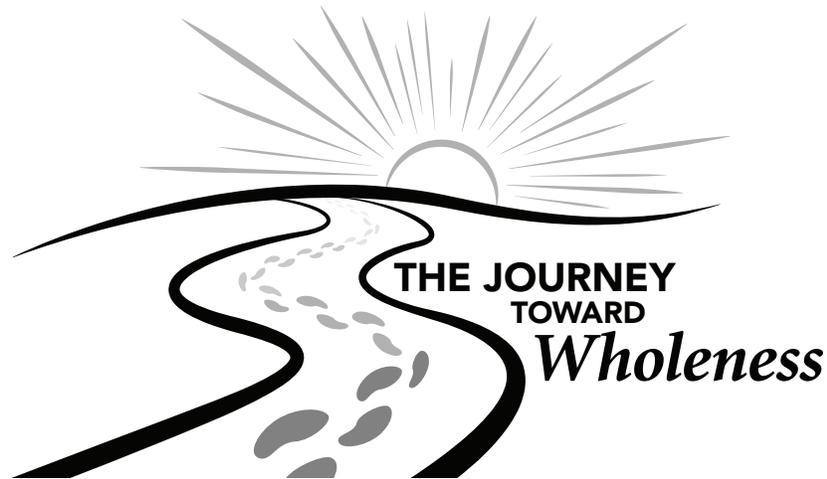


GRADE SEVEN

HUMAN SEXUALITY



Sexuality is a gift from God. It embraces psychological, spiritual and physical characteristics of men and women. We human beings need to integrate our sexuality into our total personality in order to develop into the persons God has called us to be.

OBJECTIVES

- To help the young adolescent appreciate the gift of sexuality.
- To assist the young adolescent in developing correct and positive attitudes concerning sexuality.
- To clarify for the young adolescent how the gift of sexuality can be misused.

I. SEXUALITY IN THE PLAN OF GOD

A. Gift from God

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. This means they are able to think and make choices. “Male and female, God created them.” (Genesis 1:27). God blessed them with equal dignity and enabled them to cooperate, in their sexual union, with his own creative power. [356-357, 369-70, 2331, 2334, 2393]

Human beings are the only creatures created to know and love the creator. They are willed into being by God for their own sake and called to share this knowledge and love with others.

Being male or female is a gift from God and is therefore good. Sexuality includes all that makes a person either male or female:

- Physical characteristics and responses
- Psychological characteristics
- Emotional responses
- Attitudes
- The need and capacity for intimacy
- The ability to participate in procreation

All of these things shape who we are in our relationships with God and influence our spiritual life. [369, 2332-33, 2335]

B. Adolescence and the Lifelong Process of Becoming Mature Sexual Persons

Becoming a mature sexual person is a lifelong process. Adolescence is a crucially important time in this process. [2342, 2344]

Learning to appreciate ourselves and others as whole persons (body, mind, and spirit) is essential to becoming a mature human being. [362-66, 2393]

The successful integration of sexuality within the human person – maintaining the integrity of the life and love within that person – is called chastity. The chaste person abstains from unlawful sexual activity (for example, sexual activity outside of marriage). All people are called to chastity. [2337-38, 2345, 2348]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Read Genesis 1:27,31. Read paragraph 357 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

- Ask the young people, “What does it mean to be made in God’s image?”
- Lead them in a prayer of gratitude for being created in God’s image.
- Conclude with the doxology:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

II. SEXUALITY AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Sexuality may be understood or misunderstood, esteemed or degraded, treated respectfully or abused. It is essential to develop correct attitudes toward sexuality. [386, 2331]

Knowing that we are made in the image and likeness of God is the basis of our respect for ourselves and others. Understanding this and esteeming our God-given dignity lead us to a proper attitude toward our sexuality. [355-57, 369-70, 2331]

A positive attitude toward sexuality includes respect for ourselves and others. It is:

- The realization that my body and the bodies of others are sacred; [364, 2258]
- The acceptance of my body and the bodies of others as good; [362]
- Care for and development of my whole self – body, mind and spirit – and the appreciation of others as whole persons; [362, 364]
- Recognition of my gifts and talents and those of others; [357-58]
- The ability to remain obedient to my conscience, even when this means withstanding the pressure of the crowd; and the refusal to tempt or pressure others to act against their conscience; [1777-78, 1784]
- Awareness of the immediate and long-range consequences of my actions in my own life and the lives of others; [1789]
- The understanding that no one has the right to use or abuse me, or use or abuse another. [377]¹

