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LEARNING

for the
Christian
family

ABOUT SEX

How
to **Talk Confidently**
with Your Child
about Sex

For **Parents**

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Acknowledgments

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Book 6 of the Learning About Sex Series

The titles in the series:

Book 1: Why Boys and Girls Are Different

Book 2: Where Do Babies Come From?

Book 3: How You Are Changing

Book 4: Sex and the New You

Book 5: Love, Sex, and God

Book 6: How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex

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Editors' Foreword

How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex is written especially for parents who want to communicate Christian values as they discuss sex with their children. Like its predecessor, the new Learning about Sex series provides information about the social-psychological and physiological aspects of human sexuality. But more: it does so from a distinctively Christian point of view, in the context of our relationship to the God who created us and redeemed us in Jesus Christ. The series presents sex as another good gift from God that is to be used responsibly.

The other books in the series are graded—in vocabulary and in the amount of information they provide. They answer the questions that persons at each age level typically ask. Separate books for boys and girls are provided at each age and developmental level.

Because children vary widely in their growth rates and interest levels, parents and other concerned adults will want to preview each book in the series, directing the child to the next graded book when he or she is ready for it.

Ideally, the books in this series are used as part of a much more broadly focused yet more personal training of young people for biblical adulthood. For young people, this training can flow from a mentoring relationship similar to that of Paul and Timothy or Ruth and Naomi. A young man and young woman can learn much from a parent, grandparent, or other adult who trusts in Jesus for his or her salvation. In the context of such a relationship, questions of a personal nature can be asked and answered, insightful discussions held, and godly behaviors modeled. God's plan unfolds as each generation in succession passes on the truths God imparts through His Word and the wisdom that comes as challenges are met and overcome by the power of God's grace through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Each of the books in the Learning About Sex series for boys and the Learning About Sex series for girls can serve as a helpful starting point for casual conversation and when answering other questions a child might have.

The other books in this series can also be used as mini-units or as part of another course of study in a Christian school setting. Whenever

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these books are used in a class setting, it is important to let the parents know beforehand, since the primary responsibility for the sex education of their children is theirs.

While parents will appreciate the help of the school, they will want to know what is being taught. As the Christian home and the Christian school work together, Christian values in sex education can be more effectively strengthened.

The Editors

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Now That I Have Your Attention . . .

S-E-X! Huge fluorescent-orange letters on the front of the greeting card shout the word. Inside, the caption reads, “Now that I have your attention . . .”

One little three-letter word. One huge concern: How can we help our children grow with healthy attitudes toward sex and without messing up their lives? How can we communicate the Christian view of sexuality—and do so in a convincing way? After all, we’re not “experts”! We suspect that our kids already are more sexually aware than we’d like.

Let’s start at the beginning, with the wonder of it all.

Fashioned by God’s Own Hand!

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. . . .
God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.
(Genesis 1:27, 31)

With tender care, God fashioned the first male of the human family from the dust of the earth. Observing the man’s aloneness, the Lord God took a rib from the man’s chest and made a companion: the first woman.

Made in God’s image. Made for each other. That’s God’s awesome gift of sexuality. That’s God’s perfect design. In His unfathomable wisdom, God created an orderly world, with flawless harmony, connection, and balance. Our human minds can only begin to grasp our Creator’s grand, perfectly detailed arrangement. God has put us together intricately to enjoy one another physically, psychologically, and spiritually. God made us for companionship; He did not intend for any of us—either male

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or female—to be alone. Who we are, our basic orientation as male or female, is a part of God’s plan. Our loving Father means for us to delight in this blessing, but also to cherish and guard it as the priceless treasure it is, as we understand ourselves and relate to those around us.

Not What We Do, But What We Are

From that creation day to this, our being male or female influences every aspect of our lives. Parents of both a daughter and a son marvel at the innate differences in their children. They watch their young daughter as she cuddles her baby doll or clumps around the house in Mom’s high heels. They shush their little boy’s continuous car-and-truck noises and note how he and his buddy seem unable to resist wrestling and scrapping. Mystified, they ask each other the perennial question of parents down through the ages: “Now where did *that* come from?”

Parents learn to embrace these distinct behaviors as their child’s unique identity and disposition as female or male. Indeed, many authorities seem to be rediscovering that these essential differences truly are related to the child’s gender, not picked up from the culture alone. God carefully, purposely knit each of us together in our mother’s womb; that makes us the individuals we are from the moment of conception! Put simply, our gender determines our outward appearance and influences our actions and choices throughout our lives.

Each One Unique

This is not to say that every boy is like every other boy, nor every girl like all the other girls. Nevertheless, suppose we divided any group of children, boys in one cluster, girls in another. We’d find more correlations between youngsters in each gender group than between the boys and the girls. Certainly there would be variations, but the truth is that we are designed and created by God, with distinct personalities.

The bottom line: We are unique, with unique combinations of personality traits. Yet we also share similarities with others of our own gender.

We are male and female. Created to complement each other. God intended that we view our bodies and our masculinity and femininity as He designed them to be when He created that first man and that first woman—as “very good”!

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God's plan was, and always is, perfect. His plan for uniting a male and female in marriage is one truly "made in heaven." That intimate relationship rang with perfect harmony in the Garden of Eden; Eve was a perfect accompaniment to Adam. But when selfish desires surfaced, discord shattered God's perfect composition. In His incomprehensible mercy, the God who lovingly created man and woman to live in relationships with Him and with each other also lovingly sent His one and only Son to earth to reconcile the disconnection brought about by sin. The One who created the perfect relationship also restores it, sacrificing Himself for us. Christ Jesus is the perfect husband, who gave His life for His bride, for each of us who belong to His body of believers—the Church (see Ephesians 5:21–33).

