

The Talk: Planning an Easy(ish) Weekend Getaway with Your Preteen



Hey, parents.

You're already seeking what Dr. Juli Slattery calls "mini and many" conversations with your child about sex, [hopefully from very early in their lives.](#)

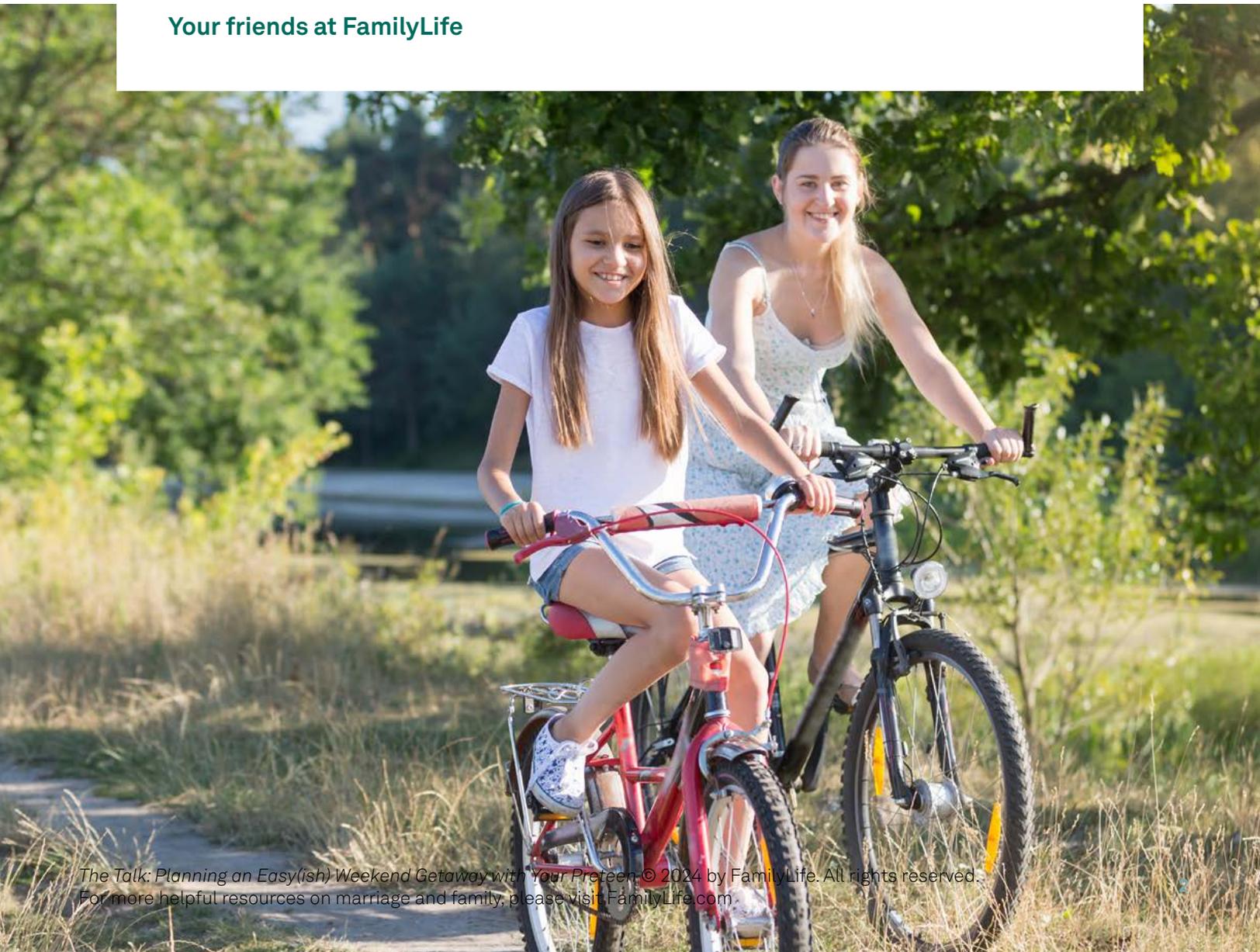
But maybe you want to make the most of the chance to talk with your preteen about sex, their changing body, and peer pressure—unforgettably.

