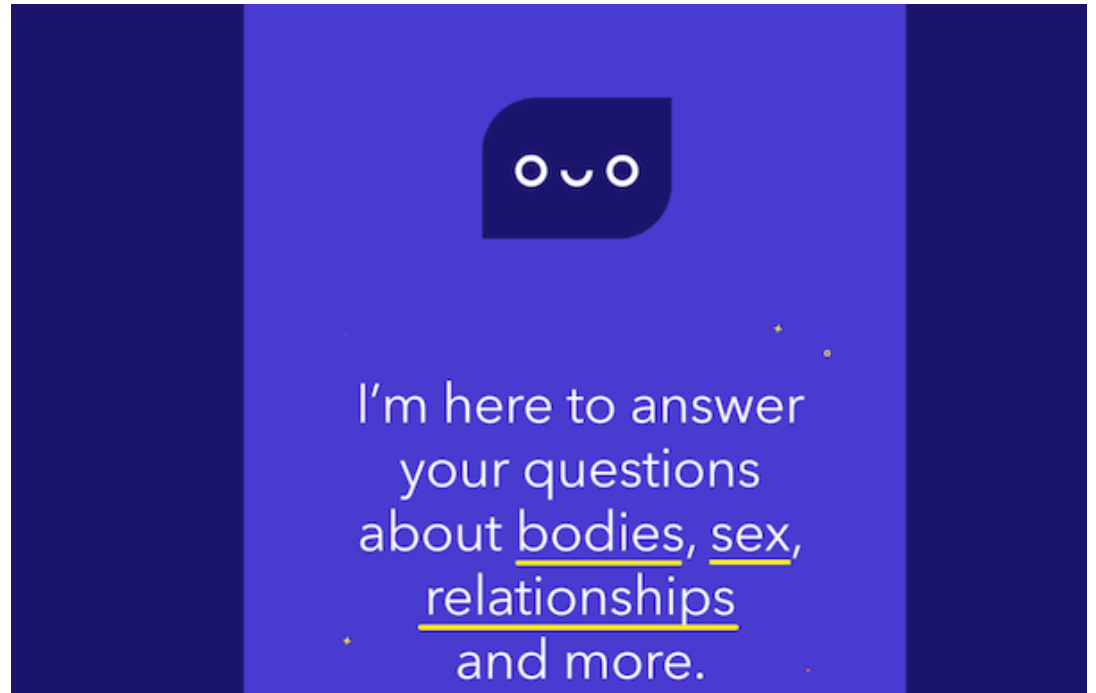


# ROO: PLANNED PARENTHOOD'S 24/7 TEEN SEX EDUCATOR

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President

*Our sex-obsessed culture offers up sexual guidance and education through non-stop depictions largely void of any borders and boundaries.*



**It's no secret that questions about sex, gender, and love cascade almost endlessly for kids as they launch into the confusing developmental phase of puberty.** Along with having bodies that are now able by God's design to engage in the reproductive process, kids experience a host of God-given sexual urges and feelings that lead to inquisitiveness and, in many cases, sexual experimentation. Who will answer these pressing questions for our curious, questioning, and vulnerable kids in ways that lead to sexual understanding, beliefs, and practices that reflect a biblical sexual ethic?

In a perfect world, parents and other adults will combine to offer a biblical perspective on sex, gender, love, and marriage in age-appropriate ways.

Doing so equips our kids to not only understand God's good and mysterious gift of sexuality, but it gives them the information and guidance they need to experience the freedom and flourishing that comes with engaging this good gift from God to His glory!

But we don't live in a perfect world. Our sex-obsessed culture offers up sexual guidance and education through non-stop depictions (media, advertising, pornography, music, film, etc.) largely void of any borders and boundaries. Kids are encouraged, educated, and nurtured into seeing sex and gender as personally-defined choices. Little or nothing of what they see and hear regarding gender and sexuality is faithful to our Creator's grand and glorious design.





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For a variety of reasons, Christian parents oftentimes remain silent, while the culture fills that void of silence with sexual guidance and direction that is anything but biblical. Combine this with our broken and sinful bent, and we are prone to embrace sexual beliefs and behaviors that are anything and everything but biblical. Increasingly, the church is following and affirming the culture's agenda on sexuality and gender as opposed to God's order and design.

