

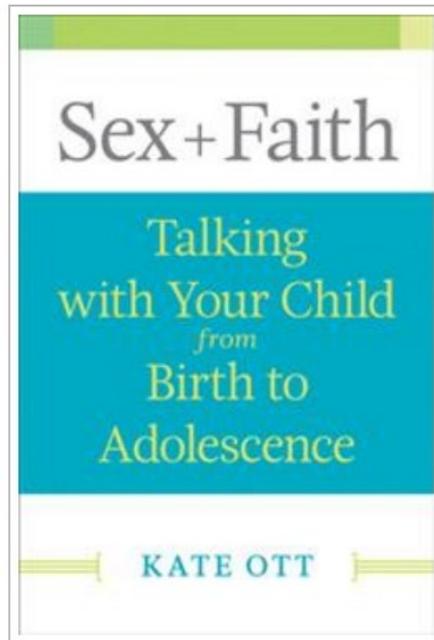
Sex + Faith

Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence

by Kate Ott
Westminster John Knox Press, 2013

***Discussion Guide for Parents, Grandparents,
Caregivers, and the Christian Community***
by Charlotte McGowan

Order the book from The Thoughtful Christian at
<http://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/Products/0664237991/sex--faith.aspx>.



Kate Ott: "... as a parent, you are already a sexuality educator, even if you have said nothing about 'sex.'"

The same is true of the Christian community as a whole; children absorb information and attitudes about sexuality from many sources. The vows we take at baptism give us an ongoing responsibility to grow in our capacity faithfully to engage in the task of helping cultivate healthy "sexuality-related messages, values, and faith beliefs."

Goals of this Discussion Guide

- To give parents, grandparents, caregivers, and the Christian community an opportunity to meet together to discuss this book.
- To assist parents, grandparents, caregivers, and the Christian community in talking about sexuality and faith with children.
- To help families and their supporters become more comfortable in doing so.

Possible venues for using this discussion guide with the book

- One-hour adult class at church with multiple sessions
- Self-guided group of friends at home with multiple sessions
- Blog conversation
- Retreat setting for adults
- Retreat setting for adults and children with children meeting for sexuality education, adults discussing this book, gathering time for families to share what they are learning and to provide opportunities for teachable moments
- Couples' fellowship
- Small group discussion meetings
- Others? What fits your particular circumstance?

Format for Meetings

- Discussion guide is designed to accompany each chapter
- Chapters may be combined for one-hour sessions or longer
- Internet access is handy, but not necessary
- Expectation is that the chapter being discussed will have been read by participants prior to the session

PART ONE

Chapter One: *Five Common Myths*

Objective: Bust the Myths

Set-Up: Write each myth on a sheet of newsprint and tape to walls in five areas around the room. Provide markers for each participant.

- Step 1: Share your earliest memory of asking questions about sexuality. What was the question? What was the response? Was it satisfactory?
- Step 2: Share the first question your child asked about sexuality. What was the question? How did you respond? Was your response satisfactory?
- Step 3: Divide into groups of 3-4. Spend 5 minutes at each myth discussing the myth, its merits, its faults. Write your observations or comments on the newsprint.
- Step 4: Debrief the comments on each sheet of newsprint.

Assignment: Read chapter 2. May combine chapters 2 & 3 for next session, in which case read both 2 & 3.

Chapter Two: *The Role of Parents, Grandparents, Caregivers, and the Faith Community*

Objective: Identify “ask-able” adults in the lives of your children, and in your own life.

- Step 1: Discuss parenting as stewardship. What impact does each of the following statements have on your parenting style and/or your interactions with children and youth? What adjustments might you consider making in your style?
 - ~ Parents Raise Children; They Do Not Own Children
 - ~ Parents Share Their Responsibility; They Are Not the Only Stewards of Their Children
 - ~ Parents Model Values with Their Behavior; They Do Not Only Teach with Words

- Step 2: With your spouse/partner/co-parent or another conversation partner, identify significant adults in the lives of your children to whom they can turn when they may be uncomfortable turning to you. Who makes up the support network for your children?
 ~ How willing are you to share responsibility for your children's nurture and sexuality education with other adults? Explore your own eagerness and/or reluctance to do this.
 ~ How might you make yourself available for "safe adult" duty for the children of others? Brainstorm characteristics of "ask-able" adults.
- Step 3: With your spouse/partner/co-parent/conversation partner, identify significant adults in your own lives to whom you can turn when you have questions about parenting. Who is included in your own support network?