The following outline of a meaningful weekend getaway together helps you know you've got this. This loose plan helps you take the next step of communicating about God's priceless gift of your child's sexuality, interwoven with your child's faith and a theology of their body.

Whether you're a minimalist or love to feel over-prepared, find ideas for a memorable, engaging weekend around topics you won't want to miss.

We'll attempt to minimize the prep, so your attention can land where it's needed most: being all there with your child.

Your friends at FamilyLife

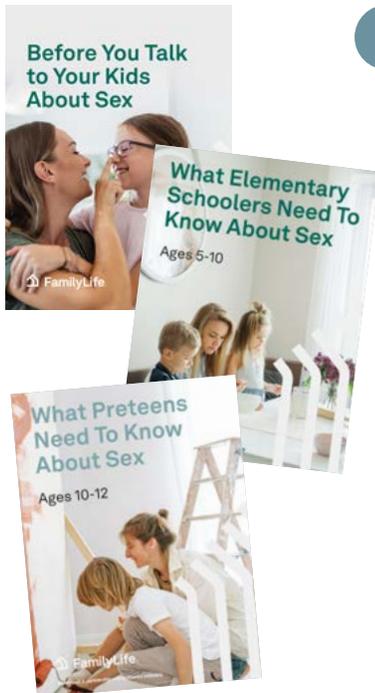




1 Plan the weekend around an activity your child will enjoy.

Ask God for holy creativity to choose an activity your unique child will love. Though this activity is important, make sure you'll still have plenty of time for the six vital **conversations** below, even while traveling. Don't forget to get your child's input unless the element of surprise feels important. Communicate this weekend will be fun *and* purposeful, so your kid doesn't feel duped.

Then, plan your lodging and meal possibilities.



2 Make sure you've read through our quick-start guide, "Before You Talk to Your Kids About Sex," and consider reading through "What Preteens Need to Know about Sex."

- Consider looking over ["What Elementary Schoolers Need to Know about Sex"](#) to make sure you've covered earlier basics with your child, which may be concepts you understood later in life.
- In this experience, you're not outsourcing these conversations to anyone else. You're positioning yourself as **your preteen's go-to person for questions and concerns**. It's a big part of what communicates to your child: *You can trust me and come to me with anything. If I don't know the answer, I'll find it.* Parents, you've got this.

How you talk to your child about sexuality is just as important as *what* you talk about. Create a shame-free atmosphere for understanding their own body, the experience of being male or female, and God's creation of sex.

What this looks like:

- Respond to your child's questions **gently and straightforwardly**. This assures your preteen that they don't have to be embarrassed by their sexuality in front of you.

- If you feel nervous, uncomfortable, and even embarrassed by your preteen's questions or these topics, take a deep breath and **become curious about your feelings**. Parenthood can trigger wounds and questions from our childhoods.
- Knowing and saying **correct anatomical names** lets your preteen know they can trust you to offer accurate information and be a safe place to have conversations about sex.
- Think of teaching your child about sexuality as an ongoing, worldview-building conversation that you will have with them **throughout their childhood**. Over time, all of these small conversations will do more good than any single conversation, or weekend, ever could.





Six Important Discussions

If the unexpected happens and you don't get to all the discussions this weekend, don't panic. But before you leave the weekend, do schedule additional dates together, so you don't miss any of these crucial, formative topics.

Remember: We serve a good God, who completes the work He begins and brings growth where we cultivate...and sometimes, even when we don't ([1 Corinthians 3:6](#), [Galatians 6:9](#), [Philippians 1:6](#), [2 Timothy 2:13](#)).

We'll offer you suggested mini-scripts for each point. Consider reading them well ahead of time, so they feel more natural.

Discussion ONE

Talk about what to expect this weekend & the mechanics of sex.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

This weekend, we'll talk about some stuff that's important, really special, and even holy. But it's also private and can be awkward. Because of this, we're doing things that are special. It will be just the two of us, so you know you can come to me with anything.

