

Sexual Integrity



Your middle schooler is changing fast. Changing their friends, changing their style, changing their interests, and yes—changing physically. As with any change, you have three options. You can resist it, and inevitably fail. You can ignore it, and become increasingly disconnected. Or you can talk about it, and probably suffer a fair amount of eye rolls. It’s ok, you’ll both survive.

Your role during this phase is to...

Interpret what is changing, so they will respect themselves and grow in confidence.

This guide is designed to help you connect with your middle school student where they are now, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of sexual integrity. As the conversation progresses through

the phases, always keep the end goal in mind: Sexual integrity means guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

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Tips to Help Middle Schoolers Understand Sexual Integrity

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future.

To sixth graders...

SAY THINGS LIKE

"You don't need to wear something like that to get attention."

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?" (Always finish the conversation with room to pick it back up again later.)

"That's a good question. I'm so glad you asked me." (Answer questions about sex in detail; if you don't, the internet will.)

"I'm here if you want to talk."

"I love the way your eyes shine when you laugh." (Increase positive affirmation and affection.)

"Thank you for sharing that with me; you are brave to share that." (Take what they say and feel seriously.)

"God made your body on purpose and you are beautiful" (Counteract the negative things they are thinking about themselves.)

To seventh and eighth graders...

SAY THINGS LIKE

"What does it mean to honor God with your body?" (Help them personalize boundaries.)

"That's a good question. I'm so glad you asked me."

"I'm here if you want to talk."

"Who do you know that is dating?"

"Thank you for talking about this. Can we talk about it again another time?"

"If you ever feel like someone is wanting you to do something you don't want to do, you could always say..." (Help them script responses to difficult situations.)

"When Jon commented on your post, what did he mean by...?" (Stay curious about what's happening in their world.)

"What does dating mean to you?"

Remember

The middle school years are the years to affirm their personal journey. Remember, they may not always act like it, but they need you now more than ever. Encourage their questions by being available and relaxed. Keep your cool if a question catches you off guard and be sure and take what they say and how they feel seriously. Keep the conversation going by staying curious about their world and what concerns them.

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Enhance the Conversation

To enhance the conversation, here are a few things your family can try:

Intentionally point out the difference between the media's portrayal of sex and dating versus real life. Don't make this a formal, one-time talk, but begin a conversation that you pick back up whenever you watch a movie, pass a billboard, or walk by a magazine stand together. Ask your middle schooler what seems real, appropriate, or likely to them as compared to the slanted way sex and dating are widely depicted.

Practice reaction management. In this phase, your middle schooler might ask you some questions or tell you stories that shock you. Remember that they're gauging your reaction to decide whether or not you're a "safe" place to bring their comments and concerns. It's okay to say, "Wow. That's a serious—but a REALLY good—question/story. Can I think about it before I get back to you?"

Find out where their closest friends and/or teammates attend student ministry and get your middle schooler connected there. This may be the most important phase of all to have like-minded adults and role models in your student's life. They need to know they can discuss potentially uncomfortable topics such as sex and dating with a safe grown-up who is not their mom or dad. But don't stop there—stay involved in what's being taught to your middle schooler. Subscribe to the

ministry's website, newsletter, or podcast. Get to know their leaders. When they do a sex and/or dating series, follow up with your middle schooler and continue the conversation at home.

This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application.

To discover more ways to understand this phase, check out the Parenting Your... book series at parentcuestore.org.

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