

Parenting: Training in Sexuality

grace church articles

In Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Moses charges the nation of Israel to wholeheartedly dedicate themselves to God's commands and to pass them down through the generations. Thousands of years later, this challenge proves to be just as critical to us as it was to the Israelites who first heard it. As followers of Christ, we are responsible for raising up the next generation to know and obey God's word. For parents, the call is to be fully dedicated to God's commands and to teach them to their children—especially in an area as important as sex and sexuality—understanding that parenting is an ongoing process, not a singular event.

Using these verses from Deuteronomy as a foundation, we begin to see how parents can effectively engage their children on the topic of sex. Parents are responsible for entering into the process of proactively training children and shaping their thinking with truth from God's word. Parents must show children that truth is found outside of them, then they must find that biblical truth and bring it to bear on the lives of their children, raising them up in the instruction of the Lord.

To aid you in discipling your children on the topic of sex, we've compiled a list of five common mistakes parents make. Our hope is that an awareness of these pitfalls will empower the families in our church to thoughtfully and intentionally raise up the next generation and help them gain clarity, truth, and power around the subject of sex.

FIVE COMMON MISTAKES PARENTS MAKE

1. Not establishing authority and developing responsibility early

You can't separate what happens in the early life of a child from what will happen years later as they mature and grow into adulthood. It is critical for children to learn how to master themselves; if they can't control themselves when authority (i.e., parents) is nearby, how will they live with self-control and wisdom later, when they are in environments where the presence of authority is much lesser? Parents must work to establish themselves as the primary authoritative figure in a child's life.

Also there is a tendency for parents to give their children blessings and responsibilities in unbalanced measure. It is not wrong for parents to extend prosperity and blessing to their child, but these things can lead to arrogant, entitled individuals if left unchecked. Increased blessing should be tempered with an increased level of responsibility for the child to carry.

2. Not being the first to tell our children about sex

Especially for families from a church culture, parents tend to delegate the responsibility of teaching kids about sex to the school or the church. Yet parents must recognize that it is their duty to initiate the conversation about sex with their children. Parents should not wait until their children begin to ask questions. When parents initiate the conversation, they establish themselves as leaders in the home and as valuable resources to their children. The reality is that we cannot expect children to retain their innocence forever – the time will surely come when a young person's ignorance will give way to knowledge about sex. If parents are not willing to be the ones guiding and directing their children's understanding of sex and sexuality, someone else will fill that void. Ensuring that sexual knowledge comes primarily from the home, rather than the world, is a major parental responsibility.

3. Not seeing purity a discipleship process

Parents have the wonderful opportunity to lead and disciple their children through the major areas of growth a young person experiences. Yet far too often, parents either neglect speaking with their kids in the area of purity altogether, or give it minimal attention at best. While the conversation explaining to a child the mechanics of sex might be confined to a single conversation, parents must accept that training in purity must be an ongoing process.

That means talks centered around purity, temptation, and how to live with sexual integrity should be a continuous and fluid conversation in the Christian home. Granted, conversations with a 13-year old will look different than those with a 16-year old, and in some ways the conversations for daughters will differ from those for

sons. But parents must accept the responsibility of creating space for these conversations to occur regularly. There is a distinction that must be made between a personal life and a private life. Certainly some things are more personal than others, but the thought that someone can have even a portion of their life that is private, closed-off to everyone, and free from scrutiny is not a Christian idea.

4. Not being involved in children's dating

What do I think as a parent it means for my own children to guard their heart? What does it mean for my child to develop mature attitudes about dating and marriage? What will dating look like in my home? How am I helping my child manage and steward their sexuality?

Questions like these illustrate the importance of teaching and equipping our children about dating. It is complicated, but dating within the context of the family and home is a much better idea than going it alone. Parents have a duty to help their children navigate the unfamiliar territory of dating. The goal is for children to see what valuable resources they have in their parents, which cultivates and maintains a healthy, ongoing dialogue that empowers them to make wise decisions as they grow into adulthood.

5. Not exploiting the individual father/mother contribution well enough

There are some things that sons need to hear from their fathers, and some things that daughters need to hear from their mothers. Conversely, daughters need to feel acceptance, attention, and affirmation from their fathers, while sons need to learn from the wise, godly example of their mother. It is healthy for a son to feel weight and responsibility brought about under the covering of their father's authority, and the mother-daughter relationship can become a powerful and unique place where a daughter feels safe to explore her ideas and feelings.

CONCLUSION

Our hope is that an awareness of these common mistakes would be an encouragement for the path that lies ahead. What inspires us is knowing that parenting is a season, a window of opportunity God has given to us to make an investment in our children for their good and His glory. If you are tempted to be discouraged because of your past parenting mistakes, know this: turning and leading your family in a new and different direction is a form of God-wrought repentance. Rather than dwelling on our past mistakes, we must press forward in the relentless pursuit

of our children, looking not at our own ability, but to Jesus' ability. Looking to Jesus, who was relentless in his pursuit of us, gives us the encouragement and the hope to press on in parenting, knowing that God's strength is perfect especially in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).