Talk about the mechanics of sex and how pregnancy happens. Consider starting with the **physiological** basics of human reproduction. Include terms like these:

- Uterus
- Egg
- Sperm
- Fallopian tubes
- Vagina
- Vulva
- Penis
- Testicles
- Erection
- Intercourse
- Embryo
- Fetus
- Ejaculation
- Semen
- Orgasm and climax

Next, talk about the emotional aspects of sex.

- Sex releases hormones in our brains and bodies that make us feel intimately connected with the other person.
- Sexual climax feels good in a person's body and releases chemicals that make them feel good emotionally.

Then, move on to the spiritual aspects of sex.

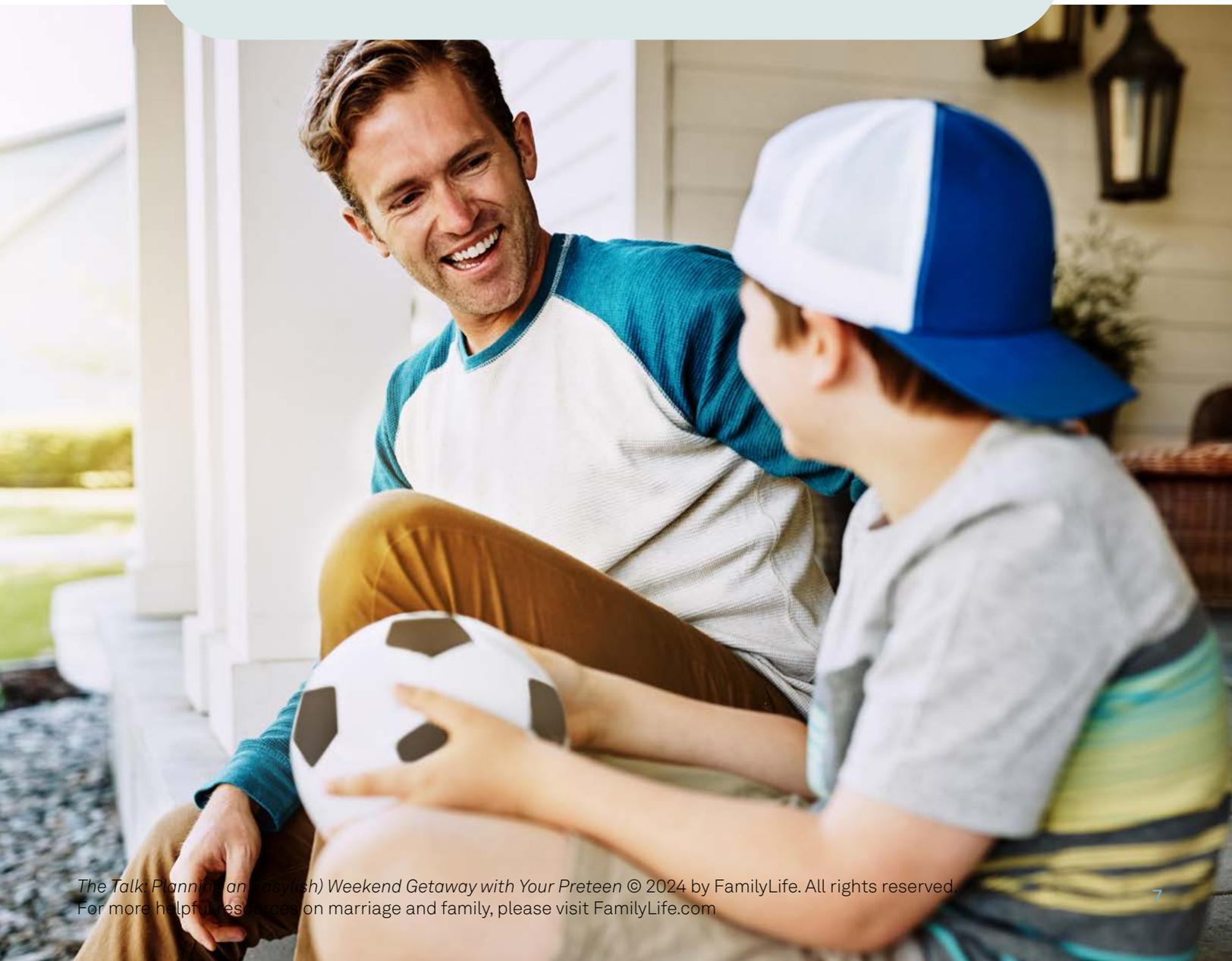
- God made sex as a very good gift to married couples, to display Jesus' covenant love for His own bride, the church. Sex gives us a [snapshot of God's relationship to His people](#) through faithfulness, intimate knowing, sacrificial love, and passionate celebration of that love.
- God talks openly about sex, and Song of Solomon is full of poetry between a husband and wife. He crafted our private parts, and He's not embarrassed by sex.
- Think about fire: It can be very good, used to heat our homes and kill germs and cook food. But it could also destroy whole cities. Sex has that kind of power.
- Because sex is a picture of God's covenant love, He knows the way it will help connect a married couple together for life and ways it can really hurt people and mess up the picture of what His love looks like. (We'll talk about some of the ways it can hurt people later this weekend.)
- So here are two of God's important rules about sex ([Genesis 2:24-25](#), [Proverbs 5:15-23](#), [Hebrews 13:4](#)):

