



The Pocket Guide to Talking About Sex

for parents

Welcome

We know firsthand that parenting is hard work, especially in the mobile age. But we also know that with tools and strategies rooted in biblical wisdom, all of us can gracefully point our children to Jesus and His redemption. He is our Pure Hope.

Our role as parents in a sexualized, digital age is to protect our kids when we can, but more importantly, to equip them with an understanding of God's story of sex that is compelling and hopeful. Most importantly, our role is to invite them into relationship and to model our own (imperfect) pursuit of purity. The good news is, all that really means is turning to Jesus, again and again, as we continue on this journey with our kids.

This pocket guide is built to be a compact field manual and continual reference for you as you open up conversations about sex though every season of your parenting.

You have what it takes, and we're cheering for you every step of the way!

conversation (n.)

At its root, conversation means to “turn with” or “dwell with.” It's not about crafting the perfect moment to have a one-time, high-pressure sex talk. It's about creating open, ongoing dialogue in the context of a safe, loving relationship. This is the beginning of a lifegiving, lifelong *conversation*.

Age-Appropriate Equipping

Here are some ideas to address with your child as they grow in understanding God's story of sex

BIRTH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

Protect

- Remember you are your child's protector. Exercise discernment. Listen to your gut.
- Teach body privacy and proper, anatomical names for body parts—with confidence and without blushing—at the appropriate times: dressing, bathing, learning to use the bathroom.
- Teach discretion and the differences between certain times and environments (in public, at home, doctor's office, changing rooms, others' homes, etc.)
- Discourage secrets and secret friends. Privacy is different than secret-keeping.
- Watch for red flags of abuse: sudden changes in behavior, withdrawal, fears.
- Activate parental controls on all network-connected devices and limit screen time for your child's growing brain.

Equip

- Affirm that your child is created purposefully and intentionally.
- Hold your child often to equip them with a sense of security.
- Teach the biological differences between the male and female sexes.
- Discuss directly why the genitals are private parts and should not be touched by others.
- Begin to gently correct and instruct in private if they touch/encroach inappropriately on others.
- Redirect or gently correct your son or daughter privately if they are touching their own genitals continually or publicly. Emphasize hygiene and the good design but private nature of those areas of their body (Remember not to overreact or shame them; they are still learning about their bodies).

- Give permission to say “no!” to hugs, kisses, holding, tickling etc. and then respect and/or defend their “no.”
- Look them in the eyes, to equip them to be comfortable with being present and engaging people.

Model

- Show affection and build trust.
- Communicate God’s love.
- Model comfort and delight in God’s design of the human body.
- Cultivate connection by speaking and responding to them.
- Sing to them, so they know they are sung over (Zephaniah 3:17).
- Help them understand healthy ways of giving and receiving attention.
- Show your child how to create and respect physical boundaries.
- Examine your own media consumption habits and closely monitor your child’s habits.
- Engage in community; don’t neglect fellowship or give way to isolation.

“When should I start talking to my kids about sex?”

We always answer that question with another question...
When does the world start talking to your kids about sex?

Today is the best time to start talking. God’s truth is never off-limits. We see a great, permission-giving example of this when the Israelites enter the Promised Land...

*“There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women **and the little ones** and the strangers who were living among them.”* — Joshua 8:35

Joshua shared the whole of God’s truth *with* the little ones present. We *get* to be storytellers!

EARLY ELEMENTARY

Protect

- Filter the amount and types of influences you let into your home; install filtering and monitoring software if you haven't already. Continue to guard digital time and screen interactions.
- Discuss Internet safety and boundaries with parents of your child's friends.
- Warn about seductions and tricks from both strangers and familiar relations, in person and online.

"Because of the society we live in, the consequences of avoiding these conversations far outweigh the consequences of giving too much information too soon."

