

Before You Talk to Your Kids About Sex



Talking to our kids about sex isn't something most of us look forward to. None of us are going to get these conversations 100% right or escape the awkwardness this topic brings. Chances are, your parents were no exception.

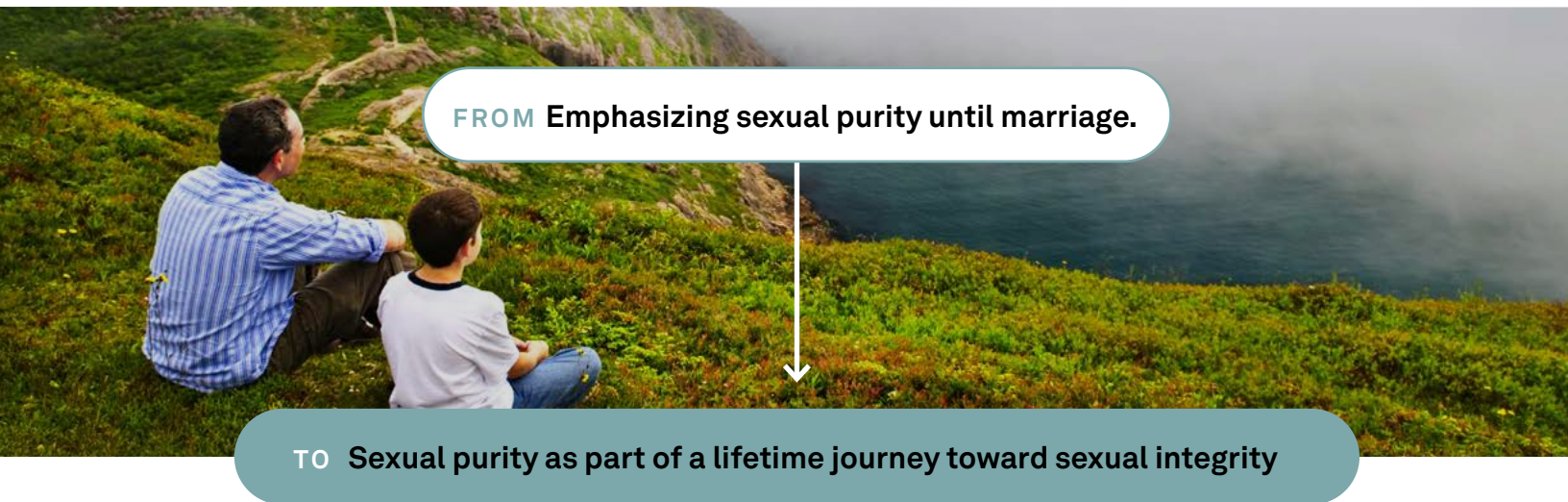
But some of you might have walked away from that conversation feeling ashamed, fearful, or confused. Or maybe your parents never approached the "birds and the bees" with you at all. Which could have left you feeling a little lost or unprepared.

And none of us want that for our kids, right?

Teaching our kids about sex is our big opportunity to shape their lifelong worldview to honor marriage and God's best design—offering our kids a high view of sex. Their bodies, sexuality, and holistic discipleship are so valuable in His eyes.

So before we dive into any convos with our kids, let's think through the posture we might want to take. Here, we'll discuss a shift away from the conversations many of us had and toward a more well-rounded view of sexual integrity.

We want to move...