1 | Sex is only between a man and a woman.

2 | It's only for two people who are married.

Questions to ask your child:

- This can be a lot to take in. What parts of this are surprising or new to you?
- How does it make you feel to talk about this? What's one thing I can do to make the most out of our time together this weekend?
- Why do you think it's important we talk about this together?
- What questions do you have about all this? I'm all ears, and I'll do the best I can.
- Are there words about sex that you've heard or seen—maybe on someone's phone, or from someone older—that I can explain to you? I would like to be able to explain those things to you.



Discussion TWO

Talk about puberty, hygiene, and changing emotions.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

For girls:

Puberty usually happens somewhere between ages 8-13 for girls, and it takes a few years.

A growth spurt.

Breast and hip growth, spurred on by rising estrogen levels.

The onset of vaginal discharge and eventually menstruation.

Increase in libido or sexual desire.

Appearance of acne.

Growth of pubic and underarm hair.

- Your period often starts about two years after your breasts begin to develop and one year after vaginal discharge begins**—clear, sticky stuff you might notice in your underwear, that God created to naturally clean your body. My period started when I was ___ years old.
- Periods usually happen **every 28 days and last 5-7 days**, until you're 40-60 years old, when it stops coming every month. (That's called menopause.)
- Women also **do not have a period when they're pregnant**, which is one of the first signs a woman knows she's pregnant.
- We'll get you period supplies, skin care products, razors, shaving cream, facial supplies, deodorant, and bras that fit well (including athletic bras).
- Your body will also start to smell differently—mostly worse!—so it's wise to shower and wear deodorant every day.

For boys:

Puberty usually happens somewhere between ages 9-14 for boys, and it takes a few years.

A growth spurt.

Broadening of the shoulders, and muscle development spurred on by dramatic increases in testosterone.

The production of sperm in the testes, often accompanied by nocturnal emissions (wet dreams).

Deepening of the voice, along with the appearance of an Adam's apple.

Growth of the penis and testicles.

Increase in libido and sexual desires.

Hair growth on the face, underarms, and pubic area, possibly alongside other body hair growth.

Appearance of acne.

- You'll have 20 times the amount of the hormone testosterone than you did as a kid. That might mean you experience **strong sexual urges, risk taking, anger, and aggressive outbursts.**
- Your body will also start to smell differently—mostly worse!—so it's wise to shower and wear deodorant every day.
- You might have **nocturnal emissions, or "wet dreams."** That's when during sleep, your penis releases semen, the sticky sexual fluid carrying sperm. It's just a part of your body's healthy cycles.
- **You also will sometimes get an erection** when you see a pretty girl, when something brushes your penis, or when you get up in the morning. Remember: God made your sexuality as a good thing. If you feel excited or have sexual feelings in response to a beautiful girl or the thought of sex, that's natural. There's a good purpose for your sexuality at the right time. **It's not shameful to have sexual feelings, but you're responsible for your response to them. It's your job to keep yourself from selfish and/or immoral sexual thoughts ([Matthew 5:28](#)).**
- Consider talking to your son about ways you've learned to resist sexual temptation.

