

*Sexuality:
Challenges and Choices*



Sexuality: Challenges and Choices



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To Mary, whose unconditional love and support have helped form me into who I am and whose encouragement and excitement have given meaning to this work

And to Christopher and David, who are living examples of the life-giving nature of God's love and whose presence fills my life with joy

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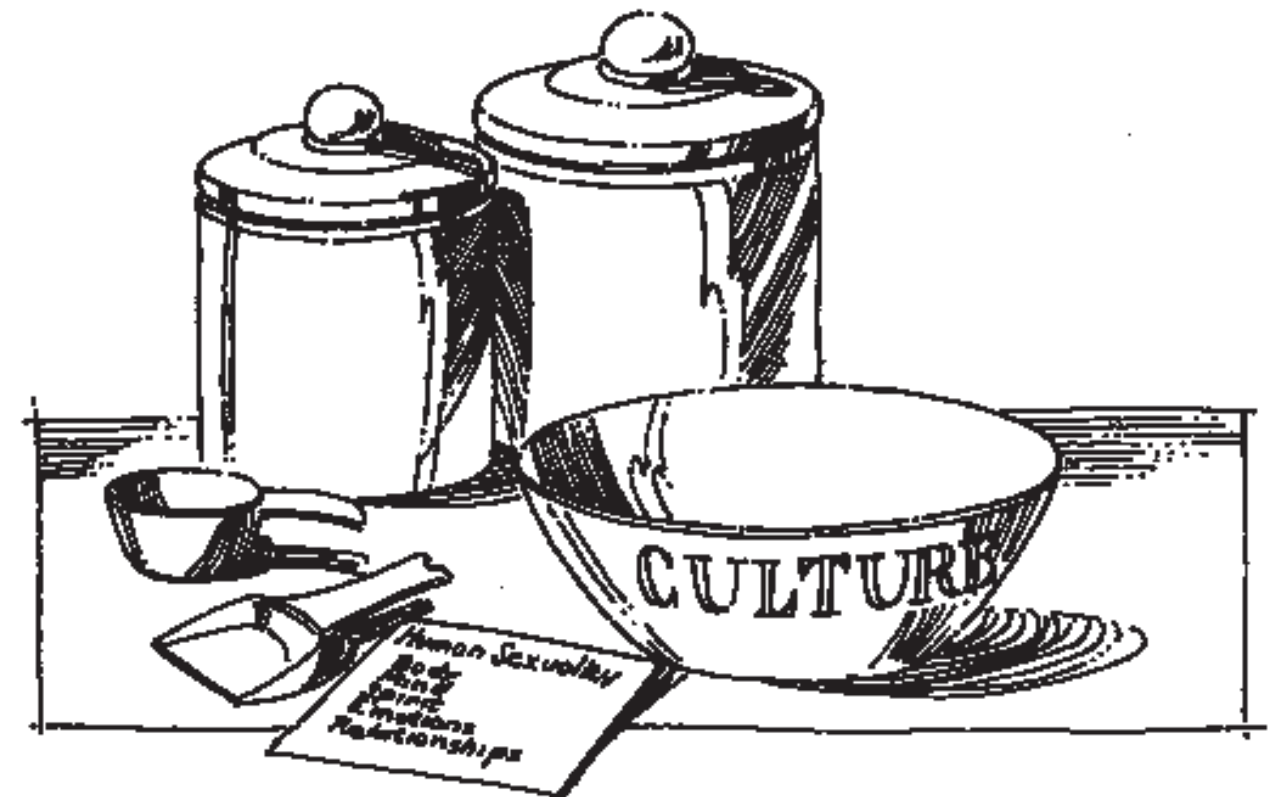
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

After hunger, the sexual drive is the most powerful force human beings experience. This fact, combined with the tremendous effects of newly released hormones in a young person's body, makes sexual development one of the most potent and formative forces adolescents face. Society adds fuel to the fire by constantly exposing young people to the manipulation, commercialization, and casual advocacy of sexuality. The beautiful life-giving and life-affirming nature of sexuality is often ignored or de-emphasized by the media and in other cultural arenas. This nature is born of the very breath of God and modeled for us by Jesus.

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices focuses on the life-giving essence of sexuality. It recognizes that sexuality affects all areas of a person's life—the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. Such a view of sexuality is critical for healthy and total human development. A positive view of sexuality is especially important as young people seek to answer a primary and central question of adolescence—Who am I? This course aims to help adolescents form a holistic notion of what it means to be a sexual person. It also recognizes the individual nature of each person and responds to adolescents who, in terms of sexuality, exhibit different levels of understanding and varying degrees of self-control.

Understanding adolescents as maturing persons who are capable of the same sexual functions as adults is an important starting point of a faith-based course on sexuality. The Christian community needs to help young people with the questions they have and provide the environment needed to develop a healthy and positive view of their sexuality. If it doesn't, then someone or something else will provide the kind of "help" and environment that are not as positive.

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices does not devote a lot of time to the physiological and reproductive aspects of sexuality—topics covered in sex education courses in most schools, both public and private. Instead, this course presents Catholic Christian values regarding sexuality, as well as nurtures the critical reflection skills young people need to integrate their sexuality into the emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual areas of their life in a healthy and life-affirming way.

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices presents Catholic Christian values and encourages critical reflection skills in three sessions for the young people and an optional parent session:

- The optional parent session, "Understanding Adolescent Sexuality," informs parents about the content of the course and about ways they can support the healthy sexual growth of their son or daughter.
- Session 1, "The Gift of Sexuality," presents a faith-based view of sexuality and encourages the young people to celebrate their sexuality as a God-given gift.
- Session 2, "The Challenges of Growth," explores the developmental changes and challenges young people face regarding sexuality, affirms the normalcy of these challenges and changes, and offers guidance on how to best deal with them.
- Session 3, "The Power of Choice," teaches the young people to critically examine media portrayals of sexuality in light of Christian faith. It shows them they have a choice about whether to accept or reject the popular culture's view of sexuality.

The sessions run 2 hours each and are meant to be taught one a week for three or four consecutive weeks, depending on whether you use the parent session. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. Sessions 1 to 3 may

also be combined and adapted for use as an overnight or weekend retreat experience. The section Using This Course as a Retreat provides more details on the retreat option.

The session activities are designed for a group of about ten young people. However, the activities can be easily adapted for smaller or larger groups. If you need help with this, contact your program coordinator.

You need not be an expert on sexuality to teach *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*. Each session plan provides the teacher with specific information and carefully guides him or her through the preparation for the session and the process itself. You may wish to supplement or adapt this course to fit your particular situation and to meet the needs of both the young people and the parents of your parish. Suggested resources are listed at the end of this introduction.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Studies on adolescent sexual involvement show that young people are becoming more sexually active and at an increasingly earlier age. You do not need to look far for explanations for this. Movies, television, music, and other media typically portray sex as a casual recreational activity. They convey messages like "Everyone does it; there must be something wrong with you if you don't" and "Sex is okay as long as no one gets hurt." In addition, changing family structures and employment patterns have helped to create a social environment in which young people have a great deal of freedom and unsupervised time and, therefore, increased opportunity for sexual experimentation and involvement.

As adults trying to counteract the reality of increased adolescent sexual involvement, however, it is important that we also affirm the reality and innate goodness of sexuality. This course helps you do that. Young people need the support and assistance of mature adults who genuinely care about them and can talk to them about sexuality in an open and honest fashion. These adults can be faith-filled models of a balanced, integrated, and responsible sexuality. They can help young people acquire a sense of respectful control and responsibility for their sexual drive and its life-giving nature.

Sexuality and Self-esteem

The challenges associated with adolescent sexual development occur at the same time that young people are developing their identity and their own unique sense of self. Because of this, sexuality and self-esteem are especially linked for young people. For example, negative feelings about one's body can have a harmful effect on self-esteem. On the other hand, if one gains confidence in the sexual values she or he has chosen, or feels good about personal decisions about sexual involvement, the effect on self-esteem is likely to be positive.

Not surprisingly, a positive view of self is one of the best supports for handling some of the issues of adolescence, including early sexual involvement. But like healthy sexuality, an adolescent's self-esteem must be nurtured and given positive reinforcement by loving, caring adults. Nurturing self-esteem includes creating an environment in which the young people feel safe, trusted, and secure. You can do this by respecting and truly listening to the young people as they share their thoughts and feelings.

