

Preparation

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Part of the [Healthy Childhood Sexual Development Series](#)

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Series About:

[Sexuality](#)

Foundation: Your child's lifelong sexuality needs to be nurtured intentionally. A proper foundation is critical – and, if it's true that children are "growing up quicker today," there's no time to waste. It's also strategic to teach our children the good stuff in this module before we have to get into conversations designed to prevent the bad stuff later.

Goal: To begin to teach your child *what* to think about his or her body and God's wonderful design, which nurtures it.

The Iceberg Zone: In this unit, both parent and child will focus on the preparation of the physical body. A healthy respect for the body in these early years, builds a solid foundation for the development of the mind and spirit. In this early stage, we simply want to help our children learn to cherish what God has given them. Obviously, the behaviors one chooses are linked to the body one learns to maintain.

What's normal

- Questions about gender differences
- Self-stimulation in public or private (not to be regarded as a fantasy-based masturbation)
- Bathroom talk (potty training)

Developmental tasks for your child

- Bonding with Mom
- Bonding with Dad
- Identification with the same-gendered parent
- Respect for the opposite-gendered parent

How to foster sexual health and integrity in this stage

- Be available. There's no substitute for *quantity* of time.

- Be consistent. There's no substitute for *quality* time, either.
- Be kind.
- Express enjoyment of your role as a male or female, husband or wife, provider, homemaker, etc.
- Teach God's design for creation, marriage, families, and general reproduction (daddies and mommies make babies by loving each other when they're married).
- Have the smallest number of caregivers possible. A child's capacity for bonding will only be harmed if he has several caregivers in addition to mom and dad, or if his community of caregivers changes frequently.
- Teach appropriate names for body parts and their function. Do not use slang.
- Teach basic differences between males and females.
- Teach age-appropriate self-hygiene to support a sense of modesty and appropriate boundaries.
- Affirm the gender of your child.
- Affirm your child's personhood regardless of gender.
- Express appropriate joy, awe, and reverence for God's design for creation (pregnancy, babies, weddings, etc.).
- Protect the boundaries they need to learn eventually – good touch, bad touch, confusing touch, irritating touch. Numerous books are available which teach the different kinds of touch. Most of these books are geared towards the prevention of sexual abuse. What's equally important, however, is for the parent to help a child begin to express his or her feelings about touch throughout a typical day.
- Respect their "no" and insist that others do as well (siblings, relatives, peers, teachers, strangers, etc.) We don't want to cater to a child's whims or bad moods, but on the other hand, even a child has the right to say "no" if he or she becomes uncomfortable in a relationship.
- Begin to interpret or unpack the cultural messages regarding gender, modesty, sexuality, beauty, respect, relationships, etc. We want our children to learn the contrasts between a Biblical worldview and a worldview that does not respect God and what He has created.
- Answer their questions (on age-appropriate level). If they're old enough to ask they're old enough to receive a thoughtful answer. Of course, you want to be sensitive and avoid answers that are too graphic or detailed. And, if the question seems not to be age-appropriate, you'll want to carefully discern if your child has been exposed to some type of sex play and/or abuse.
- Affirm God's love for your child, His goodness, and how we individually and collectively (modeling) make it our aim to please Him as we take care of our bodies.

What to avoid

- [Unnecessary immodesty](#) in the home
- Slang words or euphemisms for body parts
- Jokes about a child's body or age-appropriate ignorance

- Expressing shock or shaming them for repeating words, masturbation, questions, etc. A child's curiosity and best efforts to learn right from wrong needs to be met with tender correction rather than with disgust.
- Exposing them to seductive or explicit behavior in cartoons, movies, T.V., or elsewhere in the culture. New research indicates that children are adversely affected by *any* sustained visual media exposure up to the age of two, and regardless of content, television viewing in the preschool years has been found to increase the probability of attention deficit disorder.
- Allowing older siblings or adults to violate boundaries by tickling without permission, excessive overpowering, irritation to the point of provocation
- Over-emphasizing or praising appearance, especially in girls
- Forcing them to hug or kiss people
- Purchasing pint-size versions of seductive adolescent fashions for them

What to do if you're concerned for your child's development

- Journal your concerns: date, time, event, and the child's responsiveness to your redirection.
- Talk with any caregivers, baby-sitters, daycare providers, Sunday School teachers, etc. and gather their observations.
- Review Focus on the Family resources.
- Talk with your child's pediatrician.
- Talk with a child therapist.