

**SEXUAL INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE**
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**PROJECT
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CPYU
CENTER FOR PARENT/YOUTH UNDERSTANDING

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NAVIGATING PUBERTY

| *By Dr. Walt Mueller*

There is no question that the most exciting and confusing physical change occurring at puberty is the body's new ability to produce a child. The external genitals enlarge. Boys begin to produce sperm and have involuntary erections and ejaculations; their penis and testicles grow. Girls begin to ovulate and menstruate. The wonderful God-given gift of sexuality takes center stage with all of its newly discovered drives, feelings, and sensations. Boys become men, and girls become women. And it all happens so quickly.

Again, the culture is offering an extensive, non-stop, confusing mix of messages on how to understand and experience one's developing sexuality. The reality is that voices promoting a Biblical sexual ethic and God-glorifying sexual experience (ie – sex is a wonderful God-given gift to be experienced between one man and one woman in the context of the covenant of a monogamous, life-long marriage) are increasingly smothered by a barrage of images and messages telling kids that when it comes to your sexuality, you can do whatever, wherever, whenever, however, and with whomever. . . no limits. Increasingly, kids are. Premarital sexual activity, teen pregnancy, out-of-wedlock childbirth, single mothering/fathering, sexually transmitted diseases/infections, oral sex, anal sex, group sex, sexting, cyber-sex, and a variety of other social problems are now seen less and less as "problems," and more and more as the accepted norm. This too, is the cause for a great deal of parent-teen conflict as worldviews and beliefs on sexuality collide.

Parents can help teenagers through this confusing transition of rapid physical growth by playing the following roles:

Be sensitive and affirming as your teen's body changes.

Our children need parents who will openly explain and discuss what is happening to their bodies. We live in a world that constantly sets unrealistic



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standards regarding physical beauty so that only a handful can measure up. Teenagers spend hours in front of the mirror looking for facial and body flaws. Figuratively speaking, they look over their shoulders and see images of the “perfect people” – the actors, actresses, supermodels, sports stars, and other media heroes - who “meet” them everyday through magazines, music, movies, television, and billboards. Our kids have been marinating in these images since the day they were born. Many growing kids believe that a prerequisite for being loved, accepted, and esteemed is to look just like these “perfect people.” Those who hate what they see are painfully aware they don’t measure up. They worry over what the end result of all the changes might be: Will they be too tall, short, skinny, or fat? Will my _____ (fill in the name of a body part) be too big or too small? Most of these changes occur during the middle school years, when group acceptance is of the utmost importance and when peers – because of their own impulsivity and insecurities – tend to be most cruel and insensitive. Life can be miserable for the boy or girl who grows too fast or too slow. A loving and sensitive parent can serve as a buffer in the midst of the type of ridicule that could scar a child’s self-image for life. While dealing with these

pressures will still be difficult for your child, your positive input will serve to build resiliency into your teen.

Offer your teen a godly perspective on the changes that are taking place.

In addition to modeling the unconditional love and acceptance of Christ during the physically awkward years, Mom and Dad should temper the social pressure to be preoccupied with outward appearance. Take the time to teach your children about the inward qualities of godliness. Perhaps the best and most powerful lessons come not from your words, but from your example. Be sure you provide an example void of obsession over your own appearance. It’s important to be about the business of developing your own inward character in a Godly direction. You too, are who you are, not what you look like.

Understand the sexual temptation your teen faces.

In centuries past, when puberty arrived at a later age and marriages took place when children were younger, pre-marital sexual temptation was present but not as intense. Kids were able to answer the pressure with some resilience thanks to a commonly-held understanding of sexual parameters, right and wrong, and the expectations

of society-at-large. The ever-widening gap between sexual maturity and age of marriage has made it difficult for our kids. Add to that the fact that the wonderful, newfound, and exciting gift of sexuality can be corrupted by a culture that encourages its youngest children to “go for it,” and it’s very, very difficult for our kids. It is crucial that parents understand, teach, and model the biblical perspective of sexuality. In addition, these new cultural realities require parents to speak openly with their children and teens about sexuality in age-appropriate ways. . . even when it makes us feel uncomfortable. We must live and promote a Biblical sexual ethic so that they might experience the God-given gift of sexuality in all of its glorious and enjoyable fullness, in the context of a mongomous, heterosexual marriage.

Teach them how to view and treat others with dignity and respect.

Our world is succeeding at devaluing persons to the point where our kids can be led to believe that others


are objects or means to an end. When it comes to their sexuality, some believe that their sexual drive is no different than their hunger for food or thirst for water. Consequently food, water, and sex all fall into the same category as all are seen as basic physical needs necessary to survival. While it might sound crass and crude, I’ve come to understand the basic message of objectification my sons and daughters have been taught to believe to be this: My daughters are being told that they are no different than the porcelain urinals that hang on a Men’s Room wall. My sons have been taught by the culture to view females in that same way. They are objects to relieve yourself in whenever you get the urge. People have become means to selfish sexual ends. We must go out of our way to address these underlying attitudes and help our kids de-objectify others. God has created all people in His image and infused them with dignity.

Communicate openly with your teen.



Adolescence brings with it a host of confusing physical changes that place immense strain on the teenager and can cause friction at home. It is essential that parents take the time to understand these changes and encourage communication through open discussion with their kids. Not only will you help to provide a healthy transition for your teen, you’ll also reap the benefits of growing family closeness.

**This article is adapted from Walt Mueller’s book, The Space Between: A Parent’s Guide to Teenage Development. To order your copy visit cpyu.org.*

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For additional information or resources to help kids navigate their sexuality, visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding and Project Six19’s Sexual Integrity Initiative website at SexualIntegrityInitiative.com.

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