

Prevention

By [Rob Jackson](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/sexuality/healthy-childhood-sexual-development/prevention) <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/sexuality/healthy-childhood-sexual-development/prevention>

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Foundation: We don't like to think about childhood sexual abuse – let alone it happening to one of our children. Sadly, however, sexual exploitation is a reality. According to statistics, one in four girls¹ and one in seven boys² will be molested by age eighteen. Frankly, I believe all of our children are *covertly* abused by the explicit sexual material throughout our culture and media. Raising healthy kids requires proactive parents who understand the culture they live in. And speaking of time, now is the time to equip them with information to (1) prevent excessive vulnerability to sex abuse, and (2) help them to think correctly about sexual exploitation were it to happen to them.

Goals:

1. Continue to help your child value his or her physical body. This value lies in the fact that the body becomes the temple of God when one has a faith experience with Jesus Christ.
2. Proactively protect your child's emerging sexuality without inhibiting him or increasing his anxiety. As parents we can learn to curb our anxiety for our children's well-being as we recognize that God loves them even more than we do. If, however, we're anxious for them, our children will most likely develop their own anxieties.

Iceberg Zones:

1. We will continue to affirm that the physical body is God's gift to us, and that it houses not only physical organs that are important to our overall health, but that it houses the mind and the spirit.
2. In this section we will begin to teach our children about the mind, which includes our personality, values, likes and dislikes, etc. This emphasis will include a development of how to think, with an emphasis on healthy thoughts specific to sexual health and integrity.

What's normal

- Occasional self-stimulation

- Curiosity and questions about sexuality
- Questions about pregnancy and reproduction
- Role playing
- Masturbation at home or in other private places. In most cases, masturbation will not prove a significant issue in this stage. Parents will want to gently redirect their children if masturbation occurs in public, and otherwise simply monitor, to the best of their abilities, any increases or changes that would warrant intervention.

Developmental tasks for your child

- Maintain the developmental tasks from Unit 1.
- Understanding of the human reproductive system within the context of Christian spirituality
- How to view the opposite gender
- How to view the same gender
- How to self-moderate his behavior including reactions and responses. A child needs to learn self-control, which in turn produces a healthier sense of self and less correction from the parent.
- How to ask for needed boundaries like privacy
- How to express thoughts and emotions
- Socialization with peers, including the opposite gender

How to foster sexual health and integrity in this stage

- Continue to build on the progress developed in Unit 1.
- Supervise your child's involvement with the media. Be prepared to impose restrictions based on your child's development level. Watch some of their programs and videos and listen to their music. When appropriate, discuss how a particular piece either supports or tears down your family's value system. Media restrictions will require more supervision as you discern each child's developmental level. Begin watching some of their programs and videos or reviewing printed media together and discussing how they support or tear down your family's value system.
- Offer occasional teaching and warnings about pornography. Explain that pornography is any picture in print, videos, or the Internet that reveals the human body or any kind of writing or cartoon that refers to the human body or sexual behaviors in a bad way. Then, explain that pornography, like alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes, is highly addictive or becomes a hard habit to break.
- Provide close supervision of age-appropriate relationships.
- Discuss the slang or profane words that correspond to appropriate names for body parts and sexual behaviors. Reinforce appropriate names for these body parts.
- Provide lots of wholesome physical, emotional, and spiritual affection. A parent's love goes a long, long way in the promotion of healthy sexual development.

- Pray for them and with them about their developmental tasks and milestones.

What to avoid

- Use no humor that devalues men, women, sexuality, body parts, etc.
- Never minimize their feelings about people, especially discomfort, or dislike of certain older children or adults.
- Don't assume they understand or remember terms or concepts after telling them once. You may have to reinforce new information by example, repetition, or by other ways of explaining terms that are unfamiliar to them.
- Try not to show exasperation over the large number of questions they may ask about topics you find uncomfortable.
- Don't allow them to visit homes or other places where sexually explicit material is available (libraries, homes with Internet, relatives with romance novels or other pornography) without supervision.

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

- Maintain the action points from Units 1 and 2.
- Ask your child to help you protect them by participating in open and ongoing conversations about their reasonable safety, their experiences, their impressions of the culture, etc. Be sure to model the kind of openness you want to receive from your child. Share with them your thoughts and experiences, and draw them into conversation with open-ended questions like, "What do you think? Your thoughts are important to me."
- Ask both specific and open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered simply with a "yes" or "no") regularly about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.
- Pray with them about various conflicts they or their peer group are experiencing.

1. L. Dickinson, F. Verloin deGruy, W.P. Dickinson, and L. Candib, "Health-Related Quality of Life and Symptom Profiles of Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse," *Arch Fam Med*. 1999; 8:35-43. [↩](#)
2. Delaplane, D. and A. Delaplane. *Victims of Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, Elder Abuse, Rape, Robbery, Assault, and Violent Death: A Manual for Clergy and Congregations*. Special Edition for Military Chaplains. Includes a section entitled, "Scriptural References About Children." Scriptures include Hebrew Scriptures, the Talmud, and the New Testament. [↩](#)