—Dr. Margaret Stager, Case Western Reserve University

Equip

- Begin to introduce how human sexuality is a part of God's plan.
- Continue to teach your son or daughter basics of physical boundaries and healthy touch (of self, of others, by others).
- Reinforce their right to say "no" in situations that make them uncomfortable.
- Begin the discussion about good images vs. bad images, respectful language vs. objectifying language.

Model

- Model positive body image; children will catch on to your confidence.
- Guide them to express and experience feelings appropriately (ex: pulling someone's hair isn't a kind way to convey interest).
- Communicate that you're a safe place for questions.
- Demonstrate integrity and respect for others in your own life.
- Consistently enforce tech boundaries for yourself and your home; model excellent social media use and digital stewardship.
- Let your children see the importance you place on deep and meaningful friendships.

UPPER ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL

Protect

- Diligently guard against access and exposure to sexually explicit and exploitative content through content filters and, more importantly, ongoing conversation.
- Maintain good boundaries and limits on screen time and tech use. As research continues to confirm the adverse effects of social media—especially on developing young minds—consider holding off on introducing social media accounts until high school.
- Guide appropriate conduct, speech, dress, self-respect, and consideration of others.
- Get to know their friends and discuss choosing friends with wisdom.

“My kids accuse me and my wife of being... overly concerned about tech, and they say that none of their friends have the same rules... That’s because we have seen the dangers of technology firsthand. I’ve seen it in myself; I don’t want to see that happen to my kids.” —Steve Jobs

Equip

- Continue to talk to your kids about God’s purposes and design for sex—both our sexual stewardship as male or female image-bearers, and God’s design for the sexual union in the marriage of a husband and wife.
- Talk about the reality, harms, myths, and lies of pornography and other sexual perversions.
- Remember, as bodies change these can be awkward years; affirm your children and answer questions graciously.
- Know that masturbation can be a struggle for both boys and girls. Openly discuss this struggle with sons and daughters.
- Cultivate dialogue about their increasingly complex feelings and normal physiological responses.

- Build your child's confidence in their worth, noting their unique personalities and strengths and sharing these praises and identity-rooting statements with them often.
- Have your child observe older classes and think ahead about ways they can navigate that stage.
- Remind them that they are smart and capable.

Model

- Think critically about culture and technology, and discuss regularly.
- Utilize pureHOPE's [Tech Strategy](#) for you and your family.
- Attend to your relationships through active engagement.
- Listen! Ask, and make yourself available to answer hard questions.
- Consider others in your community who you can point to as role models for your kids.

We've done the research for you! Here are our top choices for protecting your family...



BARK

Helps families protect their children's online lives



COVENANT EYES

Offers filtering, monitoring, and accountability software

Check out these and other helpful tools and links [here](#).

HIGH SCHOOL + BEYOND

Protect

- Get to know your teens' friends and their parents.
- Talk with other parents about their "house rules" for digital access.
- Establish courting/dating boundaries; help your child create a vision and learn the purpose of relationships.
- Help them set healthy sexual boundaries based on God's story of sex.
- Continue giving guidance and boundaries on speech, dress, and behavior.

Equip

- Reinforce your teen's identity as a son or daughter of God living in the context of God's story.
- Discuss sex, tech, and porn calmly, biblically, and frequently.
- Help them understand the prevalence of sexual abuse, rape, sexting, and exploitation.
- Guide them in making quality friendships, putting value on character and choices.
- Let your teen know they can come to you with any question about sex at any time.
- Prepare them to respond wisely and courageously in situations they may face.
- Encourage your child's input and ownership of their own sexual stewardship and their own digital stewardship.
- Remind them that whether they remain single or marry someday, God has purpose for their life and is telling a profound story through them.

Model

- Model the pursuit of purity, repentance, and forgiveness in your own life.
- Be willing to talk about your own struggles and mistakes (past and present).
- Be your teen's parent first, their friend second.
- Invite other positive role models into the conversation.

