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# Talking To Your Son About Sex

by *Mark Laaser, PhD*

You need to talk to your son about sex. You've put it off long enough. You know that it's your responsibility as a father. You search your memory banks for how your father handled this call, and you only find a memory of "the talk" that happened much too late. Or, maybe that talk never happened at all. You rationalize that your son is only six and you can wait several years. So, you put it off one more time.

By age six, however, your son has already heard his friends talking about sex. One of them has shown him some "dirty" pictures on the Internet. At the grocery store, he has seen nearly nude pictures of women on the cover of magazines. He has listened to sexual talk and seen sexual situations on television. The president and other leaders have been all over the news for their sexual troubles. Your son is getting sexually educated and it is a great mystery to him. He is curious, though, and the unknowns of sex will add excitement to the pursuit of knowledge. The world will educate him if you don't.

It doesn't have to be this way, however. Talking to your son about sex is a great gift. Don't avoid it. Here

are seven principles that can make talking to your son about sex a lot easier.

**1.** Prepare for a lifetime of conversation. Most fathers put a lot of pressure on themselves because they think that they have to have one talk that includes all biological, emotional, and spiritual information. That's simply not true. You will need to teach the same lessons about sex many different times. Nobody can learn all they need to know in one sitting.

Sons will benefit the most from a lifetime of conversations. None of them have to be "the talk." If you build a foundation early, later talks will come more naturally. I'm still having talks about sex with my 20-year-old son. (We started when he was four.) His spirit has opened as he matured, and he has even come to me with questions that indicate that

he is sincerely dealing with his own relationships and sexuality.

Another reality is that fathers need to put sexual conversations in a larger context of teaching about God and His design for men. Paul continually reminds us that while we live in the world, we must not be conformed to the world (Romans 12:2). Our sons will need to know that many of the decisions they make for themselves, including sexual ones, will run counter to the teachings of the world. When peer pressure tempts them to go along with "what everyone else is doing," they will need to know that God sometimes expects them to be different.

**2.** Deal with your own issues. Your own unresolved issues about sex can prevent you from talking to your son about the subject. Maybe you lack the right information about sex.

There are a number of Christians who have written about sexuality for men, including Cliff Penner, Archibald Hart, and Doug Rosenau. Get educated and don't be afraid to admit that you don't know everything. Maybe you're not comfortable with sexual issues from your own past. One fourth of you reading this article experienced sexual abuse as a boy. If you have not found Christian counseling to help you heal those wounds, it will be really hard to talk to your son.

Maybe you are dealing with sexual sins of your own. I have known many fathers, for example, who won't talk to their sons about pornography because they are so involved with it themselves. Did you know that the No. 1 source of pornography that men are first exposed to is their father's own collection of it? Perhaps your sexual sins are more serious than this. Maybe you are even sexually addicted. Whatever the case, get some help for yourself; deal with your own sins before you try talking to your son.

Finally, remember that your son's issues will often remind you of your own. As my two boys have matured, at each stage of their lives, they have often reminded me of my

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## Talking To Your Son About Sex

own “stuff” at that age. Take time for yourself, talk through your issues, ask yourself what you needed at that age and then talk to your son.

**3.** Make your own house sexually safe. Is your house a safe house, a sanctuary for you family? Read the story of Nehemiah, particularly the first four chapters. His heart was to restore the city of Jerusalem. He knew that he first had to build a wall of protection around it. Does your house have a wall of protection around it? Do you let immoral influences, like pornography, into it? Remember that pornography has many shapes and forms. One of the most powerful sources of it today is the Internet. Although computers are necessary today for so many things, never allow your son to have one in his room, particularly with online access. With TV, music, magazines, and movies, we fathers must constantly monitor what our sons are involved with.

One of my favorite verses is Nehemiah 4:14. His battle cry to the men rebuilding the wall was to fight for their wives, their sons and daughters, and their home. Are you fighting like a warrior for the protection of your home?

