



SEXUAL INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

PROJECT
SIX19



PARENTS' PRIMER ON SEXUAL INTEGRITY

| By Jason Soucinek

Why “Sexual Integrity?”

How we speak about sex matters. Sometimes discussions on this subject in churches and homes can be misguided or fear-based. “Christian sex” can be reduced to nothing more than choosing to wait for sex until marriage. This may cause teens and young adults to think that their virginity is the most important commodity, an identity marker, in their relationship with the Lord.

In a recent article titled “The Limits of Abstinence Education,” Elizabeth Smart, the young woman who was kidnapped and held captive for nine months in 2002 near her home in Salt Lake City, UT, offered a similar thought, *“I remember in school one time, I had a teacher who was talking about, well... about abstinence. And she said, ‘Imagine that you’re a stick of gum, and when you engage in sex, that’s like getting chewed. And then if you do that lots of times, you’re going to become an old piece of gum, and who’s going to want you after that?’ For me, I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m that chewed up piece of gum. Nobody re-chews a piece of gum. You throw it away.’”*

Metaphors make a difference. They communicate meaning and significance; therefore we must be careful in how they are used. Ms. Smart’s response to the abstinence message reflects that reality. I’ve been doing this for many years and realize the power of speaking on such a sensitive subject. My hope is that, as a ministry, The Sexual Integrity Initiative is doing more than just selling the value of virginity. Virginity is not what makes someone holy.

Choosing to wait for sex until marriage is about more than our virginity. The concept of “sexual purity” is important, but considering Ms. Smart’s reaction, even the use of that term may carry unnecessary burdens for some. Without the gospel of Jesus Christ, the value of being ‘clean’ and ‘pure’ can sound like a regime of don’ts.



“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”
- Deuteronomy 6:7

I've sat through many 'purity' talks at church that omitted the name of Jesus Christ. But He is the only One that makes us pure (1 John 3:3). Sometimes this point is missed in our talks, yet it is the most important thing. The purity of Christ is where our value and identity are found.

This generation is going to have to wait longer than any other if they choose to follow God's standards for sex. In the late 1800's young people only waited one or two years from the time of puberty (physical changes communicating readiness to create life) until they married. In the 1950's the waiting time extended by five or six years. Today, because of nutrition and other factors, the onset of puberty is generally younger. However, most young adults are waiting until their late 20's to marry. This means that if they are going to follow God's standards they will have to wait anywhere from 12-17 years from the time their body is ready for sex until they marry. That is a long time! And that is why our message must resonate in ways that transcend rules and boundaries.

God is concerned with the heart. Virginity, if not spoken of in the appropriate context, can be a source of pride rather than an opportunity to glorify the Creator. Virginity, as a stand-alone virtue, is not the opposite of sexual promiscuity - sexual integrity is. Sexual integrity (and purity, if spoken about correctly) requires something more than self-willed behavior; it requires turning to the Lord with all our hearts and being empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey. Our identity in Scripture is not

found in our good works (like saving our virginity), but in the One in whom we find TRUE life, Jesus Christ. If we make a mistake (sin), our identity is not stolen from us because this identity is not based on what we do, but on what has already been done.

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Finally, another reason we use the term sexual integrity comes from the root word "integer," which means whole or complete. Our desire as a ministry is to see individuals become sexually whole in Jesus Christ. It is Christ who makes us completely whole again so that we might love fully without shame. In Christ the old has gone, the new has come. We are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus to give ourselves in love as He did. That is our identity. That is what really matters. May this wonderful truth flow through everything you share in your home regarding sex.

Challenges of Speaking about Sexual Integrity:

The language we use can be limiting - If we are only using words like 'no' and 'don't' what will young people be able to look forward to? Further, the story of Creation is always pointing us towards a future goal, not something we can't do.

We live in a sex-saturated culture - It is becoming increasingly difficult to protect our youth from sexually charged messages in music, movies, and virtually everywhere else.



“I plan on having to sort through the questions, decisions and issues concerning sex and sexuality alone. I’ve done it this long and don’t see it changing for me in my future. I created the map for my life with little or no help from my parents.”

– Molly, age 20

The growing acceptance of porn use - What were once vices are now virtues. It is not uncommon for porn exposure to happen around age 11 and be an issue for teens and young adults throughout much of their life. Its acceptance makes it both easier to access and more affordable than ever before.

Individuals are having to wait longer than any other generation - Because the trend in our culture is to marry later, now around the age of 27, today’s youth are having to wait almost 15 years to have sex if they follow God’s standards. This is almost a decade longer than teens would have had to wait in the 1950’s.

No map for questions - The questions that young people are asking today require more thought, time and effort to respond to. Many youth, unfortunately, don’t have experienced, trustworthy adults willing to offer their wisdom and direction. This means youth are left to figure out sex and relationships on their own.

Believing your voice has no power - Parents can feel defeated before they ever start. Studies suggest that parents don’t share their values with their kids because they think their voice doesn’t have as much impact as their son or daughter’s peers.

Not sure what Scripture really says about this subject - Sometimes the biggest hurdle we face in talking about sex from a biblical perspective is not really being sure what the Bible says.

Things to Remember When Speaking to Your Kids About Sex:

Recognize the truth found in Scripture - This is not a topic from which God hides. Over and over again Scripture highlights four key aspects about sex. First, we are meant for relationship with our Creator and with others (in that order). Second, we need to recognize that God invented sex. Third, God gave us our sexual desire. That is why we need to talk about this with our youth - we are all sexually tempted. Finally, God created a time and place for us to enjoy this great gift; marriage between one man and one woman. This is repeated over and over again in Scripture (e.g. Genesis, Proverbs, Hebrews, and the list goes on).

Need to change the focus - Our language needs to shift from the "no's" to pointing to a BIGGER "yes." Throughout Scripture God's "no's" are always encompassed within a larger "yes." Changing the direction youth are going and making sexual integrity not just a rule to follow, but an act of obedience. This change needs to take place in the way in which we talk about sexual integrity.

It's not about a BIG TALK - Discussing sexual integrity is more of a process than a confrontation. Remember that many of your son's or daughter's expectations surrounding sex will come from many of the other values you communicate everyday.

Create a safe place - We need to create a space that encourages youth and teens to ask real questions and have an opportunity to hear real responses without judgment.

Your voice DOES matter - Study after study shows that it's not a teens peers who have the most influence but YOU. Although that is not always what we hear or think, a parent's voice is the most influential.

Check in every day - Making sure your kids know you care and are there to answer any questions they might have will encourage them to approach you when they do have questions about sex. Also, it is inevitable that your kids will hear from some other kid about sex. So you need to be constantly talking with your kids and help separate fact from fiction.

Become the authority - Get to your kids first. Your kids are going to hear about sex at some point. It's important you talk to them early and tell them the truth - BEFORE they receive information from other places.

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Recommended Resources:

Fitch, J. Thomas., and Cox, Melissa. *Questions Kids Ask about Sex: Honest Answers for Every Age*. Revell Publishing, 2005.

Meier, Mindy. *Sex and Dating: Questions You Wish You Had Answers To*. Intervarsity Press, 2007.

Winner, Lauren F. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*. Brazos Press, 2005.

Chester, Tim. *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free*. InterVarsity Press, 2010.



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For additional information or resources to help kids navigate their sexuality, visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding and Project Six19's Sexual Integrity Initiative website at SexualIntegrityInitiative.com.

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