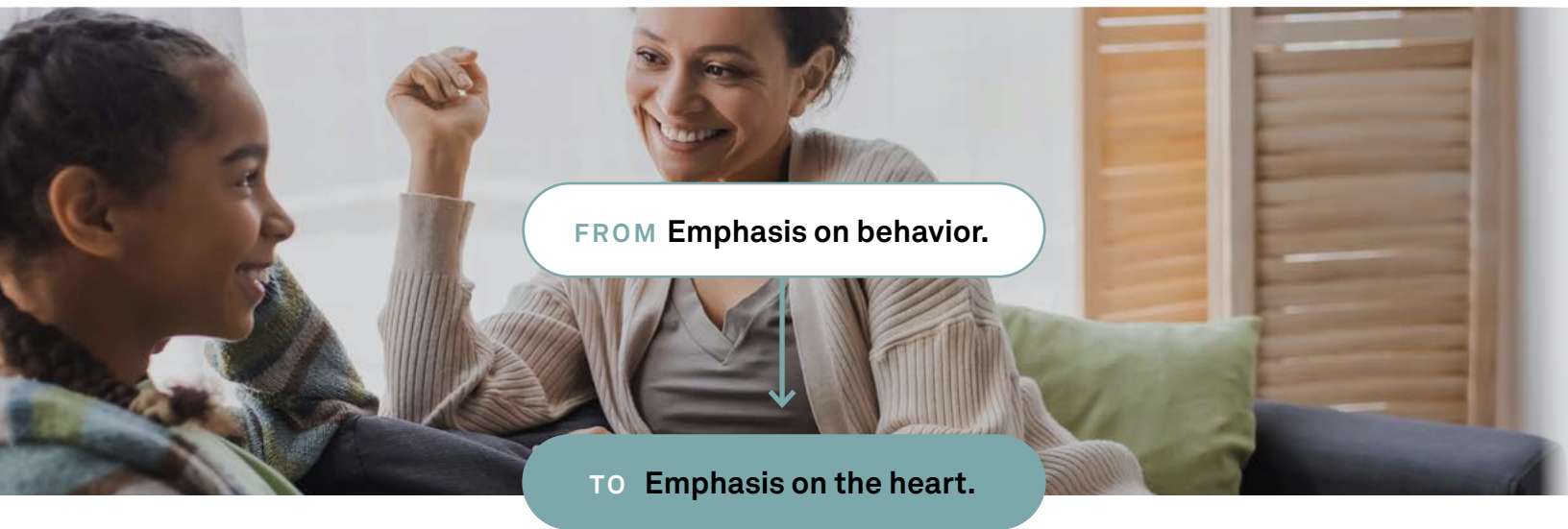


Purity, and specifically sexual purity, are unquestionably found in the Bible ([Check out these verses](#)). But purity means so much more than “no sex outside of marriage.” It means freedom from what pollutes us and keeps us from God and His ways and growing as His disciples in every area of our lives, including sex.

Each of us—and our kids!—falls short of God’s perfection ([Romans 3:23](#), [James 3:2](#)). But God desires more than sin or lust management (or self-righteousness). Not only that, but when it comes to purity, increasing in sexual integrity doesn’t stop with marriage—and singles, too, can experience spiritual maturity in their sexuality. Throughout life, we’re seeking to fully integrate our faith with our sexuality, so every part of us worships God ([Romans 12:1-2](#)).

Rather than dividing people into categories of “pure” and “impure,” it’s important to acknowledge we’re all sexually broken. Every one of us desperately needs the wholeness He shapes in us year after year.

Ultimately, any and all integrity relies on His work, not ours. Let’s champion heart-level transformation and redemption—even, perhaps especially, in the midst of failure.



