

**STRAIGHT
TALK**
with **YOUR
KIDS**
ABOUT
SEX

**Josh & Dottie
McDOWELL**



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Just One Click Away

Sex. To some people it's a dirty word, to others a beautiful one. And to still others it's a provocative word...something they're not comfortable talking about. Whatever your attitude, sex is a sensitive yet immensely important issue. For those who believe it's a marvelous but powerful force that should not be misused, such as parents or leaders working with youth, the idea of sex—sexual activity—among young people is loaded with plenty of concern.

So how concerned would you be if a stranger was slipping into your child's bedroom every day? What if this intruder was systematically teaching your child a distorted and perverted concept of sex? And what if this “sex education” your child was receiving led them down a path to immoral sex? You would no doubt be frightened and infuriated that the mind and heart of your child was being violated by this menacing intruder.

But before we go on to explain this danger, let us say this. We (Josh and Dottie), as parents who have raised four children of our own, are not here just to alarm you, although you have reason to be alarmed. We also want to equip you with a clear strategy to counter what your kids are facing. Even more at the heart of what we want

to do, we hope to supply you with effective tools to raise your kids with a healthy (godly) understanding of sex.

After all, sex is great. It's marvelous. It's so wonderful that it can't be put into words—because God has made it that way. You no doubt want your children to grow up understanding and embracing his design for their sexuality so they can delight in sex as he meant it to be delighted in. And if an immoral intruder were to cause your kids to misuse God's wonderful gift, you would be angry and heart-broken.

Studies have shown that the number-one fear among Christian parents and Christian leaders is that a secular worldview and sexual immorality will somehow capture the hearts and minds of their kids. We certainly had that fear for our own children. To address that fear, many parents have helped open and develop more Christian schools. They have formed more networks to homeschool their children than ever before. Many have sent their kids off to Christian summer camps. Families have started attending megachurches with top-rated youth programs in unprecedented numbers. The hope of these parents has been to counteract the negative influences of a destructive culture in the lives of their children.

However, these positive steps may have actually caused many parents and educators to drop their guard. It's natural to assume that kids are largely insulated from the influences of a corrupt culture if they live in a Christian home, are involved in a good church, are getting a solid Christian education, and are participating in monitored activities.

Actually, though, our kids are far more exposed to destructive cultural influences today than kids were even ten years ago. The reason for this is because right now we are in the midst of a social-media revolution that is allowing a corrupt and twisted morality to have

direct access to our children at much earlier ages than ever before, even in the privacy of our own homes and in their bedrooms. This is the intruder we have been talking about.

The Social-Media Revolution

The culture influenced the previous generation through various media such as radio, TV, videos, magazines, and so on. If a parent monitored what his or her child listened to, watched, and read, there was somewhat of an assurance that a child could be insulated from the negative effects of a destructive culture. However, today's social-media revolution has changed everything. Our culture intrudes upon your children through channels that barely existed a decade ago. For example, compare media growth (based on the general U.S. population) over the last decade.

In 2000	In 2010–2011
2.7 hours per week spent online by the average person	18 hours per week spent online by the average person
100 million daily Google searches	2 billion daily Google searches
12 billion e-mails sent daily	247 billion e-mails sent daily
12,000 active blogs	141 million active blogs
0 iTunes downloads	10 billion iTunes downloads ¹
0 tweets on Twitter	25 billion tweets on Twitter ²
0 YouTube videos seen daily	4 billion YouTube videos seen daily ³
0 hours of YouTube videos uploaded every minute	60 hours of YouTube videos uploaded every minute ⁴
0 people on Facebook	845 million active users on Facebook ⁵
0 articles on Wikipedia	20 million articles on Wikipedia

More than 250 million new people were added to Facebook in 2010, with 30 billion pieces of content shared each month.⁶ If Facebook were a country, it would have the world's third-largest population.

Approximately 20 million minors are on Facebook. Of those, 7.5 million are younger than 13 years old, and 5 million are younger than 10 years old.⁷ It is estimated that Facebook will soon reach 90 percent of all social-network users and 57.1 percent of all U.S. Internet users. By 2013, 62 percent of Internet users and half of the U.S. population are expected to be on Facebook.⁸

In regard to video content, eMarketer estimates that of the 50 million U.S. children under 12, nearly 12 million—about 25 percent—“were online video viewers in 2011.” The estimate skyrockets to 70 percent by 2015.⁹ According to Harris Interactive, in 2010, the number of children under 12 years old who spent at least one hour a day online increased from 61 percent to 76 percent.¹⁰

The Internet has surpassed TV as kids' media of choice.¹¹ A study by the U.S. Department of Education shows that 27 percent of all four- to six-year-olds are on the Internet.¹² Today kindergarteners are learning on iPads, not chalkboards.

The social-media revolution is connecting us in positive ways never before imagined 10 or 20 years ago. Yet all this ability to connect and have people connect to your children may cause you to feel uncomfortable. And it should. There is an alarming downside to the instant accessibility this culture has to your children.

