

# A Way of Life: Principles for Teaching



Principles for Teaching

The<sup>♂</sup>ology  
of the BO<sup>♀</sup>dy for families  
& single people  
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

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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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## Chapter Seven

### The Language of Love: Seven Catholic Principles to Guide Parents in Teaching their Children about Sexuality

**329** Each child is a gift of God created in His image and entrusted to a father and mother who cooperate with God's parental love by gradually forming and educating each child so as to develop his or her unique personality and vocation in life. If parents build up their marriage and home on the foundation and pillars of Catholic teaching, the sacramental life and daily family prayer, then God's design for chaste love will have already been deeply internalized as a child matures. However, parents still have a duty to provide positive information to each individual child, at the appropriate times, about God's plan for sexuality, virginity, and marriage. This loving dialogue over the years will help each child develop a pure, loving, and healthy personality.

**330** The spiritual, biological, emotional, and moral aspects of chastity formation are so integrated that they can never be separated from one another when a father and mother present this delicate teaching. In *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family*, the Church has provided seven general principles that must be observed when information about sexuality is presented to children and young people.

#### Principle One: Parents Must Provide Individual Formation in a Personalized Dialogue

**331** Teaching children about the mysteries of human life and sexuality is best communicated by a parent gradually as the child matures. Since parents know and understand the uniqueness of their children, they will also know when each child is physically, emotionally, and spiritually ready to begin receiving this information.<sup>269</sup>

**332** Parents can approach these delicate discussions with calm assurance and confidence, particularly if they have cultivated an open, honest, caring, and loving relationship with the child. In a loving way, mothers can speak with their daughters and fathers with their sons about the intimate changes taking place in their developing bodies, while integrating those discussions with the moral principles of chastity and holiness in the context of marriage or consecrated virginity. Parents speaking about their own biological and emotional experiences can genuinely help their child integrate this new information into the ongoing development of their personality in a balanced and wholesome manner.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. TMHS, 65.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Ibid., 66-67.

## Principle Two: Parents Must Communicate the Moral Aspect of God's Plan for Sexuality

**333** God, who is Love, desires that each of His children be chaste in order to experience and share true love with others. This positive aspect of chastity must be communicated over and above mere reproofs for unchastity designed to create fear of punishment, disease, and negative social consequences for the reputation of the young person and family. The goal is to help the young person be highly motivated and receptive to choosing the moral good of chastity out of love of God and neighbor rather than solely being motivated to avoid the moral evil of unchastity out of fear.<sup>271</sup>

**334** Instinctive genital activity may begin even during the early years of childhood. While this is normal to some extent, parents should correct any developing habits that could become sinful later in life by teaching virtue, modesty, and purity according to the child's ability to comprehend. Correction should always be done in the light of reason and faith and in a spirit of loving concern, gentleness, and patience while protecting the dignity of the child's sense of self-worth. Self-mastery of the instinctive passions will be an ongoing battle at every age more easily won if a child experiences parental love and compassion rather than severe punishment which might crush their heart.<sup>272</sup>

**335** Chastity aims to integrate and order the natural bodily passions, so they are subject to and united to reason and the will. God's plan for sexuality is to integrate, in a healthy way, the body and spirit, so that the passion to love is exercised with perfect charity and purity.

## Principle Three: Spiritual Formation in Holiness Must Accompany Biological/Moral Information

**336** A child's spiritual life must be cultivated so the bodily changes he or she experiences can be understood in the light of God's plan for sexuality. The body is instrumental to God's plan for fruitfulness in love whether that vocation to holiness is lived out in spiritual or physical fatherhood and motherhood. The child and young person can learn respect for the dignity of the body which God created to be a pure temple of the Holy Spirit, a vessel for manifesting the love of God and neighbor.<sup>273</sup>

**337** By discussions with children and young people and by example, parents can teach and make use of the means necessary to overcome difficulties and grow in love: "These means are discipline of the senses and the mind, watchfulness and prudence in avoiding occasions of sin, the observance of modesty, moderation in recreation, wholesome pursuits, assiduous prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 70.