>>Teachable Moment: Talk with your children about safe adults. To whom can they turn with questions when they are uncomfortable talking with you? To whom *do* they turn? Share with them whom *you* turn to when you have questions. Might these folks be safe adults for both you and your children?

Assignment: Read chapter 3.

Chapter Three: *The Faith Connection*

Objectives: Articulate core beliefs. Discuss role of faith community. Consider appropriate faith practices.

- Step 1: This chapter examines three core Christian beliefs. Discuss how these core beliefs relate to parenting and sexuality education.
 ~ God Is Love
 - How do you respond if your child expresses his or her sexuality differently than what you expect?

~ Jesus Was Human and Divine

- Jesus had a body and felt the same things we do - including feelings of sexuality. Wow! How does this revelation impact your relationship with Christ?
- How might it impact your relationship with your children?

~ Scripture Teaches About God and How to Live

- What two fundamental lessons does the biblical story teach us about sexuality and relationships?
 - As sexual beings in God's creation, how do we care for our bodies?
 - As sexual beings in God's creation, how do we care for one another's bodies?
- Step 2: How does your faith community care for one another? Discuss policies and protections that are currently in place and those which you might recommend adopting. They might include a child protection policy, a sexual abuse policy, a policy for protecting both clergy and lay people.
 - Step 3: What rites of passage do you celebrate in your faith community? What rites of passage might be adopted to celebrate physical development in your child? What might you do at home to celebrate these rites of passage?

>> Teachable Moment: Engage your children in dialog about our place in God's creation. Talk about the role of body, mind, and spirit in creation. Establish a consistent prayer time as a family. Prayer can be words, drawings, movement. Try a variety of ways of communicating with God.

Assignment: Read chapter 4.

Chapter Four: *What Exactly Is Sexuality Education?*

Objective: Distinguish between sexuality education and sex education.

- Step 1: As a group discuss the five broad categories sexuality educators use to define holistic sexuality. What is the difference between sexuality education and sex education? Craft a definition of holistic sexuality.
- Step 2: As a group discuss the five developmental skills that can promote loving, healthy relationships.
- Step 3: With a partner identify and write down ways in which you might build self-confidence, communication skills, decision-making skills, knowledge, and patience in your children that are developmentally appropriate for their ages.
- Step 4: “Speed date” the Q&A on page 20. Arrange chairs in two rows so partners are facing one another. One row role-plays the child; the other the adult. The child asks a sexuality related question. The adult answers. “Adults” then move one chair to the right while “children” stay put. Children ask a question; the adult answers. Do this until adults are back to their starting chair. Switch roles and do this again, so that every participant gets a chance to ask and answer questions.
- Step 5: Debrief the experience. How is the comfort level? Any questions about the helpful definitions on pages 22-24?

>> Teachable Moment: Share with older children the definitions on pages 22-24 and discuss. Are the definitions accurate? Acceptable? Remain open to conversation. Explore together the website on page 24. With younger children, go to the library and check out a book or two that focuses on naming parts of the body. Read the book together and remain open to questions and conversation.

Assignment: Read chapter 5. May combine chapters 5 & 6 for a session.

Chapter Five: *What's Changed Since I Was a Kid?*

Objective: Clarify what has and has not changed since our own childhood.

Set-up: Write the six true/false statements each on a sheet of paper and tape to walls around the room.

- Step 1: Pop-Ups! Take 5 minutes to pop up (stand and state) what has changed about childhood since you were a child. This is not a time for discussion. There may be comments and laughter.
- Step 2: Instruct participants to stand by a true/false statement that grabs their attention. Encourage them to spread out and try to have someone standing at each statement. Discuss each statement one by one.
 - ~ Is the statement true or false? Explain.
 - ~ Does everyone standing at that statement agree? Share where and how you disagree.
 - ~ What does the book say about this statement? Agree or disagree?
 - ~ What is your experience of this statement?
- Step 3: Explore the two websites mentioned in this chapter. How might you use these with your children to encourage conversation?