Intrusive Immorality

As parents and Christian leaders, we want our young people to embrace a biblical sexual morality. We want them to enjoy sex as God designed them to enjoy it within the context of marriage. And

just 10 or 15 years ago, we as parents, pastors, or Christian educators had a good measure of control over what type of things our young people saw or heard that shaped their view of sex. We could say, “We don’t watch those kinds of TV programs in our home; nor do we read those types of books.” There were certain controls we could put in place to insulate our children from damaging influences. When our children wanted to visit neighbors or friends, we tried to limit it to people with our same convictions.

But today we have, by and large, lost control of the controls. That is because a perverted morality is just one click away from our children. With just one keystroke on a smartphone, iPad, or laptop, your child can open up some of the worst pornography and sexually graphic content you can imagine. Just a few decades ago pornographic magazines were sold behind store counters and placed in paper bags. Most adult men didn’t even want to be seen carrying such a magazine out of a store. Today pornography is available to anyone, including your kids and teenagers.

Immoral sexual content is reaching many, if not the majority, of our children. According to research from Family Safe Media, the average age of the first Internet exposure to pornography is nine years old.¹³ And there are plenty of sites to be exposed to. There are over 5 million pornographic sites available today with over 68 million search requests daily.¹⁴ More than 2.5 billion porn e-mails are circulated every day.¹⁵

A 2009 survey of 29,000 North American university students confirmed that 51 percent of males and 32 percent of females first viewed pornography before their teenage years.¹⁶ A journal article, “The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth,” reports that 93 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls are exposed to Internet porn before they are 18 years old. Eighty-three

percent of boys and 57 percent of girls have seen group sex. Sixty-nine percent of boys and 55 percent of girls have viewed homosexual or lesbian acts. Thirty-nine percent of boys and 23 percent of girls have been exposed to sexual acts depicting bondage.¹⁷

According to a study cited in the *Washington Post*, more than 11 million teenagers view Internet porn on a regular basis.¹⁸ A Focus on the Family poll revealed that 47 percent of families said that pornography is a problem in their home.¹⁹ These were largely Christian families responding to the poll.

Who Is Concerned About This?

In contrast to the situation several decades ago, most of our young people see little or no problem with viewing pornography. Overall, studies show that 67 percent of young men and 49 percent of young women 18 to 26 years of age consider viewing pornography as acceptable behavior.²⁰

Of course, as a concerned parent, you no doubt warn your children and teens to stay away from “sex sites.” As a responsible and proactive parent, you may even install Internet filtering and monitoring software on your computers, as you should.

Yet what happens when your children visit their friends and they turn on their cell phones? Do the parents of your children’s friends have sexually explicit material blocked from all their electronic devices? The problem is that sexually oriented and perverted material through cyberspace is everywhere, and it is difficult to avoid, even when you try to block it.

Further, more than 1.5 billion pornographic peer-to-peer downloads occur each month,²¹ and most are not detected by “family filters.” (*Peer-to-peer* is from one computer directly to another computer.) An entire pornographic video can be downloaded by a child, often without detection by parents.

Because of the massive amount of sexually perverted material available today, the sheer overexposure, no matter how infrequent, tends to desensitize a young person. Rather than gaining an understanding of what sex is really for, why it comes with boundaries, and how it can bring intimacy and joy in a committed marriage relationship, young people tend to think everyone is doing whatever they want sexually without consequences. This is clearly the impression given through cyberspace.

Most young people have been so desensitized to sexually explicit material that they see no problem with joking, posting, or texting about provocative sex. Do you realize that 4 out of 10 teens are posting sexually suggestive messages? And another 39 percent of teen boys and 38 percent of teen girls say they have had sexually suggestive text messages or e-mails—originally meant for someone else—shared with them.²²

No doubt, it seems to our kids that the entire world around them, including their peers, is into premarital sex. We, of course, know that not everyone is “doing it”; yet our kids’ perception becomes their reality. The irony is, many Christian adults tend to think *none* of their kids are involved sexually, while their own kids think *everyone* else is “doing it.” These contradictory viewpoints are widespread.

Recently, I (Josh) did a two-hour seminar on “The Bare Facts: The Truth About Sex, Love, and Relationships” at the staff conference of an evangelical organization. At an afternoon session, 1800 people showed up with their kids. In the next three days, ten different staff members told me that one of their children (all under the age of 14) had confessed to them that they were addicted to pornography on the Internet. Each parent expressed amazement and had never suspected a thing.

During a recent pastor’s conference I was addressing the same

topic, and five pastors approached me after a session with their stories:

- Pastor #1: “I just found out that my two sons (ages 14 and 18) are struggling with pornography on the Internet.” Then he confessed that he had been addicted to pornography himself for 11 years.
- Pastor #2: “I learned last week that my 17-year-old son just got his girlfriend pregnant and my 15-year-old daughter is also pregnant. What do I do? I’m going to have two grandchildren soon!” He shared that his son regularly viewed pornography.
- Pastor #3 (a youth pastor): “My 14-year-old daughter has been giving oral sex to the boys at her [Christian] school.”
- Pastor #4: “I just found my 8-year-old son watching pornography on my office computer.”
- Pastor #5: “My 5-year-old son has been looking at pornography since he was 4 years old.” The pastor was crushed.