Individual Differences in Growth

Young people of the same chronological age can differ in their maturity levels by as much as five years. Recognizing and respecting the individual differences of the young people is vital to the success of a course such as *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*. Doing so allows the young people the time and space necessary to openly share their thoughts, questions, stories, and concerns regarding sexuality. This creates an atmosphere in which the participants can learn from one another.

Though some of the young people may be more developmentally advanced than others, all the participants will benefit from the insights offered in *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*. This information, along with personal sharing by the teacher, will help the young people to cope with, if not resolve, some of the common fears and anxieties typical of this stage of development.

When the young people first hear some of the objective realities of adolescent growth and development, they may think, "This happens to others my age, too?" and "You mean *everyone* feels this way?" These observations can be eye-opening. This course seeks to facilitate for young people such moments of insight concerning their sexual and personal development.

The Theology of This Course

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices is, first of all, based on the theological premise that our sexuality is a gift that is given to us by a loving and gracious God. Sexuality is an integral part of life, an element that God breathed into us just like every other dimension of our being.

Another important theological theme supporting this course comes from the Book of Genesis, which teaches that each human being is made in the image and likeness of a loving God (1:27,31). As creatures made in God's image, we are called to live as mirrors of the Divine Presence within us, to love as God loves. This means loving in ways that always show genuine care and concern for others and that are always life-affirming, life-respecting, and life-giving.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* beautifully illustrates the church's view on the uniqueness of our creation as male and female:

Man and woman have been *created*, which is to say, *willed* by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. "Being man" and "being woman" is a reality which is good and willed by God. . . . Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity "in the image of God" . . . they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness. (No. 369)

The church not only sees the beauty of each gender but also speaks of our reliance on one another to be a complete being. "Man and woman were made 'for each other.' . . . [God] created them to be a communion of persons . . . and complimentary as masculine and feminine" (*Catechism*, no. 372). Without the other gender, we are only part of what God invites us to be in the context of a community. We need the gifts and strengths that each gender offers in order for our own sexuality, our own *being*, to be complete.

Regarding a holistic view of sexuality, the church states that "sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such" (*Catechism*, no. 2361). Sexuality must be seen in a totality and be inclusive of all the other aspects—physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological,

social—that make up a person. It is this complete sexuality that is brought as a gift into the committed relationship between husband and wife and offered as a sign of the covenant of love that each has professed.

The theology of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* holds that any attempt to separate our sexuality from our total self fragments and divides who we are and can limit our ability to experience the living and breathing Presence within us. Sexuality is “a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestations, of communicating with others, of feelings, of expressing and of living human love” (*Educational Guidance in Human Love*, no. 4). To be sexual is to be human and to be human is to be sexual. One cannot be divorced from the other.

Because our sexuality flows from the Creator in whose image we were made, we know that the type of love that results from a healthy sense of sexuality must also mirror the Divine Love. And from Jesus we learn that we are to express this godlike love within the context of community through our actions, thoughts, and words. Therefore, any understanding of sexuality that disregards human dignity, cuts us off from community, or violates the goodness of life is not a healthy or Christian view of sexuality.

Sexuality education is also an education about one’s total self, incorporating the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social dimensions of the human person. The process of sexuality education is lifelong. As the U.S. Catholic bishops put it, “Sexuality is both a central aspect of one’s self-understanding as male or female and a crucial factor in one’s relationship with others. . . . Education which helps people understand and accept their sexuality begins in infancy and continues in adulthood” (*National Catechetical Directory*, no. 191).

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry [NFCYM], p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing

witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices attempts to be faithful to the principles of effective evangelization. It sees teaching and evangelization as going hand in hand: How can the good news of sexuality be preached to young people? How can both the young people and their parents be sustained in their attempts to live a life of good news, especially regarding their sexuality? As the teacher, the most fundamental principle of evangelization you can employ is to commit yourself in love to the participants in your course and to share how your commitment to faith affects your beliefs about sexuality.

In the face of the prevailing culture, effective evangelization means standing firm in our Catholic Christian values and beliefs. However, this stance must be taken within the context of the larger culture, not above it. To separate ourselves and our formation efforts from the real situations and experiences in today’s world can alienate the young people we seek to reach. Throughout Jesus’ life, he was a part of his culture but not predetermined or dominated by it. He is, as always, the model we are called to emulate as bearers of the Good News to young people.

On Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is

accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing Yourself

Your level of comfort with the young people and with the content of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* will play a key role in the success of the course. Because the course is short, being well prepared before each gathering is essential. You must also be fully present to the young people throughout the course. What the participants gain from the course depends, in part, on how comfortably and compassionately the teacher is able to present the material. Finally, your most important contribution may be to model a mature and balanced sexuality that emanates from knowing God as your Creator.

Before beginning, it will be helpful to allow yourself enough time to make the following personal preparations:

Reflect on your own sexuality. The most effective way to prepare to teach a course on sexuality is first to examine and reflect on one’s own sexuality, including one’s beliefs, attitudes, desires, hopes, fantasies, fears, and hang-ups about sexuality.

The importance of this preparation step stands out when we consider that the topic of sexuality is one adults do not seriously discuss with one another, much less with young people. And when the issues of sexuality are discussed between adults and young people, all too often moral absolutes or restrictions and warnings dominate the discussion. Many people feel uncomfortable with their own sexuality and about the topic in general.

Yet we know that sexuality is an essential part of being human. We can either choose to embrace our sexuality or subvert it. The goal of this course—to present a healthy, holistic, and Catholic Christian view of sexuality to young people—will be more fully achieved if those who teach it choose to embrace their own sexuality and examine it in full and honest light.

The following questions suggest some angles from which we can examine and reflect on our own sexuality:

- What (and how) was I taught about sex and sexuality by my parent(s)? by the church? by siblings and peers? by society?
- What were the sex role expectations in my family while I was growing up? in my family now?
- What sexuality issues, questions, or situations make me uncomfortable or nervous? Why?
- On what areas of sexuality do I need more information?
- If Jesus approached me today, on which issues about my sexuality might he challenge me? Why?

Perfection in action and attitude is not required—if it were, no one would be qualified to teach young people about sexuality. Only our willingness to be aware of and honest about who we are as faith-filled, sexual persons is required. When we have critically reflected on our own sexuality in light of our Christian faith, we will be ready to help the young people do so as well.

Do a “mini-immersion.” Your role as a teacher and facilitator in this course can be greatly enhanced by familiarizing yourself with the group’s starting point. One way to assess the starting point is to do a mini-immersion into the adolescent subculture. Find out which TV programs, radio stations, movies, and magazines young people spend the most time with and sample these yourself. Allow your senses to be open and tuned in to both the subtle and the overt sexual pressures and images young people are exposed to. While this exercise particularly prepares you for session 3, “The Power of Choice,” it also provides good preparation for the entire course.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and also on the feeling of community among the group members. Teenagers are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are several suggestions for developing that type of environment for this course:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions will require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom arrangement is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Create a good emotional and social atmosphere. Creating the proper emotional and social environment for communication means establishing a trusting and open atmosphere among the group members as quickly as possible. The opening exercise for each session offers a good way to begin to create this safe environment. A group develops trust through sharing of experiences and appropriate self-disclosure. The more sharing and disclosure that occurs, the higher the level of trust that develops. The opening exercises are structured to allow the young people an opportunity to break down barriers in a nonthreatening manner.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities will require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint, to making arrangements for guest panelists. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experience will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it, you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases the journal suggestions are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

Journal activities present an opportunity for one-to-one ministry to young people. A young person might write something in a journal that she or he would not feel comfortable sharing in a group or even talking about at all. If you do assign journal activities, take the time to read the young people's responses—with their permission—and then write in comments or words of encouragement or affirmation. Your personal attention might make a big difference to a young person who is struggling, searching, or just growing up.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, there are some practical reasons for *not* including the journal component. First, if every teacher of every course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of the activity. Second, the process of journal keeping is time consuming and energy consuming for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music, or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ, and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. The circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of course participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week, this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Completing an Evaluation

Use the evaluation form at the end of each session to record your impressions, concerns, and overall rating of the session. Do this as soon as possible after completing the session. What you may think you will remember in a week will probably become less than clear when the time comes to write it down. This information will be valuable the next time you or another teacher prepares to use this material.

Using This Course as a Retreat

To decide whether to present this course as a retreat, weigh the following advantages and disadvantages in light of your own needs and skills and those of the young people in your parish.