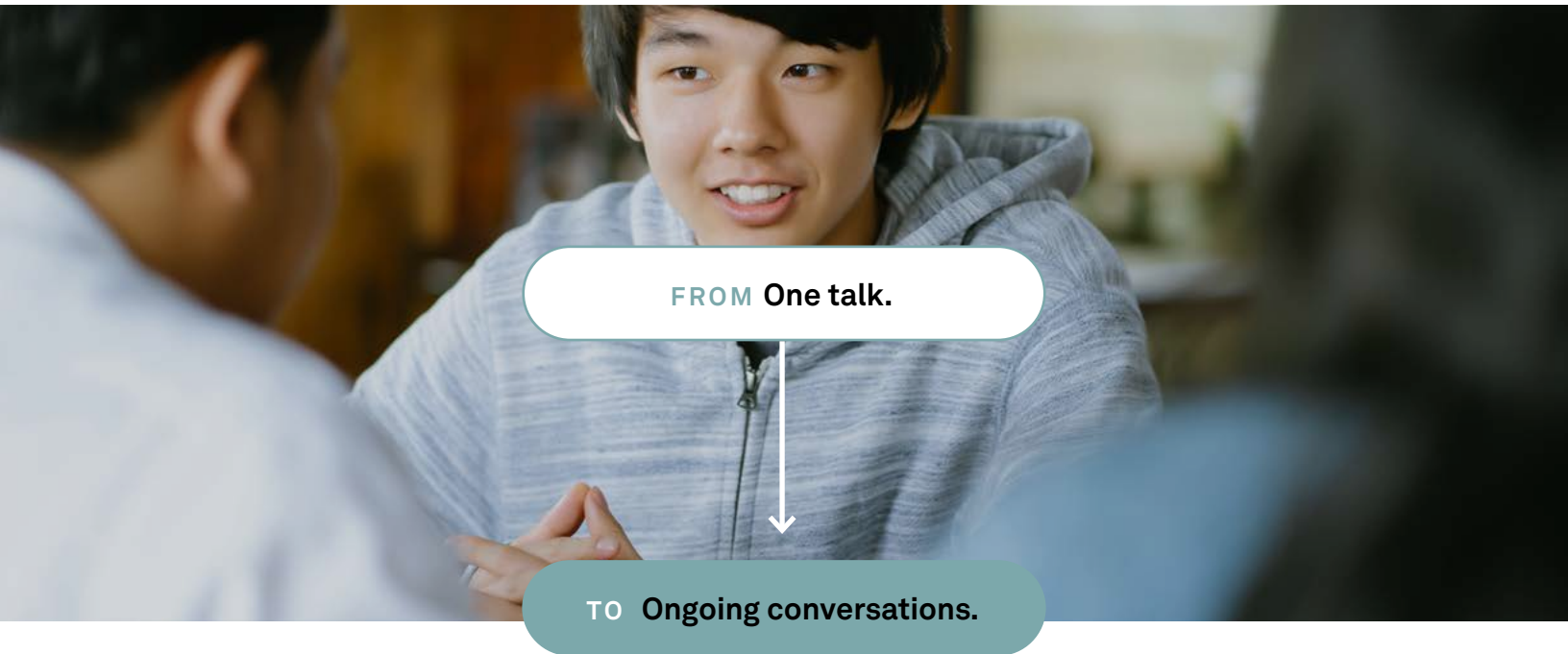
Far more than running after outward perfection, we want our kids to recognize their deep need for Jesus and their spiritual poverty without Him ([Matthew 5:3](#)). More than behavior, God’s about our long-term submission spilling from all-in love for Him. That’s the brand of holiness and purity He longs for ([1 Peter 1:16, 22-24](#)).

As Tedd Tripp wrote in *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, “A change in behavior that does not stem from a change in heart is not commendable; it is condemnable... Yet this is what we often do in childrearing. We demand changed behavior and never address the heart that drives the behavior.”¹

¹ See also Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in [Matthew 23](#), especially [verses 25-26](#).

In our attempts for outward good behavior, we become fluent at showing the world what looks good rather than our need for Jesus and the way He changes our brokenness and compels us to holiness from the inside out.

Let's move toward age-appropriate authenticity with our kids about not only the choices we're thankful God helped us make, but also the ways God brings His redemption and undeserved kindness to our regret. We embrace transformation and increased maturity, not more checked-off behavioral boxes.