>> Teachable Moment: Explore these websites with your older children. Share with your children where it is you got your information about sexuality when you were their age. Encourage your children to share where they get their info. Are the sources appropriate? Where might they find appropriate sources? Give your children an opportunity to name some sources. With younger children, go for a walk in the woods, a park, or a nature preserve. Look for plants and animals, naming them if possible. Talk about ways plants and animals, including humans, fit into God's creation. Wonder with your children about how plants and animals take care of their bodies. Talk with children about how we take care of our bodies.

Assignment: Read chapter 6. Or, if 5 & 6 are discussed together, read chapters 7-10.

Chapter Six: *Steps for Answering Children's Questions*

Objective: Practice the five steps for answering children's questions

- ~ Breathe
- ~ Clarify the Question
- ~ Provide Accurate and Age-Appropriate Information
- ~ Share Your Values
- ~ Follow Up

- Step 1: As a group name the five steps and discuss any questions that may arise about those steps.
- Step 2: Return of Speed Date. Line up chairs in two rows facing one another. Practice asking and answering questions as instructed in the discussion guide for chapter 4. This time intentionally practice the five steps in answering the question. Give each participant an opportunity to be both adult and child.

Comment Regarding Accurate Information: If you don't know the answer, look for the answer together with your child.

>> Teachable Moment: Find an opportunity for conversation about the value of body, mind, and spirit, the value of caring for and respecting our bodies, ourselves, and others.

Assignment: Read chapters 7-10.

PART TWO

Chapters 7-10 could be covered in an extended session of several hours, or they could continue as one-hour sessions. These four chapters lend themselves nicely to creating a spreadsheet combining the chapters or a four quadrant graph for each chapter.

Depending on the time available, the chart or graph could be filled in as part of class time. Or you might consider assigning the filling of the chart/graph as homework, leaving class time for discussion.

The graph might look like this, with a graph for each age group:

Birth to Kindergarten (0-5)	
Physical Development	Relational Development
Faith Development	Connecting Faith and Sexuality Education

The spreadsheet might look like this:

	Birth to Kindergarten (0-5)	Elementary School Years (6-10)	Middle School Years (11-13)	High School Years (14-18)
Physical Development				
Relational Development				
Faith Development				
Connecting Faith and Sexuality Education				

Chapter Seven: *Birth to Kindergartners (0-5): Laying the Foundation*

Objective: Identify the developmental tasks important to this age group.

- **Physical Development:** On your chart or spreadsheet write down “Importance of Touch,” “Knowledge of Body Parts,” “Ownership of One’s Body,” “Basic Reproductive Information.” Fill in details from the book related to each title in this section. Do you have some to add? Any questions regarding what the author includes?
- **Relational Development:** On your chart or spreadsheet write down “Developing Trust,” “Expressing Emotion,” and “Gender Equity.” Fill in details as above.

- Faith Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the developmental tasks related to faith.
- Connecting Faith and Sexuality: On your chart or spreadsheet write down age appropriate ways to connect sexuality education with faith formation.
- Q&A Bubbles: When the chart/spreadsheet is completed, discuss as a group the Q&A bubbles. How might you handle the questions? What additional questions might your children ask? What additional responses might you suggest? How can you prepare yourself for answering?

>> Teachable Messages and Moments: Find opportunities to discuss or put into practice the suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Eight: *Elementary School Years (6-10): Gathering Information*

Objective: Identify the developmental tasks important to this age group.

- Physical Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down physical changes that occur with this age group.
- Relational Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the relational tasks of this age group.
- Faith Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the developmental tasks related to faith.
- Connecting Faith and Sexuality: On your chart or spreadsheet write down age appropriate ways to connect sexuality education with faith formation.
- Q&A Bubbles: When the chart/spreadsheet is completed, discuss as a group the Q&A bubbles. How might you handle the questions? What additional questions might your children ask? What additional questions might your children ask? What additional responses might you suggest? How can you prepare yourself for answering?
- With your spouse/partner/co-parent/conversation partner, discuss the helpful hints concerning media literacy on page 76. What will you allow your children the freedom to do on their own? What will you monitor? How will you help them be critical consumers of media? Find opportunities to practice being a critical consumer of media.