Advantages

The common components of a retreat—community building, prayer, faith sharing, open and honest discussions, sacramental celebrations, individual reflection, and journal writing—are well suited to address the issues in *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*. A retreat that includes one or two overnights lets the participants get away from the pressures and stresses of everyday life and gives more focused attention to the topic. The retreat format will likely provide more time for addressing the specific concerns and interests the young people have about sexuality. The retreat process also offers young people a unique opportunity to develop community and share their faith with others.

If you choose to adapt this course for a retreat, design the flow of the retreat so that it covers the three main sessions in their designated order. One possible format could look like this:

Day 1

Arrival and group-building activities

Session 1: “The Gift of Sexuality”

Meal break

Session 2: “The Challenges of Growth”

Meal or snack break

Celebration of reconciliation

Games or sing-along

Lights out

Day 2

Meal

Morning prayer

Session 3: “The Power of Choice”

Meal break

Celebration of the Eucharist

Clean up and departure

Be flexible with your planning so that you are able to cover the material most suited to your group’s particular needs. The optional parent session could be offered either before or after the retreat.

Disadvantages

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices does not work well as a single, daylong retreat because the participants will not have enough time to process the information and learning experiences. Also, if you do not have any previous retreat experience, you may find yourself overwhelmed by the amount of preparation needed to pull off such an event. However, your parish coordinator of religious education or youth minister may be able to offer advice or assistance.

Another disadvantage to the retreat format is that all preparation for the sessions must be done at once, instead of over a period of weeks. Program leaders will have less time to consider young people’s responses and questions and prepare accordingly.

Special Preparation Needs

Although the full preparation details are spelled out in each session of this course, the following needs will require special attention:

For the Optional Parent Session: “Understanding Adolescent Sexuality”

1. The first decision you face, of course, is whether to use this optional but highly recommended session. Consider whether a sexuality program has been offered before in the parish and how parents were involved, if at all. If such a session was held, check whether your current group of parents participated in it. Even if they did they could still benefit from this session.

2. Before the parent session gather a collection of print, audio, and video resources to be made available to both parents and young people through a parish library or resource center. Look for resources on sexuality, parenting adolescents, church teachings regarding sexuality, communication techniques, and so forth. The list of suggested resources at the end of this introduction offers some ideas, but consult your local diocesan media center as well. Once you have gathered the resources, create a bibliography to be distributed at the parent session.

3. The parent session includes two presentations to be given by a speaker with knowledge and experience in the areas of adolescent development and effective communication. If you cannot assume this task, recruit the speaker far enough in advance of the session so that he or she has ample time to prepare the two presentations. See the Procedure section of the parent session for more details.

4. Send a letter to all the parents to personally invite them to the session. Using a warm and cordial tone, convey to them that the session is meant to assist parents in their role as the primary educators of their children. Note that the session offers parents support, information, and ideas on how they can better relate to their adolescent children and possibly parent them more effectively.

5. Finally, consider opening the session to any interested parents in the parish. The information shared in the session will be valuable for parents of both preadolescent and adolescent children.

For Session 1: “The Gift of Sexuality”

As you did for the parent session, collect materials to make available to course participants. Create a bibliography of these resources, to distribute to the young people.

For Session 2: “The Challenges of Growth”

1. The first hour of this session revolves around a panel of presenters who respond to a sex survey the young people filled out during the first session. Contact people to request that they sit on the panel. Include a priest or qualified parish staff member to address religious or moral questions, a doctor or nurse to respond to medical or physical questions, and a counselor or youth minister to discuss emo-

tional or relational issues. Look for people who can address the topic, share a positive and Christian view of sexuality, and are attuned to the needs and developmental issues of young people.

2. As soon as possible after session 1, send the panelists copies of the completed sex surveys. Ask them to identify the questions they would feel comfortable addressing, and to combine any similar questions and concerns. Arrange to meet with the panelists—together if possible—to go over the procedures for the activity. Invite the panelists to arrive before the session starts so they can take part in the opening exercise.

3. Before your meeting with the panelists, decide on the format you will use for the activity. The teacher moderates the discussion in either of the two formats. Two possibilities follow (see session 2 for further details):

- After a brief introduction each panelist gives a 6- to 8-minute presentation. During the presentations the young people jot down any questions or comments they may have. For the rest of the time the panelists answer questions or respond to comments from the young people, the moderator, or both.
- A more dynamic but involved format is a talk show presentation in which the discussion is coordinated by the moderator. The moderator opens the “show” with a brief synopsis of the topic and an introduction of the panelists. The moderator then directs specific questions to individual panelists. After about 20 minutes, the audience is allowed to direct questions or comments to the panel. The moderator can have a list of secondary questions prepared in case the audience is shy or does not bring up issues the moderator thinks should be addressed.

4. Make copies of any handouts that the panelists plan to distribute and set up any audiovisual equipment that they have requested.

For Session 3: “The Power of Choice”

This session contains an activity that involves looking at media—music videos, TV commercials, popular songs, or teen magazines—and at the messages about sexuality they convey. Look over this activity and acquaint yourself with all four options. Choose one or two of the options for use in session 3.

You are encouraged to involve the course participants in choosing two options and in making the necessary preparations. Time is allotted at the end of session 2 for asking the participants to choose their options and for recruiting volunteers to help with the preparations. (See the session plan for more details. If you think you need more than a week to prepare for session 3, consider asking for help from the young people at the end of session 1 instead of session 2.)

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of youth. *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- The topics covered in *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* could be further explored at regular youth group meetings or activities. Or a series of speakers could address young people on issues such as AIDS, date rape, abortion, church teachings on sexuality, or media censorship.

- Youth ministry involves not only what the parish does for the young people but also what the young people may be able to do for the parish. Those who have completed *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* could address some of the junior high classes on the issues and changes they can expect to face when they reach high school. A talk show format could be used, with a panel of high school students as “experts” who answer written or spoken questions of the younger adolescents. Or a Dear Wise Wanda format like the one in session 2 could be used. Both the young “teachers” and the students can benefit greatly from this kind of peer ministry.

Family Connections

Sexuality: Challenges and Choices offers opportunities to make connections with or serve the families of the young people. The first is the optional parent session, “Understanding Adolescent Sexuality,” which addresses many of the concerns, fears, and questions parents have about sexuality and their adolescent children. Another way to serve the parents of the young people is through print, audio, and video resources on sexuality, parenting adolescents, church teachings, communication techniques, and so forth, which are available through a public library or a parish library or resource center. Suggestions for additional family connections are offered at the end of each of the course's three main sessions.

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define *how* to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices*

Goals

The goals of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* are as follows:

- That the young people broaden their understanding of sexuality to include all the ways they experience themselves as male or female (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual)
- That they view a healthy, holistic, and holy sexuality as an ideal to pursue
- That they accept their own physical, emotional, and sexual development as normal and deal with common adolescent changes in a healthy, balanced way
- That they critically examine cultural stereotypes and images of what it means to be male or female
- That they recognize Jesus as the model of the fully integrated, sexual person, and appreciate and accept the church's teachings on sexuality as life-affirming and life-giving

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives that together realize the five course goals:

Optional Parent Session: “Understanding Adolescent Sexuality”

- To help parents understand the developmental issues their adolescent child is experiencing and to recognize the child's behavioral and attitudinal changes within the context of normal adolescent development
- To equip parents with basic communication techniques and strategies that will enable them to discuss issues of sexuality with their adolescent child more confidently
- To review the content of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* and to suggest ways parents can reinforce the themes of the course at home

Session 1: “The Gift of Sexuality”

- To encourage the young people to celebrate their sexuality as a gift from God and as an integral part of the beautiful and unique person God created them to be
- To invite them to explore male and female stereotypes and to facilitate an understanding of the spectrum of masculinity and femininity

Session 2: “The Challenges of Growth”

- To explore the developmental issues that adolescents experience and to discuss the basis of these concerns
- To help them realize that their developmental issues and concerns are normal and to provide them with guidance

Session 3: “The Power of Choice”

- To encourage the young people to critically examine the culture's messages and values about sexuality
- To show them that they have a choice to accept or reject the sexual attitudes and behaviors promoted by the media
- To invite them to follow the model of Jesus, who was a member of his culture but was not predetermined or dominated by it

Suggested Resources

Use the following recommendations as a starting point for identifying resources that might be made available to the participants of this course and their parents. Some of the resources for teachers may be of interest to some parents, so be sure to alert parents to their availability.