Conversation Starters

Every child, every relationship is unique. You won't always say the exact right thing, but here are a few great conversation starters for moments you might encounter along the way.

Situation: A new baby is born.

This is an opportunity to initiate conversation about the Creator of life and designer of our sex (lit. our maleness or femaleness), and the sexual union.

Starter: "Did you know that God purposefully forms every baby..."

We can be proactive not reactive in telling our children about God's good design for sex.

Situation: Your child is being teased or feeling discouraged about their appearance or abilities.

Your child needs to be reminded of their identity and reassured of their immense value.

Starter: "We all have special traits and abilities. I love and value your ____ because _____. You are very gifted at _____..."

These are powerful statements to share with your children anytime!

Situation: You come across an inappropriate image or advertisement.

Model and help your child turn away, and begin a conversation.

Starter: "Hey _____, do you know why I just turned that off? That image isn't healthy for either of us. I want to honor God and _____ with what I view..."

What we model has an incredible impact on what our kids learn and believe.

Situation: Your child is entering a new grade or a new school.

Equip them to think ahead about what they may encounter.

Starter: “So, you’re going into ____ grade next year. What have you heard about ____ grade? You know when I was your age...”

Transitions are a great time to initiate dialogue with our kids.

Situation: You find out your child has been exposed to pornography.

You are not alone. Remain calm and reinforce that you are safe and you love them.

Starter: “Thank you (if they told you)...” or “I’m so sorry this happened and I’m so glad we can walk through this together (if you found out)...”

Your child will likely be exposed to pornography at some point. You have a chance to show them God’s grace and teach them about God’s purpose for their life.

Situation: Your son or daughter expresses sexual confusion or has questions about LGBTQ issues.

Lead with grace and truth. This is a common question in our day and age, and we are all inclined to different distortions of God’s story of sex.

Starter: “That is such a great, caring question. Remember how we’ve been talking about God’s loving creation and how the story of sex reflects Christ and the Church...”

Continue to center your discussions around how God’s design communicates truth about our relationship with Him and His love for us. Engage with courage and understanding.

Situation: Your child comes to you and asks about a sexual term or innuendo they've heard.

You couldn't ask for a better moment to establish trust with your child that you are a safe person to come to with all of their questions.

Starter: "Thank you for asking me. You can always come to me with your questions. I'd love to talk to you more about that. Where did you hear that from? What do you think it means?..."

Gauge where your child is coming from and what level of understanding they may already have. Then give them an honest answer! You don't have to be graphic, but you can and should be truthful. If they're asking about a term even you are unfamiliar with, set a clear time when you can get back with them, or if they're older research it together.

Situation: Your child wants to know what your pursuit of purity looked like at their age.

Depending on your story, it can be tempting to conceal your past because of shame or lecture out of self-righteousness. But really, this is an opportunity to point to Jesus as your Pure Hope.

Starter: "When I was your age I thought ____, I experienced ____, and I struggled with ____. I wish someone had told me ____. I'm so thankful to follow Jesus and I want to help you look to Him more than me..."

Purity isn't tied up in what we have or haven't done. Ultimately Jesus is the one who purifies us.

For more resources on God's story of sex and navigating a sexualized, digital age check out purehope.net/links.

Tips to Avoid Bad Dialogue

We all know what it's like to sit through a movie or a book with bad dialogue. How much of our dialogue with our kids—especially about sex—sounds like a bad script? Here are our top tips to keep conversations with your kids natural, real, and engaging.