>>Teachable Messages and Moments: Find opportunities to discuss or put into practice the suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Nine: *Middle School Years (11-13): Ready for Changes*

Objective: Identify the developmental tasks important to this age group.

- **Physical Development**: On your chart or spreadsheet write down physical changes that occur with this age group.
- **Relational Development**: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the relational tasks of this age group.
- **Faith Development**: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the developmental tasks related to faith.
- **Connecting Faith and Sexuality**: On your chart or spreadsheet write down age appropriate ways to connect sexuality education with faith formation.
- **Q&A Bubbles**: When the chart/spreadsheet is completed, discuss as a group the Q&A bubbles. How might you handle the questions? What additional questions might your children ask? What additional responses might you suggest? How can you prepare yourself for answering?
- With your spouse/partner/co-parent/conversation partner, discuss the helpful hints concerning dating violence on page 102. What is acceptable and unacceptable dating practice and behavior? How will you help your children distinguish between what is and is not acceptable? Find opportunities to talk with your children about dating.
- With your spouse/partner/co-parent/conversation partner, discuss the helpful hints concerning technology on page 106. What will you allow your children the freedom to do on their own? What will you monitor? Will you tell them you are monitoring their online communications? How will you help them be careful users of technology? Talk with your children about appropriate ways to use technology.

>> Teachable Messages and Moments: Find opportunities to discuss or put into practice the suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Ten: *High School Years (14-18): On the Journey*

Objective: Identify the developmental tasks important to this age group.

- Physical Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down physical changes that occur with this age group.
- Relational Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the relational tasks of this age group.
- Faith Development: On your chart or spreadsheet write down the developmental tasks related to faith.
- Connecting Faith and Sexuality: On your chart or spreadsheet write down age appropriate ways to connect sexuality education with faith formation.
- Q&A Bubbles: When the chart/spreadsheet is completed, discuss as a group the Q&A bubbles. How might you handle the questions? What additional questions might your children ask? What additional responses might you suggest? How can you prepare yourself for answering?
- With your spouse/partner/co-parent/conversation partner, discuss the insets on pages 121 and 128. What message do you intend to share with your children about drugs, alcohol, and sexual intercourse? How will you help them to avoid problems related to drugs, alcohol, and sexual intercourse? How will you support your children if the “what if” happens? What if your child gets a sexually transmitted infection? What if your daughter becomes pregnant? What if your son causes a young woman to become pregnant? Find opportunities to talk with your children about these issues.

>> Teachable Messages and Moments: Find opportunities to discuss or put into practice the suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Final Session

Objective: Provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the study and a chance to celebrate the time together.

- Depending on the size of the group, either as a whole or in smaller groups (possibly of 3-5), choose one of the following sets of questions to ask. Feel free to add questions of your own. Consider providing a sheet of questions for each group with room between questions for written responses.
 - ~ What did you like best about this book?
 - ~ What did you like best about the discussions?
 - ~ What would you change?
 - ~ Are you more comfortable talking sex and faith with your child/grandchild today than you were before the course began? How has this study helped, or not helped, increase your level of comfort?
 - ~ Were your expectations met? Explain.

 - ~ What was the primary learning objective of this study? Was it met?
 - ~ What aspects of this study was most helpful to your learning?
 - ~ How will these aspects help you going forward?
 - ~ What modifications to this course would help you learn more effectively?
 - ~ Why would these changes improve your learning?
- Share results of small group evaluations with the whole.
- Where do we go from here? Is there a need for further discussion, perhaps drawing on another book or resource?
- Is there a need to provide safe space for specific persons to express their concerns?
 - ~ for parents, grandparents, caregivers, or safe adults who are LGBTQ?
 - ~ for significant adults whose children/youth are identifying as LGBTQ?
 - ~ for children/youth who are LGBTQ?
 - ~ How do we give our children permission to ask and tell?

- Is there a need to discuss additional sex related topics?
 - ~ abuse prevention?
 - ~ STD protection?
 - ~ birth control?

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL RESOURCES

- http://www.gpowernow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Lets.Talk_.Guide_.pdf
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents>
- <http://www.siecus.org/>
- <http://religiousinstitute.org/>
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/parenting-lgbt-and-questioning-kids>
- <https://www.pflag.org/>