For just over a century, the Planned Parenthood<sup>1</sup> organization has been filling the sex education void and increasingly setting the sex education agenda for children and teens. On January 24, 2019, Planned Parenthood expanded their already significant sex-education efforts with vulnerable and developing children and teens into the world of online technology with the launch of Roo, a "sexual health chatbot."<sup>2</sup>

AdAge reports that "initiatives like this one are meant to help Planned Parenthood give information to hard-to-reach audiences like teenagers who don't receive sex education or are receiving abstinence-only education. In recent years Planned Parenthood has been on the offensive about the breadth of resources they provide as conservative lawmakers and anti-abortion groups have sought to defund the organization."<sup>3</sup>

## What Is Roo?

According to Planned Parenthood, "Roo is designed to help young people visiting PlannedParenthood.org get personalized information instantly — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."<sup>4</sup> The name "Roo" was chosen as a gender-neutral short form of "Robot." Designed to meet the needs of young people ages 13 to 17, Roo is available to access anonymously on the web as part of Planned Parenthood's growing and easy-to-access "digital ecosystem." The chatbot features attractive graphics, cutting-edge technology, and a format that visually and experientially mimics the Instant Messaging and text messaging platforms kids use as primary communication tools on their smartphones.

## How Roo Works:

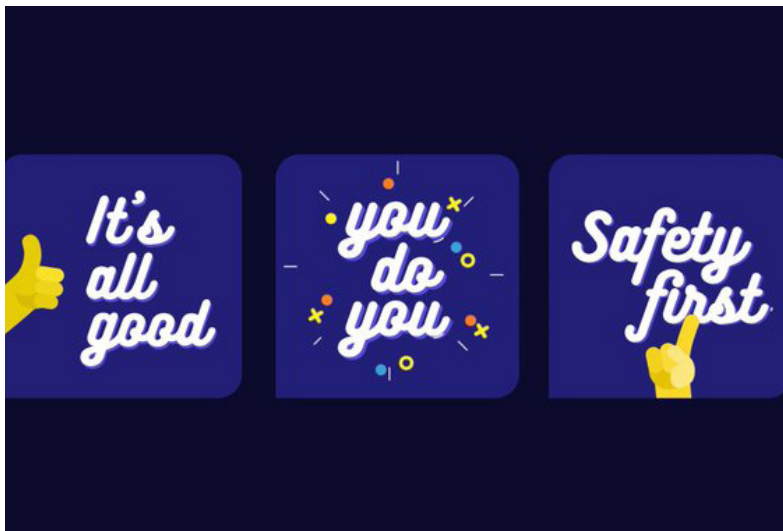
The chatbot technology is a form of AI (Artificial Intelligence) that mimics real human interaction. Using machine-driven technology reduces the stigma many kids feel about asking real human beings (parents, youth workers, teachers, etc.) questions about sex and gender. Planned Parenthood wants kids to ask their questions anonymously without shame or fear of being found out. This lowers a user's fears and increases their willingness to share personal information and engage in unfiltered/direct questioning on anything and everything sexual. One of the Roo's developers says that kids are "concerned about privacy, and skeptical about anything that seems to lecture or talk down to them or sounds like parents."<sup>5</sup>

When users go to roo.plannedparenthood.org they are welcomed by the Roo icon and the greeting "Hey there, I'm Roo." Users can then click on a message bar that returns the greeting with "Hi Roo." Roo then responds, "I'm here to answer your questions about bodies, sex, relationships and more." Roo also tells them that "this chat is confidential and private."

Roo will then ask, "What's your gender? This helps me give you better answers." Seven options are given from which users can choose: Female, Male, Trans Man, Trans Woman, Non-Binary, Name Your Own, or Skip.

The chatbot then offers users the option to either ask a question by typing it in, or to browse through a list of topics for more questions and answers. Roo features a predetermined library of questions and answers that Planned Parenthood says will grow and evolve as more and more people interact with Roo.

*When asked "What's the right age to have sex for the first time?" Roo answers, "It's all about picking the right age for you... Following the answer, a flashy graphic pops up telling kids, "You do You."*



*Home and church should ceaselessly work together to articulate a biblical theology of sex, sexuality, gender, love, and marriage and engage in continued age-appropriate efforts from a young age to communicate this biblical sexual ethic while creating open-ended opportunities for our kids to ask questions without shame or embarrassment.*

Currently, Roo's library of questions and answers (*see a sample list of questions and answers by downloading the free "Roo: Questions and Answers" handout*) is broken into nine categories: Bodies, Relationships, Masturbation, Sex, Pregnancy, Birth Control, Sexual Orientation and Gender, Health Services and Cost, and Symptoms.