For both genders:

- *Talk about your own experience of going through puberty, including moments you felt proud or embarrassed.*
- Sometimes you may feel **insecure**—unsure and easily embarrassed. That’s really normal. And I’ll be here to remind you that you’re loved and accepted by me and by God. We can work through those times of insecurity as a team.
- When your brain starts making the hormones telling your body it’s time to change, those hormones also cause **strong emotions**. You might feel really angry, sad, or anxious sometimes. Those are real feelings you’ll need to “feel and deal” with. Like the lights on a car’s dashboard, they give you an idea of what’s going on under the “hood” of your life, in your heart.
- You’ll have to think, **are my feelings managing me, or am I managing them?** Feelings matter! But they don’t get to be in charge of how we respond or treat people. The Holy Spirit and God’s Word do. So don’t just listen to your heart. Talk to it, too, with the truth of God’s Word.
- Like David in the Psalms (and like Jesus), our emotions don’t get in the way of our faith. God is emotional. Our **emotions are opportunities to bring us close to God**—when we feel alone, or devastated, or ticked off. We don’t leave our emotions outside of our relationship with Him.

Questions to ask your child:

- What’s your biggest question or fear about your body and how it’s changing/going to change?
- Let’s talk about ways I can help you feel more prepared for what’s about to happen. I have a few ideas, but I want to know what could help you feel more confident. How does it feel to know other kids will be experiencing big changes in their bodies, too?
- What could it look like to have compassion on what they’re dealing with?

Discussion THREE

Talk about the body of the opposite sex and its realities.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

Read the section for the opposite sex above, but don't feel like you need to go into discussions about hygiene and preparedness.

For both genders:

- Discuss some **terms and slang** for sex, sexual acts, and body parts—so your child doesn't look these up or ask friends. Explain which are appropriate (like “making love”) and which don't show respect for someone's body or God's creation of sex.
- God holds each of us **responsible for our own sexuality**. Guys and girls can show care for each other, helping keep each other from inappropriate, selfish sexual thoughts (called *lust*) by not saying or doing sexually tempting things.
- As followers of Jesus, **we treat the opposite sex with respect and honor** ([Romans 12:10](#), [1 Peter 3:7](#)). This could look like

Talking to and about the opposite sex and their bodies with respectful, appropriate words.

Not imagining or looking at sexual things about a person who is not your spouse.

Not treating all men or women like they're the same (“Girls are so...” “Ugh. Boys”).

Remembering that every person is so much more than just a body. You are so much more than your looks and appearance, so don't settle for being reduced to what you look like. People look at the outside of a person, but God looks at the heart ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)).

Not just selfishly using each other—maybe by having a girlfriend or boyfriend, or kissing someone—to make ourselves feel good.

Questions to ask your child:

- How does it feel to know the opposite sex is experiencing big changes in their bodies, too?
- What could it look like to have compassion on what they're dealing with?

Discussion FOUR

Talk about gender & LGBT issues/ questions.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

Your child is shaping ideas that will shape the way they see themselves, their faith, their gender, and other people in the future. Remember to give deep, nuanced, and well-founded answers to your child's deep questions about gender and identity. That means that you can no longer give a one-sentence answer, but instead will begin to engage in non-dumbed-down discussions.

Consider rereading [*Talking To Kids About Sex? Don't Forget About Identity*](#).

In this discussion, we're teaching kids how God responds to us in our own temptations, sin, and differences. How we meet others, and our own kids, in their weakness, vulnerability, and potential mistakes gives them a snapshot of how God might be responding to them. What are they learning about the gospel from how we're encountering others right now?

*Try to avoid making this an us vs. them discussion. If your child identifies with these issues later on—[*as roughly 25% of Gen Z statistically has*](#)—you want to be an “us.”*

A note: If your child is struggling with not fitting into normal gender stereotypes or is identifying as something other than their God-given biological gender, find ways of encouraging and affirming the kind of person that God created them. Just because they don't look, act, or feel like most other boys or girls doesn't mean God's creation of their biological sex was a mistake. Your child has a meaningful purpose to be the kind of man or woman God created them to be, showing the world God's love in a way only they can! Continue to affirm the goodness of His choice and design of their biological sex. If your child is struggling in any of these areas, we highly encourage you to seek support from a biblically based counselor.