**4.** Be a healthy model. One of the main ways to make your home a safe place is to be a healthy model of sexual purity and faithfulness yourself. This is what might also be called a “non-verbal” form of talking to your son about sex.

There are many ways to do this,

and some of them may surprise you. Being faithful to your wife, not having pornography in the house, using appropriate language, and not telling dirty jokes are things that we might ordinarily think about. But what are we modeling about being a husband?

Are you affectionate and affirming to your wife? Do you touch each other in healthy ways? Do the two of you model a healthy emotional and spiritual friendship? How do you talk about women? What attitudes about women, sex, and marriage are you conveying to your son in the most simple of comments, jokes, or behaviors?

Encourage your wife or, if you are not married, a mature Christian woman, to talk to your son about what women are like. My wife, for example, has had some great conversations with our sons about pornography, dating, and relationships. If women are not to be a mystery, this is a vital experience. How are our sons to know how to treat their wives if we don't model cooperation and intimacy with their mothers? There will be times, therefore, when you will want to talk to your son together as husband and wife.

Finally, don't be afraid to tell your son your own story. If you can remember back to your own feelings as a boy, what would it have been like if your father had been able to share with you his own mistakes. I don't think that you would have thought less of him. My guess is that you would have felt less alone. I believe that some of the best modeling we can do for our sons is to show them that all men make mistakes and that they can be corrected. Therefore, don't be afraid to teach your son a

higher way even if you were not able to fulfill that standard.

**5.** Learn how to have safe conversations. The key word in this principle is “safe.” If you are feeling uncomfortable with conversations about sex, your son will also. What will you do to make it safe for him to listen and to talk? The same principles of healthy communication that would apply to any relationship also apply here:

Be a good listener. Don't expect your son to ask you the “right” questions. No son is born with a set of questions that he knows to ask. Read between the lines, notice non-verbal communication and discern his heart. Expect teachable moments to occur, times when life situations bring natural opportunities to talk.

Never talk when you're reacting out of anger. Your mood will be remembered long after the content of your message. Accept that conversations don't always have to be immediate. Sometimes, issues will come up and you can take an hour, a day or even longer to prepare your response and teaching.

Never judge or blame for immature thinking. You are guarding the fragile nature of you son's spirit and his confidence. Ask yourself what you were thinking and feeling at that age.

**6.** Understand God's model of sexuality. So many young people today are telling me that they know the commandments and what they're not supposed to do: They know that sex is to be saved for marriage; they know that God is against perversions of all kinds; they know that homosexuality is wrong. But they don't know why. The key is found in Ephesians 5:1-4: “Be imitators of God, therefore,

as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving” (NIV).

First, Paul instructs us that we should be imitators of God and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. Christ died for us. He gave up His life for us. In the Bible, words that are used to describe lust are virtually synonymous with being selfish. When we get into trouble with sexual lust, it is not Christlike, it is selfish. As men we should believe that sex is a gift of marriage, not something to gratify our selfish desires. Sex is always an expression of the intimacy of man and wife, not a substitute for love and nurture.

Paul reiterates this at the end of chapter five when he says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph.5:31-33). There is something sacred about the one-flesh union of man and wife. Paul compares it to the relationship of Christ to the Church. It is not about sexual selfishness.

The word for love that Paul used is *agape*, a spiritual kind of love. Sex is the expression of a Christ like, unselfish love between a husband

and wife. This spiritual intimacy infuses sex with a divine quality that nothing in the world could ever capture in any form of media. One of my colleagues has described it as a “spiritual orgasm.”

Only in the covenant of marriage is true, godly love possible. Anything less falls short. Sex with yourself doesn’t measure up. Neither does sex outside of marriage. Homosexual sex doesn’t measure up either. God is not out to spoil our fun or to frustrate us. He points us to something so meaningful, it defies description. Even the act of sexual intercourse symbolizes the one-flesh nature of the union of husband and wife. This is the only time when we have the possibility of participating with God in an act of creation. What a powerful expression of God’s design!