¹ N.B. Sexual abuse is a grave moral evil. The young adolescent should know that he/she has the right to resist and refuse sexual advances from any source whatsoever. Any catechist/teacher who becomes aware of sexual abuse involving a young adolescent should follow Archdiocesan policy pertaining to the notification of the proper authorities.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Show a photo, picture, or image of a baby developing in the womb.
- Pray Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16.
- Conclude with the following:

Before I was born, your love surrounded me. (young people repeat)

You turned my nothingness into something. (young people repeat)

And you created me. (young people repeat)

III. PROPER USES OF THE GIFT OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

A. Sexual Feelings

Sexual feelings remind us of the God-given potential of our sexuality. It is normal to have sexual feelings. [1768, 1770, 2333]

When we have sexual feelings, we may sometimes feel confused and ashamed. However, feelings in themselves are neither right nor wrong. [1767-68]

Our responsibility is to exercise self-control (temperance) in relation to our feelings, thoughts and desires, out of respect for God's gift and plan for us and others. [377, 2339, 2342]

A sense of modesty in dress and behavior shows respect for ourselves and others. [2522-24]

B. Relationships

We read in Genesis that, "God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27) and, "The Lord God said: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.'" (Genesis 2:18) As we come to know people of the opposite sex, we also come to better understand the variety and diversity of human experience. [271-72, 369, 383]

Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. All of our human relationships, whether with people of the same sex or with people of the opposite sex, are marked by our masculine and feminine characteristics. [369, 2332]

To be life-enriching, our relationships with others must be based on respect and trust. [1702, 1879]

C. Sexual Union in Marriage

Sexual union within marriage is a sign of mutual self-surrender and total self-giving. [371, 1643, 2361]

Since self-surrender and self-giving form the very basis of love, sexual intercourse is often described as making love. Sexual union in marriage is noble and honorable, bringing joy and pleasure to the spouses. [2362]

Sexual intercourse, by its very nature, is intended to enable the man and woman to cooperate with God the Creator in bearing children. [372, 2366-67]

The total self-surrender and self-gift to another (of which sexual intercourse is the sign and expression), as well as the potential to create new life, require the public unconditional commitment of a man and woman to each other which only marriage can provide. Sacred Scripture, the teaching of the Church, and the experience of the faithful over the centuries have confirmed this to be true. [1643, 2337, 2361]

Today, the need for the public commitment of marriage is challenged by many. However, only the public and lifelong commitment of the man and woman can provide the context of security and trust which is necessary for such a total gift of self. This public commitment is intended to provide the stable community of love in which children can be raised in a family and educated in accord with their God-given human dignity. [1644, 1648, 1653, 2390-91]

The sexual union of husband and wife in marriage has a two-fold purpose: the unity and good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. [2361, 2369]

Sexual intercourse in marriage deepens and uniquely expresses the love between husband and wife by: [2360-62]

- Signifying and communicating their interdependence and their mutual trust, fidelity, and acceptance; [1646, 2365]
- Establishing their relationship as unique and permanent, the primary one among all the other human relationships in their lives; [1647, 2364]
- Assisting both of them to grow in holiness and in their ability to place the needs and desires of the other above their own. [1641]

In God's plan, it is through the act of sexual intercourse that human beings are created. The husband and wife, through their sexual union, cooperate with God in the act of creation. From the moment of conception, the child thus created is to be cherished and protected. Children are a public sign of the community of life and love which a man and woman establish in their marriage. [372, 1652, 2367]

In keeping with their responsibility to provide for the well-being of the children they bring into the world, parents may at times find it necessary to use natural methods of family planning which do not abuse the life-giving dimension of sexual intercourse. [2368, 2370]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Have the young people read and prayerfully reflect upon the following Scripture passages:

And live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God. (Ephesians 5:2)

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” (Matthew 19:4-5)

The Nuptial Blessing from The Order of Celebrating Matrimony (see Prayer Experience, Grade 7, Sacrament of Matrimony).