We've talked about **two of God's rules for sex**. Can you remember both?

1

Sex is only between a man and a woman.

2

It's only for two people who are married.

As followers of Jesus, we believe who we are—our **identity—isn't originally created by us and isn't to serve ourselves**. We trust that, as our loving Creator, God knows who He made us to be. We believe His ways and purposes are deeply good. So instead, we accept our identity from Him.

- A lot of people don't believe sex is just for a man and a woman. And they may feel having a male body or a female body could be a mistake when someone doesn't feel like a boy or a girl. It's important to understand how complex people's lives and stories are, offering compassion and understanding rather than judgment. We see Jesus doing this all over the New Testament, to Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, and others who weren't following God's plan for their lives.
- *Need to update yourself on the list of terms involving gender identity and sexual orientation? Check out our guide on pages 11-12 of ["What Preteens Need to Know About Sex."](#)*
- There's a difference between feeling close to someone—"attachment"—and seeing that as romance or sexual feelings. Many girls this age begin believing they're gay because their first emotional connection is with other girls.
- It's important to know that every person reflects God's image and is someone He loves very much. God has trusted us with His mission of showing the world His love—that comes toward us in kindness ([Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20](#)).
- As our love and compassion grow for people, so should our desire that they come to understand how much they are loved by God and, eventually, how good and trustworthy His plan is for their lives.
- We all need mercy, grace, honor, and reconciliation from God. As followers of Jesus, we want our relationships to be marked by both God's undeserved kindness as well as truth ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). That means we don't condemn each other. It also means we don't say each other's sins are okay.

Questions to ask your child:

- These topics can get really complicated. How do you feel about all this?
 - Why do you think this is such a complicated issue?
- What questions do you have for me?
- What could it look like to respond like Jesus would to LGBT people? What about the ones you know?
- What could faithfulness to God's Word about LGBT topics look like with your friends?

Discussion FIVE

Talk about dating & relationships with the opposite sex.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

For more understanding and preparedness, consider reading pages 10-12 of [*What Teens Need to Know about Sex*](#).

Your talking points:

- Sex is God’s genius idea. It leads to children, sexual pleasure, and a deep sense of connectedness. But all of those only thrive most fully in a marriage of self-giving love, faithfulness, and two people who only have sex with each other. **Outside of that relationship, sex will be dangerous in one way or another.** Maybe there will be a time in your life when you’re not sure you agree with God’s ideas about sex. But sex is His idea, His creation. **He’s completely trustworthy when it comes to sex.** What we believe about sex starts with, and reflects, what we believe about God.
- So let’s talk about healthy relationships. It’s important to understand what healthy relationships look like so you can have them someday and to avoid relationship decisions that could hurt you.
- Romantic relationships and marriage aren’t the only way to experience closeness to people or be happy in life. God created us to need each other in all different forms ([Genesis 2:18](#), [1 Corinthians 12:21](#)).
- Maybe you’ve heard about someone who started a fire and thought they could control it, but the fire got out of control. **Sexual desire is a little like a fire in someone’s body.** It might be easy to blow out a match. But the more things the match catches on fire, the tougher it is for you to put out the fire.
- So like a fireplace or a ring of stones around a campfire, **it’s good to put limits around your relationships with the opposite sex.** Your “fire ring” might be a little larger if you are, for example, engaged to be married, rather than just getting to know someone. (If you’re just getting to know someone, you wouldn’t hold their hand or snuggle with them.) But even for couples who know they’re getting married, God’s rules are the same. They still need that “fire ring” of wise boundaries. **If you’ve decided you’ll only kiss before you get married, nothing more, it’s not wise to kiss on the first date, right?**

○ **Here's a progression of activities that might or might not happen before sex:**

- Emotional connection.
- Flirting.
- Holding hands.
- Touching hair.
- Touching someone's body outside of areas that a swimsuit would cover.
- Kissing on the head.
- Kissing on the mouth.
- French kissing.
- Touching someone's body on areas that would be covered by a swimsuit, on top of clothes.
- Touching someone underneath clothes.
- Taking off clothes.
- Touching genitals with hands.