For example, one of the most common questions asked by teens to Roo is "What's the right age to have sex for the first time?" Roo answers, "It's all about picking the right age for you, which might be totally different than the right age for other people. It may seem like everybody you know is having sex, but that's definitely not true. The average age when people first have sex is around 17." Following the answer, a flashy graphic pops up telling kids, "You do You."

Most answers given by Roo are followed up with a click-through option for those who desire more information. Clicking through leads to a host of additional resources including more extensive answers, videos, access to real-time connections with live Planned Parenthood educators, information on securing Planned Parenthood services and birth control, and the ability to book an appointment.

While some questions and answers relate to anatomical realities and bodily functions, a large number of questions and answers provide behavioral guidance and relationship advice.

## How Should We Respond?

**First, we need to realize that our kids *are* sexually curious by divine-design and they *do* have questions.** There is a definite need for our kids to be educated about sexuality and gender. The reality is that Roo and Planned Parenthood are meeting a *real* and *felt* need.

**Second, we need as parents and the church to cease with the silent-treatment in the midst of a world full of both sexually developing kids and a culture that's speaking loudly on sexuality and gender 24/7.** We can no longer plead ignorance. We must educate ourselves on biblical sexuality.

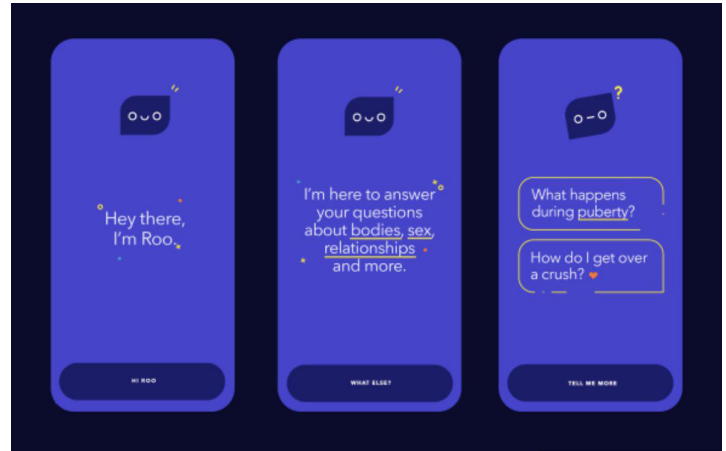
Home and church should then ceaselessly work together to articulate a biblical theology of sex, sexuality, gender, love, and marriage. We should then engage in continued age-appropriate efforts from a young age to communicate this biblical sexual ethic while creating open-ended opportunities for our kids to ask questions without shame or embarrassment. Sex and gender are good gifts of God that are to be celebrated rather than seen as dirty or unmentionable.

**Third, we should familiarize ourselves with Roo.** Take the time to ponder the questions and answers on Roo. The questions *are* the questions our kids are asking. In effect, Planned Parenthood and Roo are doing us a huge favor by giving us insight into our kids and their specific needs for answers. We must formulate biblically-faithful responses to each question, and communicate those answers openly to our kids.



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Finally, we must teach our kids to develop skills of biblical discernment so that they learn to recognize and follow the will and way of God, along with recognizing and avoiding the course of this world. The Bible teaches us to find our sexual freedom and flourishing in living out God's will and way. The culture teaches us to find our sexual freedom and flourishing in living out our sexuality according to our own whims and wishes. This is the "you do you" and "only you can decide for yourself" philosophy guiding Planned Parenthood, Roo, and ultimately way too many of our kids. The result is anything but sexual freedom and flourishing.



<sup>1</sup> The mission of Planned Parenthood is to provide comprehensive reproductive and complementary health care services in settings which preserve and protect the essential privacy and rights of each individual, to advocate public policies which guarantee these rights and ensure access to such services, to provide educational programs which enhance understanding of individual and societal implications of human sexuality, and to promote research and the advancement of technology in reproductive health care and encourage understanding of their inherent bioethical, behavioral, and social implications.

<sup>2</sup> "Planned Parenthood Launches New Sexual Health Chatbot to Meet The Needs of Young People 24/7", News Release, 1/24/2019.

<sup>3</sup> <https://adage.com/article/agency-news/planned-parenthood-launches-roo-a-sexual-health-chatbot-teens/316365>

<sup>4</sup> "Planned Parenthood Launches New Sexual Health Chatbot to Meet The Needs of Young People 24/7", News Release, 1/24/2019.

<sup>5</sup> "Planned Parenthood Develops Chatbot to Reach More Teens," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2019.

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For additional information or resources to help kids navigate their sexuality, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at [www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org).

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