For Parents

- Bell, Ruth, and Leni Zeiger Wildflower. *Talking with Your Teenager: A Book for Parents*. New York: Random House, 1983.
- Gale, Jay. *A Parent's Guide to Teenage Sexuality*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1989.
- Lewis, Howard R., and Martha E. Lewis. *Sex Education Begins at Home: How to Raise Sexually Healthy Children*. Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1983.

For Young People

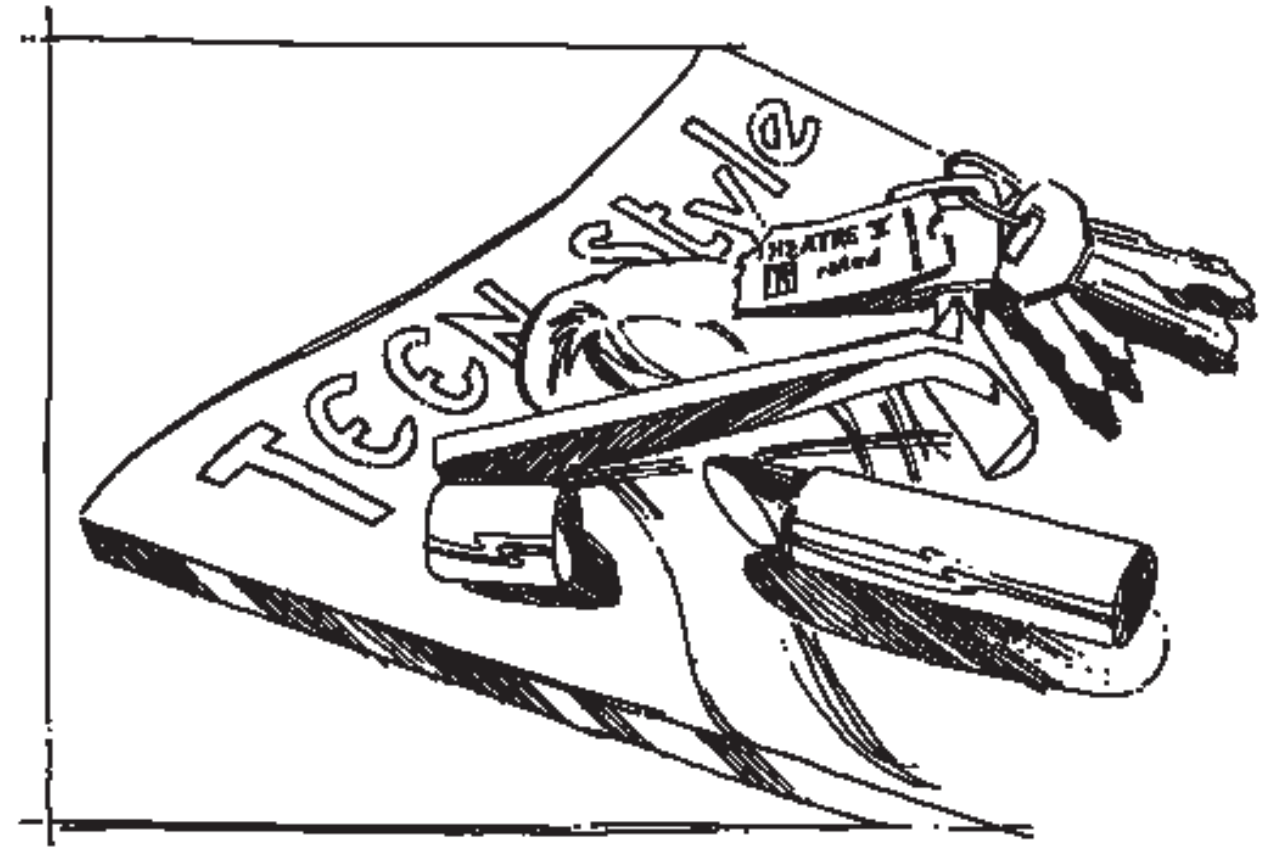
- Atanasoff, Stevan E. *How to Survive as a Teen When No One Understands*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989.
- Auer, Jim. *"Responsible Sex": What Every Teen Should Know*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1992.
- McCoy, Kathy, and Charles Wibbelsman. *The New Teenage Body Book*. Rev. ed. of *The Teenage Body Book*. Los Angeles: Body Press, 1987.

For Teachers

- Center for Early Adolescence. *Early Adolescent Sexuality: Resources for Professionals, Parents, and Young Adolescents*. Carrboro, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1989. Most of the publications by the Center for Early Adolescence are now available through Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Call 1-800-888-7828 to receive a catalog.
- Lerner, Richard M., and Nancy L. Galambos. *Experiencing Adolescents: A Sourcebook for Parents, Teachers, and Teens*. New York: Garland, 1984.
- United States Catholic Conference (USCC). *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. Washington, DC: USCC, 1991.

OPTIONAL PARENT SESSION

Understanding Adolescent Sexuality



Objectives

- To help parents understand the developmental issues their adolescent child is experiencing and to recognize the child's behavioral and attitudinal changes within the context of normal adolescent development
- To equip parents with basic communication techniques and strategies that will enable them to discuss issues of sexuality with their adolescent child more confidently
- To review the content of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* and to suggest ways parents can reinforce the themes of the course at home

Session Steps

- a welcome and an opening prayer (5 minutes)
- an exercise on sexuality education (10 minutes)
- a quiz on adolescent sexuality (15 minutes)
- a presentation on adolescent sexuality (30 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a presentation on effective parent-teen communication (25 minutes)
- an overview of *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* (15 minutes)
- a course evaluation and a closing prayer (10 minutes)
- a post-session social time with refreshments (optional)

Background for the Teacher

Parenting is said to be the single greatest responsibility an adult assumes. Yet little formal training or education is available to assist parents with this enormous task. Frequently they exclaim in frustration, "I don't know what to do!" This session, "Understanding Adolescent Sexuality," gives parents the opportunity to join with their peers to discuss, share, and gather information about sexuality and their adolescent children. The relief such occasions bring can be heard in comments like, "That happens to you, too?" and "Thank heavens we're not the only ones!"

The sexual development of their children is cause for great concern and possible anxiety among parents. Besides being a time of physical changes, adolescence is also marked by a change in the parent-child relationship. Sexuality is a subject many people are uncomfortable discussing openly. Yet for both parents and for young people, sexual development is an unavoidable fact of life.

This session offers parents information, guidance, and support so that they can deal more confidently with this stage of their child's development. By the end of the session, parents will have a clearer sense of the developmental issues and related behaviors that adolescents experience, as well as some insights into talking to their child about sexuality. Parents will also understand how the parish intends to assist them in their role.

The session begins with introductory activities, followed by a quiz and a presentation on adolescent development. After a short break, the session continues with another presentation, this one emphasizing the critical role of effective communication in good parent-child relationships. Then parents are offered an overview of the course goals and objectives as well as recommendations on how they can become involved in the course material at home.

Overall, this session is based on the belief that parents are the primary educators of their children and that the church must assist them with this task in whatever way it can. A successful parent session will help ensure that *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* will be a fruitful and positive experience not only for the young people participating in it but for their parents as well.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- paper
- name tags
- a table on which to display samples of resources available at the public library, parish library, or parish resource center
- copies of the bibliography of available resources that you prepared
- pencils
- a copy of handout P-A, "Adolescent Sexuality Quiz," for each person
- a copy of handout P-B, "Top Ten Ways to Talk with Your Adolescent About Sex," for each person
- a copy of handout P-C, "*Sexuality: Challenges and Choices—An Overview*," for each person
- a copy of handout P-D, "Session Evaluation," for each person
- snacks and beverages for the post-session social time (optional)

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step C. Review the discussion notes on the answers to the adolescent sexuality quiz.
- For steps D and F. If necessary, line up a guest speaker and provide her or him with the recommended materials and information. Make any necessary arrangements for audiovisual needs or additional handouts.
- For step G. Prepare your presentation.

🕯 Opening Teacher Prayer

Lord, God of all that is good and holy, I ask your blessing upon me now as I prepare to do your work, the ministry to which you have called me in your name. Strengthen me with your wisdom and courage, provide me with a heart that knows you and seeks you.

Please bless the parents of the young people in this course and let them know that you are with them in their struggles and their joys. May

they realize your unconditional Presence already within them and their children so that they may call on you as they make this sometimes difficult journey together.

