



The Family LifeLine

Bulletin of the Family Life Society, Archdiocese of Singapore

How to talk to your Children about SEX

~ By Nick Chui

“Kelly Osbourne’s Sex Tests” screams the headlines of MSN’s entertainment news.

Now if that’s simply a usual gossip column prying into the private lives of celebrities, parents need not be so worried.

What should make them worry however, is the fact that Kelly Osbourne is an ambassador for World Contraception Day. In other words, everybody, her fans especially, should emulate her.

What should her fans be emulating? No surprises here. “Protect yourselves against infection and unwanted pregnancy. Take the pill and use condoms.” Oh and by the way get tested for STIs three to four times a year “just for peace of mind”.

Well how about that! Parents are supposed to be feeling reassured now. I guess the “no promiscuous sex = no need for STI testing = peace of mind” equation is too simplistic for today’s sophisticated youth.

Faced with such drivel, parents had better be talking to their children about the birds and the bees. Here are five tips which we hope would be helpful to get the conversation going.

Tip One: Recognise that sex is God’s idea

God created sex and everything that God creates is good. That’s basic Catholic doctrine. God created the human race male and female to complement each other. He created the possibility of sexual union as a symbol of the irrevocable love between a man and a woman when they join themselves in marriage. (“Therefore a

man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” Gen 2:24) As an extension of that love, a child can possibly be conceived. (“Be fruitful and multiply...” Gen 1:28) Not only that, the relationship between husband and wife and their children are meant to be a sign also of the love shared between the three persons of the trinity and also of the love between Christ the bridegroom and His Church.

If that is the case, then parents should always speak to their children about sex and sexuality, especially those who are reaching puberty, in a positive and respectful way. When negative examples appear on TV, show why God’s vision is grander and better. Even conveying “merely biological” information like how the reproductive system work, (in an age appropriate manner of course) should be done with a sense of awe and reverence since we are actually describing how God chooses to bring new human beings into the world. Saying things like “sex is dirty” or “your private parts are dirty” is not only not helpful, it is also heresy.

Find out where he is coming from. It may be just childhood curiosity. If instead, you discover in the course of conversation that his friends have been talking about this to him, then it would be a good time to sit him down and have a good conversation about the meaning of sex.

Above all, avoid hurtful words and negative remarks. Instead, respect him as a person. Ask him for his point of view instead of

jumping into a long lecture. Admit that you do not always have all the answers but are happy to find out. If this is practiced, your child will feel that he is valued and that his parent is interested in him and his concerns. If not practiced, a climate of hostility is developed in the home and the default mode of child would be that their parents are always nagging at them or are unconcerned.

Tip Three: Monitor the media, especially the internet “Don’t cha wish your girlfriend was freak like me... raw like me?” shrieks the Pussycat dolls as they dance and gyrate in a manner which leaves little to the imagination.

Yup, this is what the media markets to our young people today. And honestly, not watching MTV at all is not such a bad idea. If parents demonstrate in their own lives that they can be happily entertained with good videos where the whole family can enjoy together, then the lure of trashy TV programmes can be lessened.

If instead you chose to allow your children to watch television and something similar to Pussycat dolls pops up on screen, take it as an opportunity to initiate a discussion about sex. Help them to reflect on why these people are doing what they do on screen and what they themselves [your children] would do instead.

Above all, monitor your child’s use of the internet. Very often, internet pornography comes right into the mailbox. Have the computer in a common area and ensure that you know what your child is surfing the net for. Installing internet filtering software is also a great help.

If the internet is part of the problem, it is also part of the solution. There are literally thousands of good articles, websites and even youtube videos which are edifying and provide

sound advice on relationship and sexuality issues. You can refer to our sidebar entitled “resources for families”. Read and watch them yourself and invite your children to read or watch them.

Tip Four: Set clear boundaries and standards

Author Wendy Shalit recounts something a teenage boy once told her “My parents allowed me to do whatever I want and never said no to me. I really wonder if they love me.”

Yes, teenagers do appreciate authoritative guidance from their parents especially in the area of sex. The authoritative parent, writes educationist Thomas Lickona “explains reasons behind demands, encourages give and take, sets standards and enforces them firmly but does not regard [him]self as infallible”.

Above all, parents should share clear reasons why certain sexual behaviors would in the final analysis be contrary to the happiness of their children. For example, parents can explain to their children the purpose of dating and why exclusive dating at a young age is not a good idea since one would be too young to get married. They can also explain the physical and emotional dangers of pre-marital sexual involvement, and also what an abortion entails.

Mums can explain to their daughters the beauty of modesty, where by her dressing; a woman invites others to appreciate her inner qualities.

For Dads, they can help their sons understand the need to avoid the lure of pornography and also the need to progressively overcome a common habit of masturbation. Indeed, psychologist Gregory Popcak recalls an incident where a Father, who actually discovered his son masturbating, decided to share with his son his own struggles and how he overcame the habit and the freedom which he now experiences. What was an upsetting experience, recounts the Father, became an opportunity for a good man to man talk with his son and did wonders to build up trust in their relationship.

Final Tip: Focus on building up your child’s character

Two months ago, FLL featured family therapist Bill Doherty’s advice to parents that they raise their children to be citizens and not consumers. If that has been your vision of parenthood and you have already started cultivating in your children virtuous habits and especially the virtue of self discipline, where he is able to control and direct his impulses, appetites and passions, then you are on the right track.

Indeed, another name for self discipline in the sexual arena is called chastity. A chaste person directs and masters his sexual passions towards the truth of love. For married couples, it would mean recognising that your spouse is a gift and practicing conjugal love as self-giving. For persons who are not married, it would mean recognising that sex is for marriage and respecting the member of the opposite sex as a person never to be used for their selfish gratification.

Since your child is already practicing to at least some extent, unselfishness and kindness, presenting this vision of unselfishness in the sexual arena would not seem like something alien to him, but would be simply something he would be used to doing anyway. And if children see their parents themselves trying to live out the virtues which they speak about, and trying to live an integrated sexuality they will appreciate the authenticity of the message.

That of course is more powerful than a thousand sermons.

And it would be more powerful than the Kelly Osbournes and Pussy Cat Dolls of today.

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Tip Two: Practice the basics of good communication

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Resources for Families

Imagine all good Catholic Family resources under one roof. Yup, this is now available at our very own Family Life Society website www.familylife.sg/resources. From Church documents to good Catholic family websites, you will find pertinent answers to your questions on marriage, family, parenting and life issues. What’s more, we also have carefully selected Youtube videos-bite sized information designed to make an impact. Be part of an online community of Catholic families today!

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If you have a personal story to share, comments or feedback to give, please feel free to email to nick_chui@veritas.org.sg

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