

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Talking to your kids about sex

This month's author, Bradley Snyder, doesn't pull any punches. He wants you to talk to your kids about sex. As a parent, as the campus pastor at a WELS high school, and as the chairman of Conquerors through Christ, Snyder knows how important it is that parents talk to their kids about sex. The statistics he shares are sobering. The stakes are incredibly high. Yet you are not alone. He offers resources to help. Read it all below.

—Nicole Balza

AS LOVING CHRISTIAN parents, when it comes to talking to your kids about sex, the most important thing is . . . that you talk to your kids about sex.

A study conducted by Conquerors through Christ at the 2024 WELS youth rally showed the following:

- 32 percent of the teens referred to their conversation(s) with their mom about sex as meaningful.
- 40 percent referred to it as awkward.
- 28 percent said it was non-existent.

For dads of WELS teens at the 2024 youth rally, it's worse.

- 16 percent of teens referred to their conversation(s) with their dad about sex as meaningful.
- 20 percent said it was awkward.
- 64 percent said it was non-existent.

Sixty-four percent of WELS teens surveyed said they have never had a conversation with their dad about sex!? I acknowledge that a lot of our teens, like me, don't have a dad to talk to about it, but it's not 64 percent of them.

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Research consistently shows that the majority of Christians in the US seek pornography at least monthly. The numbers rise among younger generations. Not a single church or school in our synod is exempt from those stats. If that majority does not include you, then it includes your significant other, your child, or your grandchild. It is extremely difficult and extremely rare to be any more removed from it than that. For the people I work with, high

school teens, the stats say that more than 75 percent of boys and about 40 percent of girls seek pornography at least monthly. For more than 10 percent of them, it's daily. There's a clear struggle going on.

Research also shows that about 25 percent of all online search engine requests are for adult content; the average age of first exposure is 11 years old. First exposure is almost never intentional. It's usually something somebody else does or something somebody else shows. Most often it's an older child with a smartphone who is causing a younger child's first exposure to pornography.

PARENTS MUST BE REAL TOO

An unspoken rule in many Christian homes, churches, and schools is that sex is not to be talked about unless the conversation serves to put the fear of God in children about their participation in sex before marriage. Sometimes an allowance is made to cover the basic mechanics of baby-making and safe-sex practices. Even then, talking about sex solely in the context of prohibition with an overemphasis on negative instruction will likely lead a child to associate sex with silence and shame.

We tend to teach and talk about sex in two contexts: as either something that is to be avoided so you don't become the worst kind of sinner or as something that you do in marriage and it's going to be awesome. Those are the two extremes, but neither one is a universal truth. You can have sex outside of marriage and not go to hell (because there is forgiveness for repentant followers of Jesus). You can have sex in marriage, and it's not awesome.

If a child is not practicing having conversations about sex in safe environments with adults they trust, what is that child supposed to do when he or she is victimized? What's that child supposed to do when he or she sees pornography on another child's smartphone? Who can that child talk to about that? Sadly, because Christian homes, churches, and schools (generally speaking) are not having meaningful conversations with their kids about sex, they're leaving a beautiful and vulnerable dimension of their children's lives to be shaped by the media, porn industry, or porn-saturated peers. In particular, when parents abdicate their power to frame healthy and normative sex education, they are, intentionally or not, creating a world of silence and intrigue. Where parents and ministries will not educate, pornography will. The result of our unwritten rule of cultural silence is that the door is left wide open for pornography to continue to be the most prominent sex educator of our day.

We are living, arguably, in a time unparalleled in human history in terms of the availability and normalization of erotic sexual content. As a result, sexual pain and confusion are increasingly commonplace. If we're not willing to talk about sex, then this pain and confusion will never be addressed.

We need to be honest. And we're not good at that. We're not good at vulnerability, not good at honest communication. It takes practice. A level of effort will be required to help our children navigate Christian sexuality with a biblical ethic in a digital world with ubiquitous unwanted sexual content. Our kids need us to talk to them about sex, and they need us not to overthink it. They need us to tell them that sex is good. They also need us to tell them that, like all

good things God gives us, there are ways to misuse it that are not good, and people often do. Not only will they certainly see that to be the reality as they grow up, but they are also likely to be hurt by that reality in some way.

RESOURCES TO HELP

Conquerors through Christ offers a Parent Support System at conquerorsthroughchrist.net/resources/parent-support to help and equip parents for these conversations. At Conquerors through Christ, we like to say that "sex education is a process, not an event."

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That process begins around age two by parents talking about privacy and the differences between boys and girls. The Parent Support System provides reading, printable, and video material both for parents to use on their own and for families to use together. One of the resources is a sample family plan to help families communicate what to do when a child is first exposed to pornography. My kids know the first thing is to look away, then tell me about it as soon as they can. They know they won't be in trouble, and they know we can talk about it. Having that conversation proactively is simple, but it makes a big difference when that moment comes.

The world is talking about sex. Sex is good to talk about not only because the world is but also because God does in his Word. When God talks about sex, God says it is something good, even though many people may use it in unhealthy ways. That should be our message too. If we don't say anything as parents, if we don't say anything in church, it's not as if our kids aren't going to continue to hear about it. It just means what they hear might not be true or biblical or healthy or smart or safe or good.



Bradley Snyder serves as campus pastor at St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West St. Paul, Minnesota. He and his wife, Jill, are raising two boys.



Conquerors through Christ, part of WELS Special Ministries, exists to help people resist, reject, and recover from pornography use or addiction. It produces resources to help ministry leaders, parents, people who struggle with pornography use or addiction, and those who love the struggling.

LEARN MORE > at conquerorsthroughchrist.net.



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