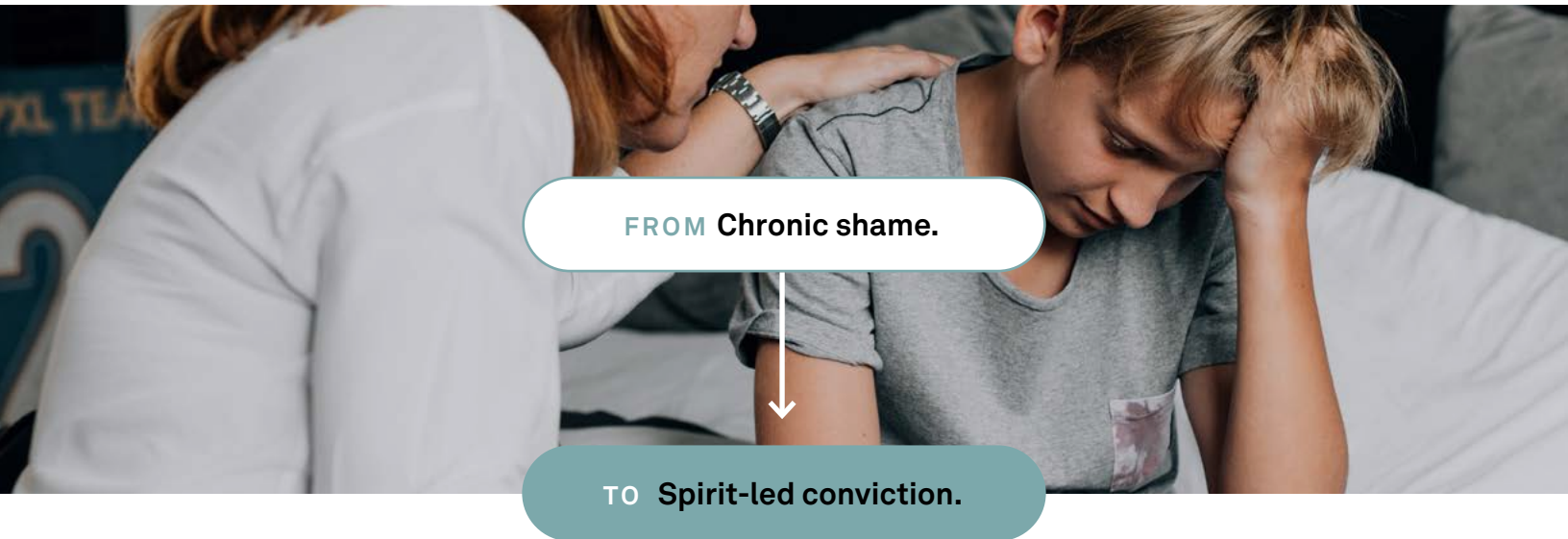


Past generations tended to believe kids were protected by delaying talks about sex until they were older. But what are the chances we can completely insulate our kids from mentions or exposure to sex until we feel it's the "right" time?

Besides, evil isn't just "out there"; sin is within all of us. So protecting kids isn't enough. Working with the Holy Spirit, we must shape their consciences in a thousand open, truthful, loving conversations.

We want to be the go-to people about sex in our kids' world. We want to help them assemble their worldview, in "mini and many" conversations. We want Scripture to inform them, rather than the kids on the playground, the locker room, or (yep) Google.

But keep in mind that “go-to” does not mean expert. It’s absolutely OK to not have all the answers or even to say “That’s a great question. Let me get back to you on that.” Show kids you’re always open to learning more. And how we deal now—even with our facial expressions and tone of voice—establishes whether they’ll feel comfortable to ask us later.²



Guilt is a healthy feeling when we’ve done wrong. Ideally, it spurs us on to responsibility, repentance, reconciliation, and restoration.

Shame, on the other hand, could be described as a vague feeling of being “not enough” or unworthy of connection. Tangled in shame, we avoid God, others, and our true selves.³

In His role of convicting us of our sins, the Holy Spirit doesn’t condemn those of us who belong to Jesus ([Romans 8:1](#)). His goal is reconciliation; we’re told explicitly that nothing can separate us from God’s love ([2 Corinthians 5:18-19](#), [Romans 8:35, 38-39](#)). Because of Jesus, we are always brought near, always worthy of connecting with Him ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#), [Ephesians 2:13](#)).