○ You're probably wondering what's okay to do before you're married; how big can your "fire ring" of sexual boundaries be? God weighs in on this in Ephesians 5:3: "among you there must *not be even a hint* of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (NIV, emphasis added). **He doesn't seem to be saying, "Light as big of a fire as you can, while still being able to put it out."**

○ When you're in a romantic relationship with someone, **you're not the only person you're protecting.** The person you're dating may be someone else's spouse someday.

○ Other people won't have the same boundaries as you. **But it's wise to only date people who want to honor God with their bodies and sexuality.**

○ **You can and should say no to any sexual pressure or manipulation** (*offer examples*). Holding good boundaries is way more important than someone making fun of you or rejecting you.

- Normally, I want you to be both **strong and kind**—saying "I don't like that. Please stop."
- **But in some situations, you don't need to be kind.** If someone tries to touch or look at your private parts, if someone is hurting you or someone else, or if a person makes you uncomfortable, please use all your strength to stop that person and get out of the situation. Tell me right away, even if they threaten you.

- It's important we respect others' boundaries, and they respect ours (*parents*, see [Philippians 2:3](#), [Romans 12:10](#), [1 Corinthians 12:23](#)).
 - Culture calls this **“consent”**—which means both people give permission, usually to have sex. But the Bible holds a higher standard. Just because two people agree to steal something from a store doesn't mean it belongs to them.
- Let's talk about **emotional boundaries** in dating. Proverbs 4:23 warns us, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”
 - What could be the danger in going deep emotionally with someone you're dating, but aren't sure you will marry?
 - What could happen if a couple said “I love you” to each other early on in their relationship?
- **Sex can have lifelong effects.** People get pregnant when they don't plan on it—from sex without birth control (or using it the wrong way), or even from sexual trauma (when someone is forced to have sex).
- God's Word says life begins when a sperm and an egg join and form a baby ([Psalm 139:13-16](#), [Isaiah 49:1](#), [Jeremiah 1:5](#), [Galatians 1:15-16](#)). It's important our communities support unmarried moms and dads and their kids. Deciding to have a baby rather than have an abortion is a tough choice when people feel ashamed, alone, or silenced by people with power over them.

Questions to ask your child:

- Do you think you should date a person you'd never consider marrying?
- God's purposes are so far above our ways and ability to reason ([Isaiah 55:8-9](#)). But why do you think God says sex is only for marriage?
 - How far do you think it's OK to go before marriage?
 - What other boundaries might you need while dating?
- At what age do you think kids should start dating or having romantic relationships? Why?
- Let's talk about ways you could communicate your boundaries about your body, even to someone you respect and what to do if you don't feel those boundaries are respected.
- Has someone made your body feel uncomfortable before? If so, do you feel okay telling me about it?

Bonus activity, if you have time:

- Let's write down a list of qualities you might want in a person you'd marry.
- Here's a few things I (as a parent) would suggest adding or subtracting, and why.
- Let's divide this list into "inessentials" vs. "essentials."
- Explain why you chose these qualities for each list.
- How could your list gain more wisdom as you grow? How could it become more helpful?
- What qualities would you definitely *not* want in a person you date or eventually marry?
- Name some people in the Bible who never married, as far as we know (*Paul, Jesus*). Do you think God sees single people as valuable as married people?

Discussion SIX

Talk about porn.

My target time period to have this conversation this weekend: _____

Your talking points:

- Photos and videos of people without all their clothes on and doing sexual things are called *pornography*.
- Rather than honoring God's gift of sex designed to take place in a relationship of committed, lifelong love, **porn subtracts all the intimacy, celebration of love, self-sacrifice, faithfulness, and is mostly about the physical act of sex.**