IV. ABUSES OF THE GIFT OF SEXUALITY

A. Lack of Respect for Ourselves and Others

We human beings do not always use the gift of sexuality as God intended. Lack of respect for the dignity of the human person leads to wrong attitudes toward sexuality, which in turn lead to abuses of sexuality. Some abuses are:

- Using our sexuality to manipulate other people for our own purposes or pleasure
- Failing to treat others as persons, and, instead, treating them as objects
- Trying to pressure others into doing things that are against their conscience
- Disregarding the consequences of our actions
- Failing to respect ourselves as persons, and so allowing others to treat us as objects [357, 1849-50, 1865]

The most obvious examples of this lack of respect for the dignity of the human person are pornography, prostitution, human trafficking, and rape.

- Pornography, prostitution and human trafficking treat human beings as things and exploit their sexuality for pleasure, profit or power. Through these actions God’s gift of sexuality is completely debased. [2354-55]
- Rape is an act of violence that gravely injures the respect, the freedom and the physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It is always intrinsically evil. [2356]

Christians must do all they can to foster respect for the human person. This includes rejecting and combating:

- Everything that mocks or degrades women, [2334, 2336, 2352]
- Everything that mocks or degrades men, [2334, 2336, 2352]
- The abuse of children and youth, including sexual abuse, [2356, 2389]
- Any exploitation of sex for pleasure, profit or power. [2351-55]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Discuss what it means to manipulate and use other people.
- Have the young people give examples of ways in which someone “uses” another sexually and calls it “love.”
- Reflect on how we can treat one another with respect and dignity.
- Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
- Pray with the group, asking the Holy Spirit to give them strength and courage when tempted to misuse the gift of their sexuality.

B. Misuses of Sexual Activity

God has given the human person a basic need and capacity to give and receive love. Our experience of love helps us develop a sense of self-esteem and reduces our sense of loneliness. [1609, 2331]

Sometimes people use sexual activity as a substitute for a basic communication of love or to make themselves feel important, powerful or needed. Sexual activity does not, however, solve underlying problems of loneliness and self-esteem. [1606-07, 2351]

When sexual activity is experienced outside of marriage, it is fundamentally dishonest, because we are implying by our actions that we have made a life commitment when, in fact, we have not. We find ourselves feeling manipulative or used, as lonely and as empty as ever. [2337, 2348, 2390]

Sexual activity outside of marriage is morally wrong, [2337-38, 2350, 2353]

- Premarital intercourse (fornication) denies the public commitment of total self-giving which is the purpose intended by God for sexual intercourse. It thus devalues the gift of one person to another and degrades them both. [2353, 2390-91]
- Extramarital intercourse (adultery) betrays the trust and fidelity which are necessary foundations for marriage. By disrupting the community of life and love which a marriage is, adultery also threatens the well-being of the children. [2364-65, 2380-81]
- The deliberate act of masturbation is morally wrong because it is not at the service of love and life according to the design of God. [2352, 2396]

NB: At this age, masturbation can be a problem for some adolescents. The catechist/teacher should discuss it sensitively and cautiously. Although masturbation is objectively morally wrong, there are many factors which enter into the moral responsibility of adolescents in this regard. The Church recognizes that it is usually a symptom of more profound problems which cause sexual tension in the adolescent. Accordingly, the catechist/teacher should try to help the adolescents to move “toward integration, to be open and interested in others ... advancing toward self-giving love.” (CF: Educational Guidance in Human Love, #98-100).

- Homosexual activity is another misuse of God’s gift. Human sexuality is designed by the Creator to enable a man and a woman to reproduce. Homosexual activity, that is, sexual activity between a man and another man, or between a woman and another woman, contradicts this reality. [2357-59, 2360]

When people are consistently attracted sexually to others of the same sex, we speak of them as having a same sex attraction. This same sex attraction, in itself, is not sinful, and the person having this attraction is to be respected and loved as a child of God. However, such an attraction can sometimes lead to homosexual activity. It is this activity which is a misuse of God's gift. [2357-59]

Although each of us has a particular masculine or feminine identity, individuals often have traits or interests that some in society attribute to the opposite sex. This does not mean that the person is homosexual.