1. *Don't be fake.* Draw from your own experiences and beliefs and dialogue will flow. For our conversations with our children to mean something to them, what we're saying has to mean something to us.
2. *Don't state things that should be shown.* When you say it in place of doing it, your words become flat and hollow. Your actions should reflect and reinforce your words. What do you think your kids are learning from watching you?
3. *Don't let "dialogue" become lecturing.* Dialogue takes an unfortunate turn when it becomes... well... not dialogue at all. Long speeches and relentless lectures are not what our kids are looking for. We don't have to have the perfect answer to every question or launch into a doctoral dissertation on God's story of sex. Creating open dialogue with our kids means journeying with them to discover more of who God is.
4. *Don't miss your cue.* Good dialogue is good interaction. Emphasis on the "inter-" a root prefix meaning "reciprocally" or "together." This is a perpetual back-and-forth. Discipleship is a moments-matter type gig. What "moments" are in front of you right now? Capitalize on them!
5. *Don't forget to rehearse your lines.* Okay, so you don't really have "lines." What you do have is the Word of God. This is and will always be the single best parenting book you've got. Dig into God's Word regularly with a heart to minister to your child.

"I wish my parents would talk to me about these things. I have a lot of questions but sometimes I am afraid to ask them."

Find Pure Hope For Your Family

Purity is not an accomplishment. It is primarily a relationship with the one who is Pure: Jesus. The pursuit of purity is marked by prayer, understanding, resolve, and engagement, P-U-R-E. Instead of a vicious cycle of sin and shame, this is a virtuous one, spurring us on to closer intimacy, increased discernment, stronger commitment, and deepening love for God and others. Here are ways you can...



PRAY | Pray over these opportunities and this ongoing conversation. Pray for what your children will hear about sex from the world, from their peers, from the church. Pray especially for what they will hear from you. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you every step of the way.


UNDERSTAND | Get to know God's Word on the subject of sex (we have some great resources for you on the next page). Get to know your child's heart and where they are coming from as you approach this topic together.

RESOLVE | Commit to modeling the beliefs, language, and actions you hope to see in your children when it comes to sex.

ENGAGE | Start talking! Keep talking. It may feel awkward at times but will ultimately bring you closer together.

"Lately I have been filled with panic thinking about how the world will come after my sweet child... trying to keep the bubble from popping. I started reaching out to other parents to learn what they were experiencing. This was only making my panic worse. After engaging with pureHOPE, my spouse and I feel like we have the guidebook to resource our Bible with the answers to teaching our child what we certainly were not taught as children. We feel empowered to move forward, to teach our kid about purity and start the ongoing dialogue that will make us squirm and grow even closer to each other and God."

Resources



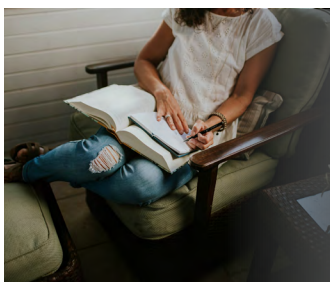
Listen to *A World Free: The pureHOPE Podcast*

We start conversations on the show to help spark conversation in your life



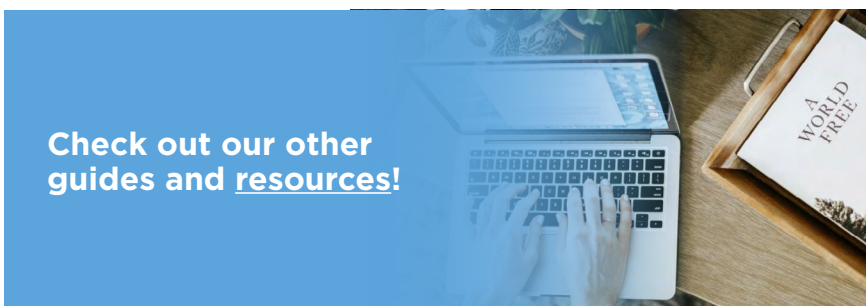
Bring pureHOPE to your church or community.

Get equipped with vision, insight, and practical strategies to confidently approach the topic of sex in a digital age



Read Parenting in a Sexualized, Digital Age

Get into God's Word with our Bible App Reading Plan



Check out our other guides and resources!

Join the pureHOPE community [@findpurehope](https://www.instagram.com/findpurehope)





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