastity, whose heroic virtue led them to even die a horrible death rather than commit a sin against purity, will inspire and strengthen the hearts of children during this period. A special consecration to Jesus, Mary or St. Joseph for the purpose of chastity will obtain supernatural help and keep a child’s vision on heavenly things.

Putting this Knowledge to Work

615 Formation of conscience

- Teach your children that worldly views which promote immorality do not reflect God’s design and purpose for human sexuality, chastity, holiness and authentic love. The mass media promotes worldly views.

Sins against chastity contained in the Sixth and Ninth Commandments need to be discussed in age-appropriate detail, including information on how they can be avoided.

Those sins are as follows:

- Masturbation
 - Fornication
 - Pornography
 - Prostitution
 - Rape
 - Homosexual practices
 - Lust of the flesh
 - Lust of the eyes
 - Pride of life
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- Begin teaching your children that the gift and use of their sexuality is reserved by God for marriage.
 - As a child's curiosity about the opposite sex grows, parents must reinforce the need to respect all people as children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit.
 - Parents should explain the means of grace that are available to strengthen their child's resolve to live chastely (i.e., the Sacraments, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, daily prayer, reading the Bible and so forth).
 - Help your children understand and know the difference between having sexual feelings and acting on them, as well as knowing right from wrong in these situations.
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- 616 Loving dialogue**
- Parents should have a plan in place before their children reach puberty; they should know what they are going to say and how they are going to impart information about human sexuality to their children.
 - Loving and meaningful dialogue between parents and children should already be sufficiently developed before puberty. This will make discussions easier and more meaningful.
 - Parents must be vigilant in intercepting premature and erroneous information from their children's peers and other sources, and be ready to correct any misinformation their children may be receiving.
 - Parents should have daily discussions with their children to find out what they are learning or hearing on the streets and in schools.
 - Listen to what your children are telling you (pay attention to their body language, eye contact, and other external signs to validate whether they are telling the truth or not; or, to discern whether they are simply nervous or apprehensive).
 - Parents should be sensitive to the biological, emotional and psychological development of each child and be prepared to introduce information about human sexuality at the appropriate time. Beginning too early or waiting too long can be counterproductive and detrimental to your child.
 - Dialogue should include the biological, emotional and spiritual dimensions of sexuality in stages.
 - Parents need to share their own personal experiences during puberty as a way to help their child process and integrate the information in a healthy and constructive way.
 - Mothers should provide individualized and personalized information to their daughters in private.

- Fathers should provide individualized and personalized information to their sons in private.
- Keeping these discussions confidential between parent and child can be a great opportunity to build trust.
- Parents should ask lots of questions and get feedback from their children.
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617 Suitable information

- Sexuality is a gift from God.
- Proper use of sexuality, according to God’s design, must be emphasized.
- Teach reverence and respect for their and other people’s bodies, especially those of the opposite sex.
- Instructions on human sexuality should ultimately be directed towards a vocation to marriage, virginity, or consecrated life.
- Help children understand how mass media distorts the beauty of God’s design and purpose for sexuality.
- Information should be imparted in stages according to the emotional, biological and psychological disposition of the children and their readiness to receive the information.
- Biological aspects of sexuality need to be presented during this period of time including anatomically correct names for body parts, etc., if this has not been done yet.
- Discussions about personal hygiene, modesty and purity are important in light of the physical changes that are taking place in their bodies at this stage of life.

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618 For boys by fathers

- Educate boys about what to expect as their bodies develop and mature.
- Discussions about sexuality should be directed towards marriage and fatherhood or virginity for the sake of the Kingdom.
- Boys should be given generalized information about the changes girls are experiencing as they go through puberty.
- Stress the need for reverence of the body as being a temple of the Holy Spirit; respect for their own and other people’s bodies.
- Reinforce your message of chastity at all ages and that sex is reserved for marriage.
- Fathers should teach their sons about the need for custody of the eyes, purity in mind and imagination, and how to avoid or ignore visual stimuli that will tempt them to sin.
- Fathers should teach their sons about being responsible for their actions and behavior.
- Puberty is the appropriate time for discussions about the need for boys to exercise self-control of their sexual impulses, and the meaning of true manhood and fatherhood.
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619 For girls by mothers

- Educate girls about what to expect as their bodies develop and mature.
- Discussions about sexuality should be directed towards marriage and motherhood, or virginity of the sake of the Kingdom.

- Girls should be given sufficient information about the changes boys are experiencing as they go through puberty.
- Stress the need for reverence of the body as being a temple of the Holy Spirit; their own and other people’s bodies.
- Reinforce your message of chastity at all ages and that sex is reserved for marriage.
- Mothers should emphasize the need for modest dress codes, limited or no use of make-up and other things which attract male attention and why this is so important.
- Girls often do not realize how their appearance affects boys, so mothers must also address this subject.
- Girls need to know and understand why they must avoid attracting sexual attention, and how to counter pressures to dress and act immodestly.
- They need to know what real beauty in God’s design means.
- Mothers should help their daughters comprehend the necessity of dressing more conservatively instead of revealing their bodies to others, so that their virginity and innocence can be preserved until they are married. Mothers can reinforce this message by their example.
- Puberty is the appropriate time for discussions about reproductive cycles, fertility, and the meaning of womanhood and motherhood.

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620 Early discernment of vocations

- Boys in particular should be encouraged to serve the local parish community as altar servers. This has always been a traditional pathway to the priesthood and religious life.
- Foster the musical talents of your children by having them participate in the music ministry of your parish. With the support and help of your pastor and music director, form a children’s choir to participate in the liturgical worship of the Church on Sundays and for special events.
- Encourage your children to participate in Church-sponsored summer camps and outings for children; or, initiate programs where there is a need.
- Encourage your child to get involved in service work in and around the parish; or, visit the elderly as a ministry of charity within the Church.
- Take family trips to holy places, monasteries and shrines.
- Make plans to take annual family pilgrimages, especially in the summer.
- Encourage your children to study the lives of the Saints.

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