- The use of artificial means of birth control is a misuse of the life-giving dimension of sexual intercourse. [2370-71]
- Abortion, the destruction of human life before birth, is the ultimate abuse of the life-giving dimension of sexuality. It is the ultimate societal evil. Contrary to cherishing and protecting the life which God has created through the sexual union of the couple, the father, the mother, or other parties decide to destroy that life. [2270-72]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Tell briefly or read the story of David and Bathsheba (using 2 Samuel 11-12), noting David's temptation, his adultery, his attempt to cover up his sin by the murder of Bathsheba's husband, and the accusation by the prophet Nathan. Stress David's true sorrow for his sins and his obedience to his conscience once he recognized the wrong he had done.
- King David of the Old Testament loved God greatly, yet he sinned seriously. Invite the young people to reflect briefly on how they can love God, and yet may sin.
- Have them read together the following psalm, written by David to express his sorrow for his sin: Psalm 51:1-8, 12-14.

V. WAYS TO FOSTER SEXUAL MATURITY

Recognizing and accepting our sexuality with its strengths and weaknesses are essential to our becoming mature people. [2332-33]

Accepting our sexuality means learning to control our sexual urges. Indeed, the process of maturing includes appropriately responding to our sexual urges according to human dignity and God's plan. [1954, 2339-40, 2342, 2344, 2520]

A. Resisting Temptations

Learning to resist temptation is a necessary part of Christian living. Setting limits – that is, determining what we will do and what we will avoid doing – can help us to resist the temptations of inappropriate relationships and activities, drug and alcohol abuse and the pressure of media, music and those peers who encourage irresponsible behavior. [1809, 2339, 2342]

There are healthy ways to use our energy that will help us to avoid temptations. Some of these are to:

- Participate in sports and games,
- Develop one’s talents, hobbies and interests,
- Volunteer to help others in the community. [1803, 2848]

It is always prudent to avoid those situations which may lead us to sin. Yet, even with the best intentions, we will sometimes experience temptations to use the gift of our sexuality inappropriately. Such temptations are moments of opportunity for us to be faithful to what God has called us to be. [1806, 2343, 2863]

Jesus our Savior, who has compassion for us in our weakness, will always respond to those who turn to him in prayer. The regular practice of prayer, frequent recourse to the sacraments and Sacred Scripture, and cultivating moral and religious virtues [see Grade Seven: Personal Growth, Part I: The Human Person, section II] will strengthen us to choose what is right and to resist temptation when it occurs. [1784, 1802, 1811, 2340, 2849]

Sacred Scripture and the lives of the saints provide us with excellent examples of victory in the struggle against all temptation. The Virgin Mary, our Blessed Mother, is a shining example of purity and intercedes for us in time of need. [2030, 2520]

B. Developing Friendships

Fully integrated human beings need to develop a variety of relationships with family, friends and acquaintances. We need to form friendships with persons of both genders. [2347]

Some of these relationships will be closer and more enduring than others. During young adolescence, exclusive dating should be avoided. This limits one’s growth and opportunity for friendship with others. It can also lead to inappropriate relationships, greater intimacy, and temptations which young adolescents are not prepared to handle.

C. Seeking Advice

Adults can be positive role models for adolescents learning to form interpersonal relationships. Parents, catechists, teachers, priests, and religious, among others, can be of great assistance during this process of becoming sexually mature. From their own experience they are aware of the questions, fears, and struggles which young adolescents have and they can be of help by listening and offering advice and guidance. [2207, 2221-24]

D. Responding to God’s Gift

In God’s plan, our sexuality is intended to add to our joy and our fullness of life. [369, 384, 2331, 2333]

The Holy Spirit is present in each of us to guide, strengthen, comfort, and challenge us. [1265-66, 1742]

Through prayer we are empowered to become the fully mature person God has called us to be. [2013, 2340, 2345]

E. Sexual Activity and Love

Part of coming to maturity is the understanding of the relationship between sexual activity and love. [2332, 2346, 2360]

- Sexual activity is inappropriate for the young adolescent. True love requires us to respect this fact. [2348-2350]
- To say “no” to sexual intercourse before marriage will not lessen genuine love, but will help that love to eventually blossom into the commitment of marriage. [2350, 2391]
- The love expressed in friendship is appropriate for the young adolescent and is a good preparation for the intimate sharing of life and love in marriage. [2347, 2350]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Ask the young people what a “temple” is. (A place that is holy because God dwells there.)
- Ask them the question that St. Paul asks in his first letter to the Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”
- Give them some minutes of quiet to reflect on the truth that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, are dwelling within their very body and this makes them a holy temple.
- Explain that the Sign of the Cross is an expression of our belief that the Trinity dwells within us. Then lead them in slowly making and saying the Sign of the Cross.