I ask this prayer, through your Son and my brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Procedure

A Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Greet parents as they arrive. Ask them to sign in and take a name tag (if you think it necessary) and invite them to pick up a bibliography and browse through the resources until the program begins.

Begin the session by welcoming the parents and thanking them for showing interest in and commitment to their son's or daughter's personal growth and faith development.

Invite everyone to join you in asking God's blessing on your time together. Offer a prayer such as this one:

- Loving Creator God, breath of life for us all, we come before you now with open hearts and minds so that you may fill us with the wisdom, love, and guidance necessary to help our children grow in your light.

We ask your Divine Presence to lead us to a deeper and more profound understanding of what it means to be a healthy and holy sexual being for both ourselves and our children.

We pray through Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.

B Opening Exercise: Sexuality Education (10 minutes)

1. After the opening prayer, direct the parents to get into groups of two to four. If they came with a spouse, they should join with at least one other couple or person who is not part of their family. Explain that after they have introduced themselves to one another, they are to spend a few minutes sharing what, when, and how they learned about sexuality. Then they are to talk about what, when, and how today's young people learn about sexuality.

2. After a few minutes, call the parents back together and ask for feedback. Keep this time moving as quickly as possible by following up some of the responses with the question, How many others does this apply to?

Next, elicit the parents' thoughts about what, when, and how today's young people learn about sexuality. Again, keep this process moving as quickly as possible.

Wrap up this activity by briefly pointing out some of the differences and similarities between the parents' sexuality education and that of today's young people. Use this summary to lead into the following quiz.

C Quiz: Adolescent Sexuality (15 minutes)

1. Distribute handout P-A, "Adolescent Sexuality Quiz." Assure the parents that they do not have to hand in their quizzes. Then give them a few minutes to answer the questions. You may wish to invite them to work in pairs or small groups.

2. When the parents finish the quiz, lead a short discussion, using as a guide the answers given in the section Discussion Notes at the end of this session. Try to do this without getting into a prolonged discussion or debate about any one fact. If such a debate begins, simply ask the people involved to discuss it with you at the break.

D Presentation: Adolescent Sexuality (30 minutes)

Before the session. If necessary, line up the guest speaker. As background, provide her or him with a copy of the objectives of the parent session, a list of the session's steps, a copy of handout P-A, and the discussion notes for the quiz.

Inform the speaker that this first presentation should run for 30 minutes, *including* 10 to 15 minutes for questions. Ask the speaker to focus her or his remarks on the various behavioral and physical changes that occur during puberty and how these affect the emotional and relational areas of young people's lives. Specific attention should be given to how these changes affect a young person's relationship with her or his parent(s). Make any necessary arrangements for audiovisual materials or additional handouts.

1. Welcome and introduce the guest speaker, briefly describing his or her background and offering a sentence or two about the topic of the first presentation. Mention that the speaker will allow time for questions.

2. Help the speaker distribute any handouts she or he may have prepared. Watch the time during the presentation, making sure that after about 15 minutes the speaker invites questions.

After about 15 minutes of questions, wrap up the discussion and announce a 10-minute break. Encourage the parents to visit with the speaker or peruse the resource table.

E Break (10 minutes)

F Presentation: Parent-Teen Communication (25 minutes)

Before the session. If you are not comfortable presenting this material yourself, recruit a speaker (or speakers). As background, pass on to him or her a copy of the session objectives, a list of the session steps, a copy of handout P-B, “Top Ten Ways to Talk with Your Adolescent About Sex,” and the discussion notes that correspond to handout P-B. Also make any necessary arrangements for the speaker’s audiovisual materials or additional handouts.

Convey to the speaker that the preferred format for this 25-minute presentation is an interactive discussion based on handout P-B and the accompanying notes. Her or his role is to lead this discussion and to stress that positive and open communication between a parent and child is necessary for effective sexuality education.

If the speaker wishes to use a formal presentation, ask that she or he cover the information on handout P-B and keep the presentation to 15 minutes. This allows 10 minutes for questions.

1. Distribute handout P-B. Tell the parents that the next presentation is on effective communication strategies between parents and adolescents, especially on sensitive subjects like sexuality. Explain whether questions may be asked at any time or if they should be held till the end.

2. At the end of the allotted 25 minutes, wrap up the discussion and thank the guest speaker for her or his assistance with the issues of adolescent development and effective communication between parents and adolescents. If the speaker will be available to visit during the post-session social time, indicate this to the group.

G Overview: Sexuality: Challenges and Choices (15 minutes)

Before the session. Thoroughly review the contents of the course and familiarize yourself with the goals for the course and the objectives and activities for each of the three sessions (see handout P-C, “Sexuality: Challenges and Choices—An Overview”). Prepare a presentation for the parents using this suggested format:

- Review the overall goals for the course.
- Give an overview of the learning objectives and main activities for sessions 1 to 3.
- Highlight the recommended family connections on handout P-C. Explain that these activities will be suggested to the course participants. Encourage the parents to cooperate with their child if he or she asks them to do the exercises, or even to initiate the exercises with their child.
- Conclude this overview by stressing that *Sexuality: Challenges and Choices* is an introductory course; it does not cover all the information necessary in a total Christian sexuality program. Note that the Horizons Program contains other courses that touch on issues such as dating, morality, and relationships.

1. Distribute handout P-C to the parents and proceed with your prepared overview.

2. After you have covered the material, ask for questions from the parents. If some parents ask questions that you don’t have time to address during the presentation, suggest that they visit with you during the social time. Also encourage them to feel free to contact you in the future if further questions or concerns arise.

3. For parents with more personal concerns, you may choose to find resources for them individually or invite them to talk to someone (such as the pastor, youth minister, or director of religious educa-

tion) who has more information and expertise. If you expect issues to arise that you do not feel comfortable or qualified to address, you may wish to have your pastor or other parish staff person on hand to assist you.

H Evaluation and Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Distribute handout P-D, “Session Evaluation.” Request that each parent complete an evaluation of the session and place it on the resource table.

2. When everyone is ready, invite them to join with you in a closing prayer. If the group is small enough, ask the parents to form a circle and join hands; if the group is larger, simply have them remain seated. Offer parents a few moments to quietly reflect on a concern or situation they are now experiencing as a parent and that they would like to offer to God in prayer.

Invite the parents to share their concern with the group. Let them know that no response is needed after someone offers their intention. You may wish to begin the sharing then allow enough time for the parents to offer their prayers.

3. Conclude with the following prayer or one of your own:

- God of all life and love, we have come before you with our mind and heart full of our concerns, fears, and hopes for our children. We ask you to hear these concerns with love and understanding.

May we always know the limitless Presence that enfolds us every day of our life. Allow this Presence to reassure our mind and heart that you are indeed with us during every step of our journey with our children.

We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

I Post-Session Social Time with Refreshments (Optional)

While you distribute the session evaluation, invite the parents to stay for refreshments after the closing prayer and to visit with one another, with you, or with the guest speaker(s). Set out beverages and snacks for the social while the parents are filling out the evaluations.

For Parents Unable to Attend

More than likely, not all the parents of the course participants will be able to attend this parent session. The sign-in sheet will help you determine which parents were not at the session.

The following suggestions provide some options on how to inform those parents:

1. Send a letter to the parents and include a copy of the bibliography of resources and handouts P-A, P-B, and P-C. Invite them to contact you regarding any questions or concerns they may have about the program.
2. Videotape or audiotape all or parts of the session (e.g., the two presentations) and mention the availability of the tape in your letter. Ask the parents to contact you if they would like to borrow the tape.
3. If your course has a large number of participants, consider offering the session twice to allow for scheduling conflicts.

Discussion Notes

Quiz Answers

Use the following notes to guide the discussion based on handout P-A, “Adolescent Sexuality Quiz.” Familiarize yourself with the content of these notes ahead of time so that you can convey the information without reading the answers to the parents.

Question 1. Human beings experience more growth during adolescence than at any other time in their life except infancy. True or false?

Answer. True. Adolescence is the second fastest period of growth.

For girls, rapid growth begins at about 10 years of age and peaks at about 12 years of age. Female growth is marked by breast development, the appearance of pubic hair, and the beginning of menstruation. For boys, rapid growth begins around age 11 and peaks at around age 14. During this time, males experience enlargement of the testes, growth of the penis, the appearance of pubic hair, a deepening of the voice, and a rapid growth in height.