We Live in the Real World

Many parents admit to running scared as they contemplate guiding their offspring through their growing-up years into young adulthood. What reasonable person wouldn't be uneasy? In print, on the screen, and over the airwaves a steady parade of innuendo and blatant sex streams forth. We shudder as we consider the effect on young, undiscerning minds.

The wreckage resulting from misuse of sexuality clutters the landscape. Adults *and* children in every community are surrounded by the evidence: marriages destroyed because of extramarital affairs; children bearing children; and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as AIDS now accepted as a danger common to all, rather than a rarity.

We see. We hear. What once shocked us now appears normal—or at least commonplace. If this is true for us as adults, how much more for our children, who lack the life experience that helps foster a balanced perspective?

Questions abound. How do we steer our youngsters toward God's view of sexuality rather than society's flawed outlook? Is it even possible to raise young women and men who cherish God's precious gift and the marriage relationship in which He intended it to flourish?

Although we live in a world contaminated by sin, where many guarantees don't seem to exist, in faith we can rely on the sure promises of God. He says, *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous*

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right hand" (Isaiah 41:10 ESV). Although we often act in ways that may weaken or sever the bond between ourselves and God or others, God clings to us, brings us to repentance, and for Jesus' sake forgives our selfish, independent choices. God desires our happiness. Jesus says, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:9–13 ESV). When we fail to share of ourselves with another person for the good of that person and for the glory of God, God demonstrates His own selfless love, calling us back to Himself through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.

Sex and Sexuality Are Not the Same . . . Or Are They?

Sex is more than gender, more than sexual intercourse. Sex is not what we do, but what we are. Actually a better term is sexuality, for our being male or female influences every aspect of our lives from day one. Our God has created us for fellowship; the unique sexual differentiation between male and female is a fundamental element in our understanding of what it means to be human and to live in a community. Sexuality encompasses our attitudes, our strengths and weaknesses, our whole way of looking at life. As one counselor put it, "The brain of the typical female and the brain of the typical male are wired differently. It's as simple—and as complex—as that." Females and males naturally seem to process information and arrive at decisions from a particularly male or female perspective, as parents of both daughters and sons often report. That was God's intention: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. . . . God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:27, 31 ESV).

Despite those similarities, however, beware of sweeping generalities. Within those broad parameters, individuals vary widely. Each person is God's unique creation. Although a child's male or female sexuality helps parents to better understand that child, parents who avoid pigeonholing their children bestow a great blessing on their offspring. Similarly,

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spouses who respect and value their own and their marriage partner's singular gifts discover that together they're more effective than either would be alone.

Our society seems uncomfortable even acknowledging that male and female are unique. Media presentations often either disclaim innate differences in the sexes or declare that one is "victimizing" the other. That's a setup for mutual distrust. Yes, injustice occurs, and that's wrong. Still, as Christian parents we do well to avoid echoing that dismal refrain, because every moment of every day our children are formulating their personal image, from their own opinion of themselves and from the opinions of others.

As parents, we want to provide a nurturing atmosphere in which our children can develop a strong self-image and healthy attitudes. A major factor is parental role-modeling. Do we enjoy being female or male ourselves? Do we celebrate the differences between husband and wife? between our daughters and our sons? When moms and dads delight in the uniqueness of each child God gives, children are free to blossom into secure young adults.

Changing Roles and Changeless Facts

Certainly the culture in which we live affects the choices we make. In the past, clothing styles, behaviors, and roles were clearly spelled out. Girls were told to "be nice." Misbehaving boys were excused on the premise that "boys will be boys." Today most parents bite their tongues rather than speak such clichés (even when those exact words leap to mind).

Rather we assure both daughters and sons that they can be anything, do anything if they're willing to work hard enough. Few arenas remain unchallenged by individuals of both genders.

Yet biological differences remain. For example, despite the marvels of science, only the female can shelter the developing child within her body and physically give birth. Only the male produces sperm. Most males display greater physical strength than their female counterparts. Females generally exhibit greater endurance. As one example, females can tolerate cold temperatures for longer periods of time because they're endowed with a larger percentage of insulating body fat even when at their ideal weight.

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Attitudes differ between the sexes as well. Childhood conditioning influences us markedly, whether we're male or female. Nevertheless, scientific research demonstrates specific emotional contrasts. For instance, the average female is naturally more intuitive, able to balance several tasks simultaneously. Researchers report that the male typically fails to pick up subtle messages from conversation and body language and is more likely to focus on one task at a time.

Our essential male or female natures remain unaffected by whatever outward roles we assume in daily life. Variations in our talents and our emotional responses are normal. Each of us is a Designer original! Therefore, we can't lump together all males or all females as if we were cookie-cutter images. Nor can we accurately gauge inner qualities such as strength, security, or tenderness by simple observation. The psalmist David eloquently describes God's handiwork: *"My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them"* (Psalm 139:15–16 ESV). God knows the plans He has for us, and He fearfully, wonderfully, and intentionally made us male or female.

Don't Forget the Wonder!

Sexuality can't be neatly separated from the rest of life. So when we speak with our children, it's critical to remember that wide-ranging issues are part of understanding their maleness or femaleness and of building right attitudes. S-E-X is a big topic!

We'll want to lace our discussions with a sense of wonder and joy. Wonder at the beauty of the gift God bestows on each of us. Joy that He also gives us freedom to view our bodies and our sexuality as He meant them to be when He created that first human male and female—as "very good"!