- Sometimes people watch porn and touch their own genitals, giving themselves an orgasm. Touching yourself sexually is called *masturbation*.** (*parents, see our note below*).
- The Bible says that *lust*, those inappropriate, selfish sexual thoughts we talked about earlier, is a sin. Jesus says looking at another person lustfully is like committing adultery with them in your heart (Matthew 5:28)! So **God's not just looking at the sexual faithfulness of our bodies. He looks at the sexual faithfulness of our hearts.**
- Porn is all over the internet—which is another reason why it's a **bad idea to Google your sexual questions**. I will answer whatever questions you have, even if they're super embarrassing.
- Unfortunately, **porn has long-term effects on someone's brain**. [One large study](#) found out it's addictive like cocaine, because sexual arousal gives our brain a stimulating feel-good hormone called dopamine. But porn is also addictive like heroin, because an orgasm brings a relaxing release to our bodies.
- Just like any other drug, seeing porn over and over actually changes our brains' structure. For people to still find porn satisfying, they start watching things that are more and more different from healthy sex in marriage. Sometimes, normal sex in marriage isn't enjoyable for them anymore.
- So even though I may be more restrictive than other parents, that's why we'll work together to keep your phone and our computers safe from porn. But I can't protect you everywhere. Your heart could find ways to make destructive choices. Ultimately, you hold the power to make choices in your own heart about what you'll watch or look for.
- Let's talk about **what to do if someone else shows you porn**, which will probably happen, or maybe has already. Someone might also show you *sexting*, which is when people text each other pictures of someone without their clothes on. Sexting is never, ever okay. And I need to tell you something pretty heavy: If you would ever send someone a picture like that of a person under a certain age—even from a friend's phone—you can be legally charged with giving out child pornography, and even be publicly labeled as a sex offender for a lifetime. That label affects what jobs you get and where you can live.

** As you decide whether and when to talk about this issue with your kids, we suggest you consider two things. 1) Talking about masturbation awakens curiosity that could lead to them exploring this. 2) At some point, they will learn about masturbation from another source. This could lead to them seeking information and drawing conclusions apart from you and God's Word on a topic they may feel deep shame about. We encourage you to think prayerfully about the right decision for your family.

- So if someone shows you sexting or porn, try to remember “S.T.O.P.”



- It's possible you've made bad decisions about sex already, or might some day. I'm praying that you won't, but here's what's important to know.
 - **No one is perfect sexually.** We're all broken. And together, your goal and my goal for your sexuality isn't *just* for you to arrive at your wedding day without having sex with anyone. God wants us to keep learning how to be like Jesus even in our sexuality.
 - Someday you may mess up, and **the consequences for messing up sexually can be very tough and even lifelong.** There could be pregnancy, diseases, addictions, or pictures in your mind you can't unsee when you're with your spouse someday.
 - But just like if you messed up and broke a window at home, I don't want you to try to hide that you messed up. Instead, I want you to get the help you need. **I want to be a safe place for you to tell me those things.** Because I'm broken, too.
 - **Read** [1 John 1:9](#) and [Luke 15:1-7](#).
 - God knows how much damage our sin can do. He hates that sin. But more than that, He wants to forgive us and help us. **You're never so broken or damaged that God can't find you and heal you and make something beautiful.**

Questions to ask your child:

- Has someone already shown you porn or sexting? (*Parent, be prepared with your unshocked face. You want your child to come to you with future struggles.*)
- Let's talk about a plan for what you could do if someone showed you porn or other pictures disrespecting a person's body.

Next steps for your child after this weekend

You're going to have more questions as your body changes and as you encounter different situations. **I would love to keep talking with you. How can we do that after this weekend?** (*Suggestion: Consider a recurring monthly date, just the two of you.*)

Next steps for parents after this weekend

Our culture's sexual landscape is more immersive for kids at younger ages—and changes rapidly. **Stay prepared** with FamilyLife's free download, [What Teens Need to Know about Sex](#). Consider subscribing to Axis ministry's weekly Culture Translator for parents, to keep you up to date on what's culturally happening in the preteen and teen world.

Schedule a check-in date with your child in a week or two, so you can find out how they've been processing all you've talked about.

Seek out teachable moments during your daily life to **continue your “mini and many” conversations**. Sometimes you'll have something specific you want to teach about sex or relationships, or your child will ask a question, or you'll see or hear something—perhaps something that happens in school or in the headlines—that will spark a conversation. Ask questions, seeking to be a conversation-starter (who listens and responds), rather than a conversation-stopper (who preaches).

Keep praying for your child, their sexuality, their peer and romantic relationships, and their future spouse. God's love for and protection of them is fierce.

Need help establishing a prayer routine? Grab our free, 30-day guide, [“Prayers for Parents.”](#)