These five conversations happened in the 20-minute time span it took me to get from the podium to my car.

Before I could get into the car, a desperate teenager gripped my arm and said, “Dr. McDowell, would you please pray for me? I’ve been struggling with pornography for three years and it is destroying me!”

Several years ago, I was invited to speak on sex and relationships at one of the largest and most prestigious evangelical Christian schools in North America. The administration appreciated that I came to speak on that subject, but they made the following request: “We don’t want you to mention anything about oral sex,”

they said, “because we don’t have that problem here. If you mention it, our kids will simply start thinking about it and want to do it.”

I thought their request was absurd and naive, but out of respect, I honored it. The moment I finished speaking, dozens of kids crowded around me to ask questions. Nearly every question was about oral sex. “Is it sex?” “Is it wrong?” “Can you get an STD from doing it?” and so on.

I wished the school headmaster had been standing there to hear his students. As I walked outside, three guys and two girls, all sophomores, approached me and asked, “Why didn’t you talk about oral sex?”

I avoided telling them that I had been asked not to talk on the subject. Instead, I asked them, “Why? Is oral sex a problem here?” And they said, “No, not really.” I replied, “That’s good,” to which they responded, “No, it’s not a problem for kids to do, because everyone is doing it.” (This was an exaggeration.)

I asked them to explain. “Well,” they stated, “at our school when a guy wants oral sex, he walks up to a girl and says, “Would you like a taco?” That was their code word for oral sex. They went on to explain, “If she agrees, they go into some room right here at school and perform oral sex. But then the boy is obligated after school to take the girl to Taco Bell to buy her a taco.”

According to these kids, oral sex was commonplace. According to the school leadership, “We don’t have that kind of problem here.” The disconnect between what many parents and Christian leaders believe their young people are doing, and what kids are actually doing, is vast. Sure, we don’t want to think our sons and daughters are involved in sexual activity of any kind and are being brainwashed with a distorted view of sex. But the truth is, if we are not proactive to

counter what our kids are exposed to, chances are they will be captured by a destructive culture.

So What Can You Do?

It seems that it would be ideal if we could reverse the social-media explosion. But we can't, nor should we even try. In fact, in the last 12 months, some estimate more than 200 million people were confronted with the claims of Christ on the Internet. Social media themselves are not the real culprit here. They are simply the vehicle that can bring either positive or destructive influences into the lives of our kids.

Escaping to a remote island where only committed Christians live might seem like a definitive solution. Then we could raise our kids where no secular culture could influence them. But that isn't a realistic alternative any more than reversing the media revolution we are experiencing. So what can we do?

1. We must acknowledge the reality that kids are being negatively influenced with a distorted view of sex by the culture. We can't live in denial of what is really happening. It is like one young mother said, "It feels as if we are trying to raise our kids in the center of Las Vegas." So the first step to a solution is seeing the problem as it truly exists.

2. We need to counter the distorted and perverted views about sex our kids are hearing and seeing with the correct and healthy understanding of sex. Let's say you are among those parents who have one or more children over the age of seven. And let's say you are just now getting around to talking to them about sex. By now your kids have already got their sex education from the outside culture. And in all probability their understanding of sex is distorted and quite different than what you had hoped.

In this case, you will need to *reintroduce* your kids to a whole new concept of what sex is and why God created it. In many respects you will need to deconstruct the distorted concepts of sex they have adopted and represent an understanding based on God's design. If your children are much younger you may still have time to get to them before the culture does. But you must start with them at a very young age.

Teaching kids God's idea of sex means that we as parents and Christian leaders must first clearly understand why he created us as sexual beings in the first place. We must know the real purpose of sex, what sexual purity actually means, why there are boundaries around sex, and how a loving relationship is the cornerstone in teaching God's view of sex. With this type of foundational understanding you will have a biblical context for introducing or reintroducing your children to what sex is all about. This will give you the biblical basis to raise your family to embrace a healthy (godly) perspective of sex. And that is what we will address in part one of this book, "Sex Is God's Design."

3. We must actively guide, lead, and instruct our kids in God's perspective of sex. And to do that we offer you valuable and practical tools in part two, "Tips and Ideas for Your Conversations." These short chapters have insights, examples, answers, and ways to deal with so many issues that you either have encountered or soon will encounter. We will discover together the wonderful opportunities to introduce or reintroduce God's wonderful gift of sex to your kids.

As parents we (Josh and Dottie) didn't do it perfectly. Perfect parents don't exist. But we are grateful for the wonderful opportunity we had to impart to our children God's plan for sex. All four of our kids are married now and have children of their own. And it is thrilling to watch them successfully passing on a biblical view of sex

to their own children—our grandchildren. Be encouraged—your biblical values on love and sex can be passed on to the next generation. And we hope the pages that follow will help you in your effort to do just that.