So we can teach kids to lean into God’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s beautiful conviction of our hearts, which point out the sin that gets in the way of our relationship with God ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#), [Ephesians 4:30](#)). We don’t need to hide in shame. We can choose to be fully known and fully loved, moving toward God in truth ([John 4:23](#)).

² Taken from: *Permanent Markers*. Copyright 2021 Janel Breitenstein. Published by Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon 97408. www.harvesthousepublishers.com. Used by Permission.

³ 1 John 1:7.



FROM Fulfillment primarily through marriage.

TO Fulfillment through intimacy with God and healthy relationships.

At times, Christians have implied that when a person waits to have sex, God will bless them with a good Christian spouse. With an eye on marriage, young people were encouraged to think wisely and with self-control about the future.

But that formulaic reasoning can lead to false confidence in happily-ever-after outcomes. The majority of Scriptures are precepts, not promises. We aren't guaranteed a fairytale marriage or even a spouse. And considering Jesus and Paul were famously single, Christians often falsely exalt marriage as the "Promised Land" of maturity and subtly regard singles as second-class citizens.

When we imply that if someone checks all the boxes, their dreams will come true, we propagate our own version of a prosperity gospel. Which isn't much of a gospel at all.



FROM Girls being the sexual gatekeepers.

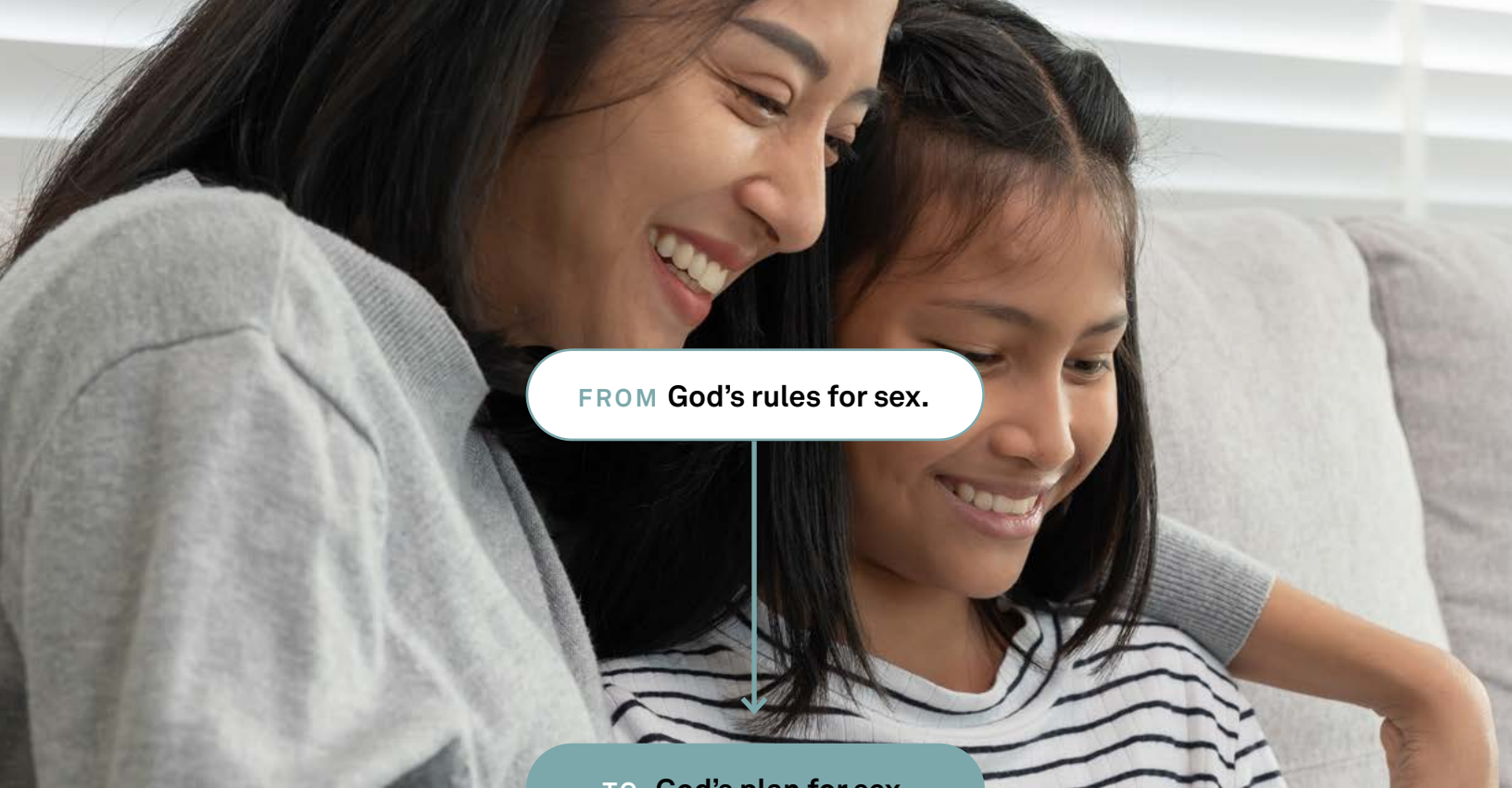
TO Boys and girls being stewards of their own bodies.