The ages given here for both girls and boys are averages. This means that it is normal for individual adolescents to start their growth earlier or later than these ages.

- Question 2.** The number of adolescent pregnancies in the United States each year is
- under five hundred thousand
 - between five hundred thousand and one million
 - between one million and two million
 - between two million and three million

Answer. C. Between one million and two million adolescent girls become pregnant each year in the United States.

One out of every ten girls under the age of twenty becomes pregnant each year. More than 20 percent of all adolescent pregnancies occur in the first month after initiation of sexual intercourse and 50 percent occur within the first six months. (Pascale, comp., *Adolescent Contraceptive Use*)

- Question 3.** The average age of first sexual intercourse for males is
- 13 to 15 years
 - 15 to 17 years
 - 17 to 19 years
 - 19 to 21 years

Answer. B. The average age of first sexual intercourse for males is 15 to 17 years.

By age 15, one out of every three boys has experienced sexual intercourse; by age 16, half are sexually active; and by age 19, over three-quarters are sexually experienced. Only 8 percent of males have received formal sexuality education by age 13. By age 19, only 52 percent of males have received sexuality education.

Eight out of ten sexually active males indicated that the most desirable age to have sexual intercourse for the first time was an age older than they were when they first experienced sexual intercourse. (Armstrong, comp., *Adolescent Males and Teen Pregnancy*)

- Question 4.** Each year, what percentage of pregnant adolescent girls choose abortion?
- 10 percent
 - 25 percent
 - 40 percent
 - 60 percent

Answer. C. Forty percent of adolescent pregnancies end in abortion each year. One study found that 30 percent of those receiving abortions consider themselves Catholic. (Flynn, comp., *Adolescents and Abortion*)

- Question 5.** Using and experimenting with drugs—including alcohol and tobacco—increases an adolescent’s risk for sexual activity. True or false?

Answer. True. The risk of sexual activity among adolescents increases with drug use. Adolescents who use marijuana are three times more likely to be sexually active by age 16 than those who do not. Among white females under 16, those who smoke cigarettes are four times more likely than those who do not smoke to engage in sexual activity. One study reported that almost 50 percent of adolescent pregnancies occurred after the young people had used alcohol or drugs. A college survey found that 75 percent of the men and 55 percent of the women involved in date rape had been drinking or using drugs before the attack. (Armstrong, *Adolescent Substance Use and Sexual Risk-taking Behavior*)

- Question 6.** Young people between the ages of 13 and 19 have the second highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases among all age levels. True or false?

Answer. False. Adolescents have the leading rate of sexually transmitted diseases among all age-groups. Every year, one out of six young people—nearly three million teenagers—is infected with a sexually transmitted disease.

In 1990, AIDS was the sixth-leading cause of death among adolescents. That rate is expected to climb dramatically in the years ahead. In a two-year time span (from 1990 to 1992), one study found a 43 percent increase in the number of AIDS cases among 13- to 24-year-olds. (Biddle, comp., *Adolescents, HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases*)

- Question 7.** When an adolescent discovers that he or she is attracted to others of the same sex, the most common response is
- running away from home
 - attempting suicide
 - using alcohol or other drugs
 - engaging in promiscuous behavior

Answer. B. Suicide is the leading cause of death among homosexual adolescents.

Research studies show that homosexual adolescents are at a much higher risk for depression, suicide, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and alcohol and drug abuse.

The average age of initial same-sex attraction occurs at age 14 for males and between ages 16 and 19 for females. Almost one-third of homosexual adolescents attempt suicide during the first year they identify themselves as homosexual. One in four gay adolescent boys is forced out of his home prematurely due to issues surrounding his sexual orientation. Up to 50 percent of these boys resort to prostitution in order to support themselves. (Messina, comp., *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth*)

- Question 8.** In a typical afternoon soap opera, the number of instances of sexual content viewers see is
- one every 10 minutes
 - one every 7 minutes
 - one every 5 minutes
 - one every 2 minutes

Answer. D. Viewers are exposed to scenarios with sexual content once every 2 minutes during a typical afternoon soap opera.

In general, the sexual material on television has unmarried couples engaging in sexual intercourse four to eight times more often than married couples. In many action and adventure shows, sexual behavior is often associated with acts of violence or power and rarely in the context of a loving, committed relationship.

Adolescents who were shown a set of ten music videos were more likely than a comparison group who did not see the videos to find premarital sex acceptable. Another study found that junior high students who watched a greater amount of “sexy” television were more likely than peers who watched less of such programming to engage in sexual activity during their adolescent years. (Neidell, comp., *Media and Adolescent Sexuality*)

- Question 9.** Abstinence is promoted in what percentage of the sexuality education programs throughout the United States?
- 25 percent
 - 40 percent
 - 80 percent
 - 90 percent

Answer. D. Nearly 90 percent of sexuality education programs around the country promote abstinence. Eighty-six percent of the instructors of these courses report teaching that abstinence is the best method to prevent pregnancy and STDs.

By age 19, 60 percent of girls and 52 percent of boys have taken a sexuality education course, but many initiate sexual intercourse before being exposed to these courses.

Sexuality programs do not increase adolescent sexual activity, but they do increase a teenager’s knowledge of sexuality. (Armstrong, comp., *Sexuality Education*)

- Question 10.** According to most adolescents, the most important source of information regarding sexuality is
- friends
 - parents
 - media or books
 - church or school sexuality courses

Answer. B. Most adolescents report that their parents are the primary and preferred source of information about sex and sexuality. Home is where children first learn the attitudes and values that will shape and form their sexual behavior as they grow into adulthood. Fifty percent of adolescents in a survey said that their parents have not provided them with enough information about sex and that they would like to talk more with their parents about the topic. Ninety-eight percent of parents report that they need help in talking to their teenagers about sex.

Mothers are usually the primary source of information regarding sexuality in the home; 68 percent of mothers as compared to 48 percent of fathers report having talked to their children about sexuality.

Parents and children who communicate frequently about sexuality tend to share values to a greater extent than those who communicate less. One study found that parent-child discussions about sexuality primarily influenced children’s sexual attitudes, rather than their sexual knowledge. (Armstrong, comp., *Parent-Child Communication About Sexuality*)

Suggestions for Effective Communication

The following notes elaborate on handout P–B, “Top Ten Ways to Talk with Your Adolescent About Sex.” The speaker who leads the presentation on effective communication between parents and adolescents should have a copy of these notes as preparation for the session.

Number 10: Educate yourself. Parents can do a lot to improve communication with their children by taking the time to read up on the areas and issues with which they feel uncomfortable. It helps to be honest when an adolescent asks about something the parent does not know or is unsure about. A good response is “That’s a good question, let’s see if we can find an answer together.”

Number 9: Respect confidentiality. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to issues of confidentiality. Communication will be more effective if a parent lets the child know that what he or she shares will be confidential and respected. Any sharing of the information, even with the other parent, should be agreed on by both the parent and the child. Respecting confidentiality goes a long way toward developing a strong and lasting relationship between parents and children.

Number 8: Avoid put-downs and comparisons. Sometimes parents, whether intentionally or not, say things that embarrass or ridicule their adolescent children. Parents may be tempted to compare one child to a sibling or a peer or to tease an adolescent about new underarm hair or breast development. Parents must avoid this kind of behavior if they wish to develop good relationships and good communication with their children.

A young person’s self-esteem is already delicate as he or she tries to gain mastery over a changing body and emotions. Preying upon these changes, even if in fun, can cause heartache and ill feelings that often go unexpressed and build walls, not bridges, between parent and child.

Number 7: Love the person, hate the action. Even when an adolescent tells his or her parents something they do not like, the best response the parents can give is to let their child know that their love is unconditional and forever. Only after this love has been expressed should the parents confront an action that goes against the rules or values expressed in the family.

All too often, young people believe that parental displeasure or anger is directed at them as a person, instead of at their behavior. Parents need to back up their love for their children with some visible sign. An embrace will go much further than words ever could. In conflict situations, parents are advised to wait a few minutes—or longer—until tempers are cooled.

Number 6: Be clear and firm about values and expectations. If children are to follow the family expectations about sexual behavior, these rules need to be communicated clearly and enforced with consistency and love. Adolescents are often tempted to stretch the rules as much as possible and to turn to the parent who will let them do something that the other would not. A parent who is cornered with a request can say that she or he needs to talk the issue over with the other parent.