We must certainly teach our sons to be unselfish when it comes to sex. Their natural hormonal and brain chemistry drives are quite natural. God has given us the desire to be physical sexually. We should never put them down or be angry with them for that. We should celebrate any friendships that they have with girls. We should also teach that friendship is not the “go ahead” sign.

God has fearfully and wonderfully made our sons. When they start becoming men, we will want to celebrate with them the passage into manhood and all of the feelings that this brings. If we are going to teach them God’s ultimate plan, however, we will also have to model for them how to “override” normal physical feelings by choosing a higher way.

Let’s take pornography for example. It is normal for them to

want to see it. But God reminds us that His love is to be expressed between one man and one woman in marriage for a lifetime. Pornography teaches us lies about sex and about women. Pornography is selfish. It is a myth. Our sons will have to override their desires to look at it as they hold on to a vision of honoring the woman to whom they will be married and what she will really be like.

Masturbation provides us with another great example. There is nothing against the physical act of masturbation in the Bible. Some would therefore think it is natural to masturbate. It is certainly natural to want to do so and to find pleasure in it. However, masturbation can create lots of problems. It can become a habit or addiction. The chemistry of the brain can adjust to it and always want more. It is a fallacy to think that masturbating will prevent us from other sexual sins because the brain will always want more. At a deeper spiritual level, we should remember that it is really impossible to masturbate without somehow thinking about sex. We create fantasies about the perfect woman, the perfect situation, and the perfect sexual act when we masturbate. Jesus told us that when we think about women in this way, it is adultery. A pattern, or habit of masturbation, creates illusions, fantasies, perfect situations that dishonor the spiritual nature of marital sex. Creating these fantasies is not fair to our wives. It sets us up to be dissatisfied with marital sex.

There is nothing to compare with the deep fulfillment of sex with one woman for a lifetime. God knows this. And when we teach our sons to override their own desires, we are

doing more than simply teaching them what not to do. We are helping them to find God’s plan for their sexuality.

**7.** Practice, study and find support. One of the realities that we fathers face is that our own fathers probably weren’t very good role models in talking about sex. We are going to have to find other men to talk with, to practice conversations with, and to study scripture with.

You may be facing your own shame, guilt or embarrassment. What keeps you from finding this kind of fellowship? Maybe it is leftover issues of your own. Maybe you’re afraid of being judged. My experience is that when we get honest about our own issues, it leads to a freedom and intimacy with other men that will help us do the right thing.

Fathers need to help each other. Find some older men who have been through what you are facing, or some men your age who are going through the same thing. We can learn a lot from one another and find the support we need.

God bless you in your journey of fathering. Most of all, be gentle with yourself. God doesn’t expect you to get this exactly right. Don’t let your fears keep you from one of life’s greatest gifts. Talking To Your Daughter About Sex Don’t expect your wife to do all the talking. Dads have an important role too.

It’s true that your wife — or, if you’re a single dad, a trusted female friend of the family — should do the talking about technical issues that women are better at understanding. But we dads play an important role in teaching our daughters what they need to know about men. Here are

some of the lessons that we should be communicating:

- Your daughter’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is fearfully and wonderfully made. It belongs to her, and no one should touch her against her will.
- Affirm her attractiveness as a woman.
- Challenge her to dress attractively but to be aware of any inappropriate messages she might be sending to others about sexual availability.
- Explain to her that men and women desire each other physically and that this is a normal phenomenon. But God calls us to save those appetites for marriage.
- Any man who is not willing to honor the purity of sex is not worthy of her. Tell her that men can control their physical desires. Teach her that men respect a woman who is confident in herself without needing to be provocative.
- Tell her how much you love her mother’s mind and spirit and that sex is always an expression of a deeper love rather than pure physical desire.
- Share any lessons about sex that you learned the hard way.
- Go over the lies in our culture about how women should look or behave.
- Invite you wife to have a dialogue with you and your daughter about marital love.