Jesus reinforces that sexual immorality comes “out of the heart” ([Matthew 15:19](#)). The cause is inside of us, not outside (i.e., external temptations, which simply trigger sin—and should still be avoided).

Unfortunately, blame shifting for sexual temptation has often singled out girls, implying their bodies are harmful. It fails to esteem males, too, implying they aren’t accountable for their own sexual desires, thoughts, appetites, and behavior.

Males and females share much of the same responsibility in sexual integrity. Both sexes serve as the “brakes” in sexual temptation. Both struggle with temptation toward pornography. And both are responsible for their own sexuality.

Blaming sin on someone or something outside of ourselves surrenders our capacity for change, Holy Spirit-filled self-control, and to stand up under God’s path out of every temptation ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)).



FROM God's rules for sex.

TO God's plan for sex.

Why did God give us sex? Why did He create the genitalia, the orgasm?

Sex, [explains Dr. Juli Slattery](#), reflects God's covenant love with His people. From the Old Testament to the New, we see God faithfully loving and preparing a breathtaking Bride for Himself ... to the point He would die for her.

Of all the concepts God wants us to know, few are more powerful than His unending covenant love. So He attached that concept to a powerful metaphor. Within the safety of a healthy marriage, sex represents that love through [four key pillars](#): regular celebration, faithfulness, intimate knowing, and sacrifice.