Before creating family expectations and rules on sexual activity, parents need to be clear on their own values, beliefs, and morals. They should especially avoid basing family rules and expectations on what the neighbors may think or do.

Number 5: Hold regular family discussions. Designating a specific time each week or month for family members to come together for discussions allows everyone the chance to share whatever is on their mind. This is an ideal time for parents to discuss their values, hopes, and beliefs concerning sexuality as well as any questions and concerns the children might have about the topic.

The more frequently a family spends time sharing about other issues and topics, the easier it will be to talk about sex and sexuality when it is time to do so. Regular, designated times for family discussions are ideal, but discussions can also be integrated into other family activities, such as meals or commutes.

Number 4: Live what you preach and preach what you live. Credibility is crucial in parent-teen relationships because adolescents are keenly aware of people who say one thing and do another. For a parent to punish an adolescent for possessing a pornographic magazine while he or she has a drawerful of them simply does no good. For a single parent to tell an adolescent not to engage in premarital sex while the parent has a date spend the night holds no real substance or meaning for the adolescent. Parents must carefully examine their own actions and lifestyle before pronouncing to their children what the family’s sexual values and standards of behavior are.

Number 3: Seek common ground. When attempting to talk to anyone about sensitive or difficult issues, the best advice is to begin on common ground. To begin with issues that the two sides disagree on will only cause both people to become defensive and argumentative.

When parents talk to adolescents about sexuality, they should seek an area that everyone can agree on and begin there. For example, if the topic is whether an adolescent can go out on a date alone, the place to begin might be agreeing that dating is a good and positive way in which a person comes to know himself or herself better. By relating some of their own dating experiences, parents might also be able to reduce the tension and anxiety over talking about the issue.

Number 2: Actively listen. Perhaps the most important yet overlooked skill a parent (or anyone) can learn is active listening. An active listener fully listens to the speaker, picks up both verbal and non-verbal messages, and conveys back to the speaker what was heard before giving a response. This technique requires practice and patience. However, the results, especially when an issue such as sexuality is up for discussion, can be well worth the extra effort.

When people choose not to listen actively, they will usually fall into old habits such as selective hearing, interrupting, assuming, advising, moralizing, judging, or ignoring. These approaches are sure to lead to a discussion that is unproductive, emotionally draining, and generally destructive.

To be listened to and really heard is a special gift parents and children can offer to one another. When parents practice active listening with their children, they are not only resolving a current crisis but also modeling a pattern of communication that their children will use throughout their life.

Number 1: Trust. Trust is the foundation of all relationships. Although the other suggestions for effective communication can build up or reinforce this foundation of trust, a basic level of trust must be present from the start.

In a parent-child relationship, the parent needs to trust in the basic goodness of the child, and the child needs concrete evidence that the parent is trustworthy. This helps a child to see that even if a parent sets expectations and rules the child does not like, the parent has the child’s well-being in mind. The parent must also trust in his or her own ability to be a good and loving parent and in the child’s ability to learn and grow in positive ways.

At times, the trust between parent and child may weaken or break down. The other nine suggestions for effective communication can help in rebuilding trust. But again, a beginning level of trust must be present—even if it is nothing more than a willingness to extend trust.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation



Closing Teacher Prayer

Creator God, thank you for parents who care. Bless the parents who shared their time, their joys, and their struggles today, and offer them your guidance and vision to see the hope you have for them and their adolescent children.

Especially bless those parents who were not here. Help them to see they are not alone in their struggle and that your Spirit walks with and guides them.

Be with all these families as together we continue to help form the young people in your image and likeness.

This prayer is made in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Evaluation

Take a few moments after the session to record your impressions and observations of what worked and what needed improvement. Read through the participants' evaluation sheets. Write your thoughts in the spaces provided, for future reference.

1. What really worked well in this session?

2. What would make this session better next time?

3. Circle the number on the following scale that, on the whole, reflects how you would rate this session.

Poor				Average					Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. What are the reasons for your rating?

5. What do you need to follow up on?

Adolescent Sexuality Quiz

Circle the answer that you believe is correct for each question.

1. Human beings experience more growth during adolescence than at any other time in their life except infancy. True or false?
2. The number of adolescent pregnancies in the United States each year is
 - a. under five hundred thousand
 - b. between five hundred thousand and one million
 - c. between one million and two million
 - d. between two million and three million
3. The average age of first sexual intercourse for males is
 - a. 13 to 15 years
 - b. 15 to 17 years
 - c. 17 to 19 years
 - d. 19 to 21 years
4. Each year, what percentage of pregnant adolescent girls choose abortion?
 - a. 10 percent
 - b. 25 percent
 - c. 40 percent
 - d. 60 percent
5. Using and experimenting with drugs—including alcohol and tobacco—increases an adolescent's risk for sexual activity. True or false?
6. Young people between the ages of 13 and 19 have the second highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases among all age levels. True or false?
7. When an adolescent discovers that he or she is attracted to others of the same sex, the most common response is
 - a. running away from home
 - b. attempting suicide
 - c. using alcohol or drugs
 - d. engaging in promiscuous behavior
8. In a typical afternoon soap opera, the number of instances of sexual content viewers see is
 - a. one every 10 minutes
 - b. one every 7 minutes
 - c. one every 5 minutes
 - d. one every 2 minutes
9. Abstinence is promoted in what percentage of the sexuality education programs throughout the United States?
 - a. 25 percent
 - b. 40 percent
 - c. 80 percent
 - d. 90 percent
10. According to most adolescents, the most important source of information regarding sexuality is
 - a. friends
 - b. parents
 - c. media or books
 - d. church or school sexuality courses

TOP TEN WAYS

TO TALK WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT ABOUT SEX

- 10. Educate yourself.** Read up on issues with which you feel uncomfortable and be honest when asked about something you do not know. Respond with, “That’s a good question. Let’s see if we can find an answer together.”
- 9. Respect confidentiality.** Let your child know that what she or he shares with you will be held confidential. This will go a long way toward developing a strong and lasting relationship.
- 8. Avoid comparisons and put-downs.** Avoid saying or doing anything, especially related to your adolescent’s sexual development—such as teasing or making comparisons—that might harm her or his self-esteem.
- 7. Love the person, hate the action.** Only after telling your adolescent that you love him or her unconditionally and forever—and backing up your words with some visible sign—should you confront an action that goes against the rules or values expressed in your family.
- 6. Be clear and firm about values and expectations.** Be clear on your own values, beliefs, and morals before creating family expectations and rules regarding sexuality. Avoid basing family rules and expectations on what the neighbors may think or do. Clearly spell out your values and expectations with your children and enforce them with consistency and love.
- 5. Hold regular family discussions.** The more frequently your family spends time sharing about other issues, the easier it will be to talk about sex and sexuality. Regular, designated times for family discussions are ideal, but discussions can also be integrated into other family activities, such as meals or commutes.
- 4. Live what you preach and preach what you live.** Adolescents are keenly aware of people who say one thing but do another. Carefully examine your own actions and lifestyle before pronouncing to your children what sexual values and behaviors you expect from them. Let your actions be consistent with your words.
- 3. Seek common ground.** When discussing a sensitive subject like sexuality, the best starting place is on common ground. Find an area that you both agree on and begin there.
- 2. Actively listen.** Active listening is the most important skill you can learn in order to communicate positively with your adolescent. This technique requires practice and patience, but the results can be well worth the extra effort.
- 1. Trust.** Trust is the foundation of all good relationships. Although the other suggestions for effective communication can build up or reinforce this foundation of trust, a basic level of trust must be present from the start and extend both ways.

Learn to trust in the basic goodness of your child and in her or his ability to learn and grow in positive ways. Trust in your own ability to be a good, loving parent. Give your child concrete evidence that you are trustworthy and that the expectations and rules you set truly are for her or his well-being.