\*Mark R. Laaser is executive director of The Christian Alliance for Sexual Recovery and author of the book *Talking To Your Kids About Sex*. Dr. Laaser holds a PhD in Religion and Psychology from the University of Iowa, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Bachelors degree in Religion and Philosophy from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. If you feel that you need help, or if you would like to talk with Dr. Laaser about his ministry, you can reach him at (888) HELPHOPE. Reprinted with permission by Mark R. Laaser

# from the mailbag

## testimony

In our last newsletter we asked for testimonies about how God has helped you overcome sexual brokenness. We received this testimony in the mail and want to share the blessing with you.

“Think of people in your church, in your circle of friends, maybe even in your family who may be sexually and/or relationally broken. Some of them are close to you; people you dearly love. Some are addicted to internet pornography. Some struggle with deep shame over the sexual abuse they have suffered. Some are struggling right now, right under your nose, but they are too scared to say anything and too ashamed to talk about the daily ‘hell’ they experience. Some of the people you know and care about struggle with their sexual identity and associated actions. Some have come to see themselves as homosexual or lesbian, having bought

the lie that this is who they really are and can’t change, even if they wanted to. All of these people desperately need a few safe, trusted others who will listen to them and will love them into wholeness.

I am one of these people who have walked the path of brokenness. I know personally what shame feels like. I am one who sinned grievously against God’s moral order, against my beloved wife, against those in whom I falsely thought I could find the completion I so desperately sought.

For many years I led a double life. Marriage did not fix my sexual identity and its related struggles. I sought and found lots of opportunities for anonymous sex. Not unlike the alcoholic who keeps trying to find salvation in a bottle, I kept trying to find in other men what I sensed lacking in myself. The good news is that the ‘Hound of Heaven’ would not quit

chasing after me. With hound dog determination, God kept pursuing me with his healing love.

It took the loss of my job and vocation to wake me up to this reality; all was very much not well within. Oh, I had known that before and had even tried to get relief through counseling. Through a series of God-designed events, my wife and I took part in the very first “Living Waters” group offered by Greater Hope ministry in Harrisonburg, VA. Living Waters is an intensive 26 week program designed for ministry of God’s truth to the sexually and

relationally broken. At first, my wife Eleanor wondered why she was there. She thought it was just to support me who had “the problem”. But it wasn’t long before this adult child of an alcoholic realized she had her own areas of brokenness that needed healing.

One of the things we study in Living Waters is the way we can be wounded by our parents. It’s not that we want to place blame on our parents. They did by us the best they knew how. Those of us who are par-

# w a n t e d

## Executive Director

of OneByOne

OneByOne exists to educate and equip the church to minister the transforming grace of Jesus to those in conflict with their sexuality. We are seeking a Full-Time Executive Director to lead and grow the ministry of OneByOne in educating and equipping congregations, presbyteries and the national church to minister the transforming grace and power of Jesus Christ to those in conflict with their sexuality

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# Upcoming GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OneByOne is pleased to announce that Dr. Warren Throckmorton will be one of our keynote speakers at this year's General Assembly. Please join us on Tuesday June 29th, 2004 at The Renaissance, 107 W. Broad St., Richmond VA. Tickets can be purchased through the Office of General Assembly for \$20.

Warren Throckmorton is Director of College Counseling and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Grove City College. His research "Initial Empirical and Clinical Findings Concerning the Change Process for Ex-Gays," was published in the June 2002 issue of the American Psychological Association's publication *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.

He has a website [www.drthrockmorton.com](http://www.drthrockmorton.com) that has many of his



Warren Throckmorton, PhD

Op-Ed's and other articles. He has also produced a CD called "The Truth Comes Out". "Truth Comes Out" is a groundbreaking new faith-based resource combining original musical and spoken word tracks for high school students and young adults wrestling with homosexual issues, as well as their counselors. The 14-track CD provides answers to difficult questions in a compassionate, inspirational and educational format that is easily accessible via the Internet.