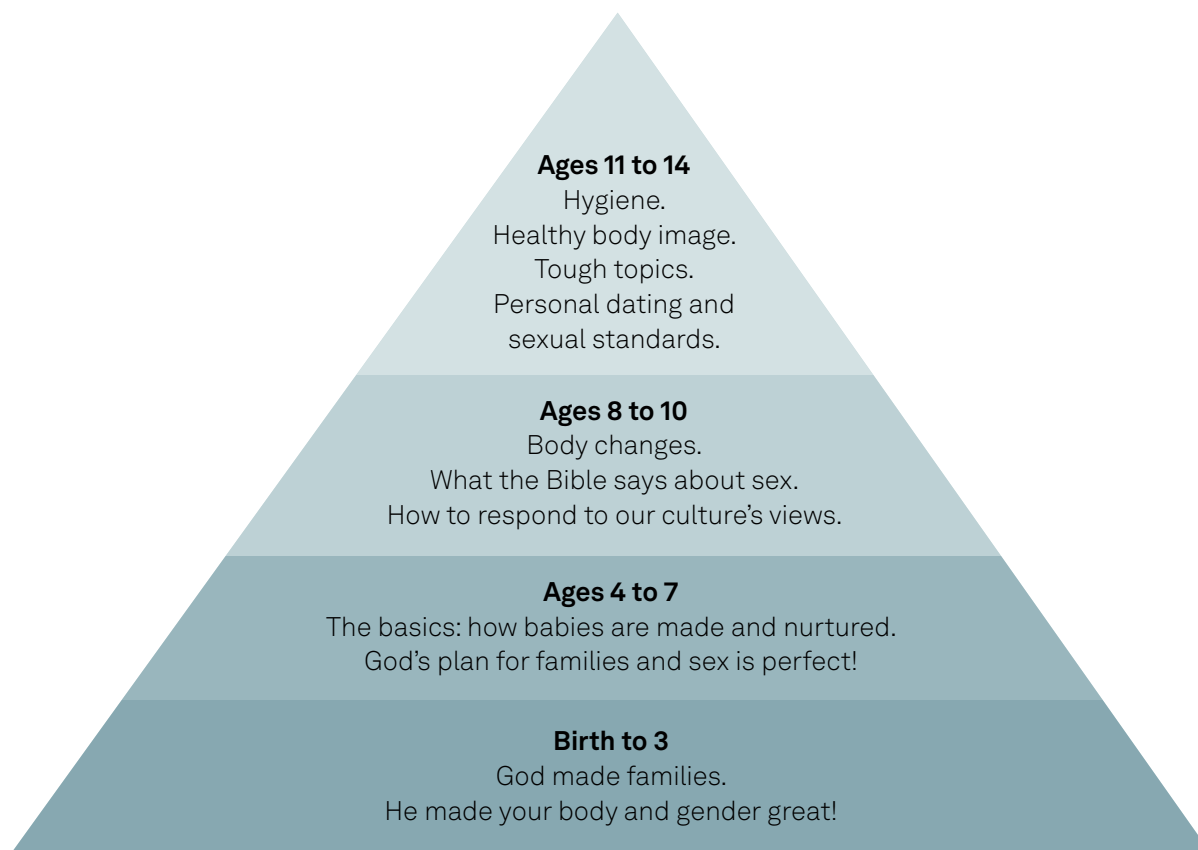
"The Christian 'rules' around our sexuality are there because they frame the picture of the true purpose of our sexuality," Slattery explains.

That's why, she insists, a sexual theology focused on the "rules" falls so short of what sex is about. God wants more than our morality! He longs for our sexual *maturity*. Yes, the rules are a critical part of that maturity that our kids need to understand. But by themselves, those rules fall far short of sexual wholeness.

The Life Stages of “The Sex Talk”

From *Permanent Markers: Spiritual Life Skills to Write on Your Kids' Hearts*
By Janel Breitenstein

The graphic below is a quick reference of the life cycle of the sex talks you may have with your kids. These age ranges are not prescriptive. Every child's development and sensitivities are different, so consider these as you evaluate when to hand each child another piece of the sexual-worldview puzzle.



Grab FamilyLife's free downloads of what your child needs to know at every stage:



Preschool



Elementary











Preteen



Teen

With your tone and body language, communicate essential truths:

-  You are a deeply loved child of God. No matter what. You are also my deeply loved child. No matter what.
-  You can come to me anytime.
-  You can trust me to tell you the whole truth.
-  Your gender is so valuable. Neither gender is better or more valuable. This isn't something you need to be embarrassed about.
-  Sex is good and created by God.
-  Your body and desires are good. Using them the right way is important.
-  If someone tells you not to tell about this, please trust me; come and tell me.
-  We're going to hold a high view of sex and your body, with some standards worthy of this gift, but I will not shame you when you mess up.⁴

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