Young people especially should foster devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God.<sup>274</sup>

**338** Parents can present positive images and models for the child in the use of their vital energies, developing friendships, patterns of solidarity and service, for example, learning the lives of the saints. With these examples in mind, children will be able to critically evaluate the environments, models, and images they encounter; positively channel their energy; and learn to detach from mass media and potential occasions of sin.<sup>275</sup>

**339** Among other things, the flood of pornography and impurity, in particular, has seriously impacted many children leading to deviant behaviors, tendencies, and attitudes. When parents observe problems of sexual deviance, they should direct their teaching, correction, and help towards identification of the causes rather than directly repressing the behavior. Trustworthy specialists, doctors, educational experts, and psychologists can provide information and assistance with these problems.<sup>276</sup>

**340** By word and example, parents help to convince the child that chastity is possible, brings joy, and is pleasing in God's eyes. *In The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, a classic teaching of St. John Chrysostom on chastity and marriage it is noted:

“Christ gave laws for everyone.... I do not prohibit you from marrying, nor am I against your enjoying yourself. I only want you to do this with temperance, without indecency, guilt and sin. I do not make a law that you should flee to the mountains and deserts, rather that you should be good, modest and chaste, as you live in the midst of the cities”.<sup>277</sup>

**341** God's help in Jesus Christ is never lacking and always present, even until the end of the world. But both parents and children must make the commitment to respond to and receive His grace made available, especially in the sacraments. God's grace and mercy in the sacraments provide the necessary supernatural help which makes a person capable of living chastity well. Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a regular confessor is most helpful, as is spiritual guidance or direction, and the reading of recommended books of formation in virtue and holiness.<sup>278</sup>

## Principle Four: Parents Should Provide Age-Appropriate Information after Prayer and Discussion

**342** Clear and delicately provided information at the right moment is the key to chastity formation:

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Ibid., 72.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. Ibid., 72.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Ibid., 74.

Parents are well aware that their children must be treated in a personalized way, according to the personal conditions of their physiological and psychological development, and taking into due consideration the cultural environment of life and the adolescent's daily experience. In order to evaluate properly what they should say to each child, it is very important that parents first of all seek light from the Lord in prayer and that they discuss this together so that their words will be neither too explicit nor too vague. Giving too many details to children is counterproductive. But delaying the first information for too long is imprudent, because every human person has natural curiosity in this regard and, sooner or later, everyone begins to ask themselves questions, especially in cultures where too much can be seen, even in public.<sup>279</sup>

**343** Information presented should be adapted to the child's stage of development, whether they are in the age of innocence, puberty, adolescence, or young adulthood. Direct information about genital sexuality is appropriate in puberty and beyond. In a small child and in the age of innocence, children are curious about pregnancy and the birth of a brother or sister. Simple facts about pregnancy can be presented in light of wonder, awe, and joy at the creative work of God who designed new life to be cared for in the mother's body, near her heart.<sup>280</sup>

## Principle Five: The Principle of Doctrine

**344** The method and content of the parents' dialogue about sexuality must conform to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church, include information about the lasting effects of original sin, and avoid trivializing the subject. The conscience of each child must be formed clearly and correctly. Beyond just teaching children to avoid sin, parents should help them to grow in virtues, in their spiritual life, and to develop "the capacity for self-giving" in one's vocation in life.<sup>281</sup>

## Principle Six: The Principle of Decency and Respect

**345** Parents should take special care not to offend a child's right to chastity, modesty, and sense of privacy. Information should always be "positive, prudent, clear and delicate." The principle of decency and respect in chastity formation means that information about human sexuality should always be presented in the context of one's vocation to love in the state of virginity or marriage. Respect for the dignity of God's design for human sexuality means "no material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age."<sup>282</sup> Other "methods that abuse sex education" like dramatizations, role playing, or drawings,

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. TMHS, 76.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 122, 123.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 126.

depictions, and oral or written exams about genital or erotic matters must be avoided.<sup>283</sup>

## Principle Seven: The Principle of Love

**346** *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family* concludes with one fundamental principle for chastity formation: “*Much of the formation in the home is indirect, incarnated in a loving and tender atmosphere, for it arises from the presence and example of parents whose love is pure and generous. If parents are given confidence in this task of education for love, they will be inspired to overcome the challenges and problems of our times by their ministry of love.*”<sup>284</sup>

## Summary Points

**347** The spiritual, biological, emotional, and moral aspects of sexuality are so integrated that they should never be separated from one another when a father and mother teach their children about sexuality.

**348** In teaching about sexuality, each child should receive individual formation in a personalized dialogue at the appropriate time by his or her own parents.

**349** Parents should always communicate the positive moral good of God’s plan for sexuality, along with any admonitions about the moral evil of the sins against chastity.

**350** Biological and moral teaching must always be accompanied by spiritual formation in holiness including prayer, the sacraments, devotions, and the examples of the saints.

**351** Age-appropriate information on sexuality should be given to each child only after the parents’ careful planning, prayer, and discussion together.

**352** The method and content of a parent’s teaching must conform to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church on human sexuality.

**353** Parents should take care to respect each child’s privacy, modesty, and innocence. and never present them with or permit them to see material of an erotic nature.

**354** The tender, faithful love and chaste example of the parents is an indirect but most effective method of teaching each of their children about healthy sexuality and love.

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<sup>283</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