**Please consider supporting OneByOne financially and in prayer for our work at General Assembly and throughout the year.**

## Homosexuality and Genes: Deja Vu All Over Again?

by **Warren Throckmorton, PhD**

It's like déjà vu all over again. Another study claiming to support the idea that homosexuality is directly caused by genes comes to public attention. And then there are journalists eager to trumpet the headline. Alas, as in the past, the reports and public statements of the authors misrepresent and hype the study beyond recognition. For instance, there is the "blinking" study reported recently in the *Behavioral Neuroscience Journal*. Lead author Qazi Rahman has become a leading opponent of the idea that environment may play a crucial role in the formation of same sex attraction.

Columnist Nicholas Kristof thought so much of this study that he quoted it in a recent *New York Times* article as being important evidence of a gay gene. Although Rahman's theo-

ries are more hormonal than genetic, the researcher does negate the role of environment in sexuality. Why? One reason is that when startled, 15 lesbians on average blinked in a similar manner to 15 straight men. There were no differences between straight and gay men.

Wait, no difference between gay and straight men? From reading Kristof's recent piece and the press accounts of the study, you would not know that. Because a small group of lesbians blinked like a small group of straight men, the leap is made to assume being a lesbian is obligatory? However, the headlines for the Rahman study could have read:

"Sexual orientation not genetic for gay men; might be for lesbians." I must have blinked; I didn't read that anywhere.

In his *Times* article, Kristof then quotes another Rahman article from the journal, *Personality and Individual Differences* that speculates that 50-60% of the differences in sexual orientation are due to genetic influences. Kristof and others in the media uncritically accept these numbers even though there is a considerable debate in scientific circles about the validity of the 50-60% figure and the research on which it is based. Despite a couple of fairly sophisticated attempts, efforts by independent

researchers to confirm these numbers have failed. So what you wouldn't know if you only read the news services is that the data are highly questionable and there are findings in these studies that better support environmental theories of sexual orientation. However, even if we did assume that differences in sexual orientation were 50-60% genetic, what would that mean? Well, first of all that leaves a pretty substantial portion of sexual preference open to environmental influence.

So the analogies to left-handedness and eye color fall absolutely flat. Putting the questionable figure in perspective lets look at other traits and the estimated percent of differ-

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## mailbag

ents do that too. Even when we try our best we can still manage to wound our children. It is a part of the sinful condition of humanity. But this has helped me understand the roots to some of my struggles. I have also learned what triggers my temptations, which helps keep me “on track”. I have learned a lot about boundaries; God’s, others’, my own. I have learned to call homosexuality what it is, a violation of God’s intention for men and women. I have been able to repent from the sin of emotional and relational idolatry, and have discovered my need for those who will keep me accountable. I value their participation in my healing. This open, transparent way of relating has done wonders for my marriage. Having been forgiven of my sin and freed from the shame, has given me the ability to walk with integrity in all of my relationships.

Reflecting on my journey has frequently led me to Psalm 25: *Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for your are my God and Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.* Vs. 4-6  
God has shown me his ways and continues to do so. He has placed me among Christian friends who support my journey into wholeness and purity.

God has remembered his mercy and love; I am a daily recipient of these. If there is one thing I want to leave with you, it is this: There is hope for broken people. That hope is in the healing work God longs to do in each of our lives.

Is everything perfect in my life? Are all the loose ends tied up in a neat package? Do I have it all together and free from sexual temptations? The answer to each of these is “No”! But I have learned that my temptations do not define me, nor control me. I have learned that my healing is an ongoing work in progress. I still have a ways to go, but I’m glad to be on that way. With God’s help, my healing will continue until the day Jesus calls me home. Then at last I will be completely whole and perfect in His sight. This is true for every person on this planet, including those in your church, your family, and your friends; even you and me”.

## Question

From an email we received this question. Perhaps others of you have asked the same thing and may benefit from the response.

“I have been having a discussion with another friend who is concerned about our church’s policy towards homosexuals. Neither of us is gay. We understand the need for biblical support for those who are struggling with leaving the homosexual lifestyle.

