

Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Sexually Ignorant



By Shannon Ethridge

"I don't want to rob my children of their innocence by giving them too much information about sex." If I had a dime for every parent who'd ever expressed that sentiment, I'd be a rich woman. While I understand the heart behind this sentiment, the reality is that keeping our children sexually *ignorant* is NOT keeping them sexually *innocent*. In fact, I believe the opposite is true.

My parents took the minimalist approach to sex education and I grew up sexually ignorant, which didn't help me maintain my innocence at all. When I was 12, uncles introduced me to flirtatious games like "Kiss and *Don't Tell*." Not understanding how inappropriate this invasion of boundaries was, I developed an insatiable hunger for male attention and affection. At fourteen, I was in the wrong place with the wrong person -- an 18-year old boy who had more than flirting on his mind. I was raped without any knowledge of how to get out of the situation. I never told, fearing my parents would blame me. When I began dating, I felt my virginity had already been stolen, so I didn't feel I had incentive to say "no" to sexual pressure. Over the next five years, I had one sexual relationship after another, feeling that sex was the price I had to pay for the attention and affection I craved.

I got a wake up call as a 20-year old student in mortuary college. I was embalming many in their twenties and early thirties that had either died of AIDS or committed suicide as a result of an HIV positive diagnosis. Because of my promiscuous past, I was grateful to be standing *over* the embalming table rather than laying *on top* of it.

Are teens any wiser about sexual boundaries today? I'm not so sure. Consider these statistics:

- 25% of girls and 30% of boys have sex by age fifteenⁱ
- 21% of ninth graders have slept with four or more partnersⁱⁱ
- 50% of 17-year-olds have had sexⁱⁱⁱ
- 80% of teens have sex by age nineteen^{iv}
- 55% of teens ages 13-19 have engaged in oral sex^v

If parents were more proactive in their sex education efforts, could teens make healthier decisions? I believe so. Studies actually show that both children and parents consistently report that they want parents to be the primary source of sexuality education. When parents are the source of sex education, children are less likely to be sexually active, they positively identify with their parent's traditional sexual values, their first sexual experiences occur at a later age, and the probability of promiscuity is lowered.^{vi}

Realize that the world isn't taking a "minimalistic approach" to your child's sex education. Magazines, music, movies, the fashion industry, all are bombarding our young people with an avalanche of unhealthy sexual messages. Consider the following statistics about the internet and television's influence on our children:

- 90% of 8-16 year olds have viewed porn online (most while doing homework)^{vii}
- 80% of 15-17 year olds have had multiple hard-core pornography exposures^{viii}
- 89% of sexual solicitations of young people are made in Internet chat rooms^{ix}
- The average adolescent will view nearly 14,000 sexual references per year^x
- 64% of all shows include sexual content, and only 15% mention waiting, protection, and consequences.^{xi}

Also, the vast majority of sexual situations depicted on television involves single people, whereas marriage is often depicted as a sexless relationship. The message is loud and clear: *If you want to have good sex, have it now while you are single because once you are married, you probably won't get any.* Indeed, kids often tell me, "My parents don't even have sex, so they probably don't know any more than I do."

To counteract these messages, demonstrate that marriage is a relationship they *can* look forward to. Hold hands, kiss, and go on dates with your spouse so your child witnesses the romance in marriage.

Also, we have to be askable parents. Tell your children, "You can ask me *anything* about sex, and you can use whatever words you need to use to ask it. I want to be the one you come to with your questions. If I don't know the answer, we'll seek out appropriate answers from reliable sources."

By remedying sexual ignorance with honest, healthy information, we *can* equip our children to guard their minds, hearts, and bodies in this sex-saturated world.

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ⁱ S.Singh & J. E Darroch (1999), Trends in sexual activity among adolescent American Women: 1982-1985. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 31, 211-219.

ⁱⁱ Lisa Collier Cool, "The Secret Sex Lives of Kids," *Ladies Home Journal*, March 2001, 156, www.lhj.com/lhj/printableStory.jhtml?storyid=/templatedata/lhj/story/data/15093.xml.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tina S. Miracle, Andrew W. Miracle, and Roy F. Baumeister, *Human Sexuality: Meeting Your Basic Needs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 271.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Linda Marsa, "Pregnant Pause," *Seventeen*, 2001, 178.

^{vi} M. L Bundy,, and P. N White,, "Parents as Sexuality Educators: A Parent Training Program." *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 1990, 68(3), 321-323.

^{vii} Internet Filter Review (www.internetfilterreview.com)

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x American Academy of Pediatrics, "Sexuality, Conception, and the Media," *Pediatrics* 107, no. 1 (2001): 191-194.

^{xi} Kaiser Family Foundation, Program for the Study of Entertainment Media and Health, *TV Sex Is Getting "Safer,"* 4 February 2003, <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/0030204a-index.cfm>.