**Our question is this:** When

someone who is homosexual turns to Christ and gives his/her life to Him, is it appropriate to continue to call him/herself a homosexual, albeit a celibate one? Why not say instead that he/she is a child of God, a new creation, and now a former homosexual? We (my friend and I) understand that the life in Christ involves sanctification, which includes working through deep-seated issues/hurts over a lifetime. Our concern is the identification... is it as a celibate homosexual (who can be ordained in the PCUSA) or as a child of God?

What is your understanding of this identification? I know it may sound like splitting hairs to some, but we believe there is a biblical basis for identifying with Christ and not with homosexuality any longer... I Cor. 6:9-11 (esp. v. 11) and II Cor. 5:16-17.

Thank you for your input”.

## Response

from Don Corne...

Thank you for your email. You make a great point and one in which I agree. Leaving the homosexual, gay, lesbian, etc labels behind is important for one overcoming that identity. The word homosexuality described my feelings, but I never enjoyed accepting that as my identity. It has been incredibly healing to understand what it means to be a child of God. For me that has meant embracing the fact that I am a man, and releasing the shame I felt when trying to accept

that term for myself. I now describe myself as a heterosexual man who has struggled/experienced same-sex attractions. I know of many others who use similar descriptions as they have experienced transformation. For many of us who have experienced healing in this area, there is growing discussion about terms we use to describe ourselves. Most of us do not even like the term ‘ex-gay’. We don’t really believe we were ‘gay’ to begin with — God did not create anyone ‘gay’, therefore it’s an adjective, not a true identity. I have been part of an organization this past year that has spent time addressing this very issue. (P.A.T.H. [www.path.org](http://www.path.org)) To some it may appear hair-splitting, but it is important to individuals experiencing healing, as well as for communicating accurately our message of hope.

When I first opened up to another Christian about my struggle, he shared with me 2 Cor 5:17...“we are new creatures in Christ”. It has been my “life” verse. The scripture you mentioned in 1Cor. are also very dear to those of us who have struggled in this area.

Thank you for your willingness to discuss this with compassion and truth. It is your understanding that helps strugglers feel less isolated from the church.

Bless you,

**Don Corne**, Associate Director,  
OneByOne

OneByOne  
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## Homosexuality and Genes

ence attributable to genetic factors according to existing research found on the American Psychological Association web site.

- Attitudes toward reading books - 55%
- Feelings about abortion on demand - 54%
- Feelings about roller coaster rides - 50%
- Attitudes towards the death penalty for murder - 50%
- Humility - 58%
- Likelihood to engage in casual sex - 49%
- Attitudes toward equality - 55%

Think of the new advocacy groups that might spring up. Roller

coasters enthusiasts might lobby for free or reduced admission to theme parks since many riders would be hindered from being who they are by restrictive pricing policies. If we thought about these traits the way the media and some researchers want us to think about homosexuality, the campaign for safe sex is futile since nearly half the reason why certain people drop their pants on a whim is theoretically due to genetics. And as we are getting accustomed to hearing, can't change that, right?

At risk of belaboring the point, the faulty interpretation of all of these studies is that genetic influence is the same as destiny. Certainly the inference desired by many in the gay activist camp is that the only scientifically acceptable approach to homosexual feelings is to accept and identify with them. Unless one is prepared to say that about attitudes toward equality, the death penalty, abortion

and literacy, then why say it about sexual feelings?

Here's one more human trait that is highly heritable: weight and body type. This trait is estimated to be 60-80% related to genetic influence. If homosexuality is out of control at 50-60% then what of one's physique? I can hear the doors of gyms, fitness centers and infomercial studios slamming shut now. Why bother to change something so clearly due to genetics? Oh, to have inherited the six-pack abs gene! There may be one trait that is determined. I guess we could call it journalistic determinism because it appears that many journalists are determined to find that gay gene. I really shouldn't be so hard on them, they probably can't help it.

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