SEXUALITY:

Challenges and Choices

An Overview

Course Goals

- That the young people broaden their understanding of sexuality to include all the ways they experience themselves as male or female (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual)
- That they view a healthy, holistic, and holy sexuality as an ideal to pursue
- That they accept their own physical, emotional, and sexual development as normal and deal with common adolescent changes in a healthy, balanced way
- That they critically examine cultural stereotypes and images of what it means to be male or female
- That they recognize Jesus as the model of the fully integrated, sexual person, and appreciate and accept the church’s teachings on sexuality as life-affirming and life-giving

Session 1: “The Gift of Sexuality”

Objectives

- To encourage the young people to celebrate their sexuality as a gift from God and as an integral part of the beautiful and unique person God created them to be
- To invite them to explore male and female stereotypes and to facilitate an understanding of the spectrum of masculinity and femininity

Family Connections

These family connections may be suggested to the course participants for session 1:

1. The participants can discuss with their parents any sexual stereotypes the parents grew up with. Encourage the participants to question their parents on the standards present in their home now and why those standards exist.
2. Invite the young people to share extra copies of handout 1-B, “The Gender Spectrum,” with their parents or siblings to see where they place themselves on the spectrum and why.

Session 2:

“The Challenges of Growth”

Objectives

- To explore the developmental issues that adolescents experience and to discuss the basis of these concerns
- To help them realize that their developmental issues and concerns are normal and to provide them with guidance

Family Connections

These family connections may be suggested to the course participants for session 2:

1. Invite the young people to initiate a discussion with their parents or older siblings on when and how they received their sex education as a young person.
2. Encourage the participants to work with their parents to seek out reliable resources for dealing with questions and concerns about sexuality. Distribute to the young people the bibliography of the resources available at the parish library or resource center or suggest that they ask their parents about what resources are available at home. Suggest that they let this search be a basis for dialog with their parents.

Session 3:

“The Power of Choice”

Objectives

- To encourage the young people to critically examine the culture’s messages and values about sexuality
- To show them that they have a choice to accept or reject the sexual attitudes and behaviors promoted by the media
- To invite them to follow the model of Jesus, who was a member of his culture but was not predetermined or dominated by it

Family Connection

This family connection may be suggested to the course participants for session 3:

- Send extra copies of handout 3-A, “Media Messages,” home with the young people. Suggest that they invite their parents or siblings to use the handout to examine some of the magazines around the home or the TV shows family members watch regularly.

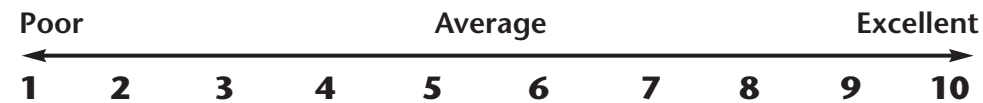
Session Evaluation

Please respond to the questions below and turn the evaluation in before you leave. Your input will assist with future program planning. You need not give your name.

What part of the program "Understanding Adolescent Sexuality" did you find most helpful, and why?

What part of this program did you find least helpful, and why?

Circle the number on the following scale that reflects how you would rate this program in terms of its effectiveness in addressing your concerns and questions about the sexuality course in which your adolescent will be participating.



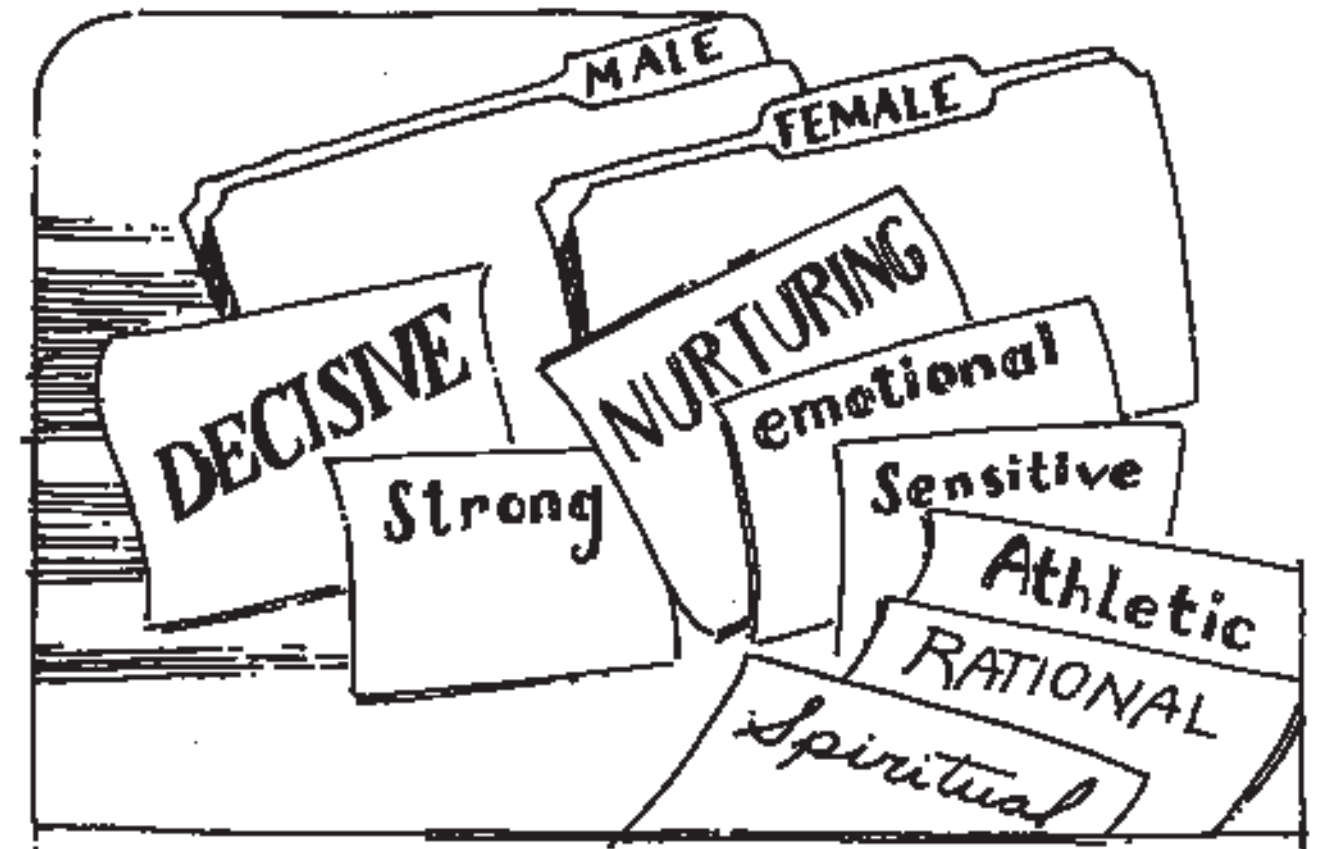
From among the following topics, check those on which more information would help you so much in your role as the primary educator of your children that you would actually attend a program on them. (A program offered on any of these topics would clearly present the church's position on the issue.)

- abortion
- adolescent dating
- church teachings on sexuality
- conception and pregnancy
- conscience formation
- contraception
- moral decision making
- homosexuality
- human biology
- masturbation
- sexual fantasies and fears
- sexual intercourse
- sexual values and morality
- HIV (the AIDS virus) and sexually transmitted diseases

Thank you for attending this session and for completing this evaluation.

SESSION 1

The Gift of Sexuality



Objectives

- To encourage the young people to celebrate their sexuality as a gift from God and as an integral part of the beautiful and unique person God created them to be
- To invite them to explore male and female stereotypes and to facilitate an understanding of the spectrum of masculinity and femininity

Session Steps

- A. a welcome, an opening exercise, and a discussion (20 minutes)
- B. a discussion on setting ground rules (10 minutes)
- C. a discussion exercise on sex and sexuality (15 minutes)
- D. a break (10 minutes)
- E. a handout exercise in preparation for session 2 (10 minutes)
- F. a forced-choice exercise on masculinity and femininity (30 minutes)
- G. a discussion exercise on gender characteristics (15 minutes)
- H. a reflection on the Scriptures and a prayer (10 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

To set the right frame of mind as you prepare to teach this session, carefully review the theology section of the introduction to the course. Pay particular attention to these points:

- God created each of us in God's image.
- Our sexuality is a wondrous and life-giving gift.
- Our sexuality is part of how we live out the Divine Presence within us.

This is the positive, life-affirming message that Christian faith has to offer about sexuality.

Let this message about the Christian perspective on sexuality come through in every aspect of your preparation and teaching of this course, especially for the first session. If you reflect it in your thoughts, your words, and your actions, the young people will experience sexuality in this positive and life-affirming light.

The first opportunity you have to convey the Christian message about sexuality comes as you set the physical environment for the session before the arrival of the young people. Do not underestimate the importance of creating the proper physical environment for your group. Picture walking into a brightly lit, bare-walled room with school desks in rows facing a blackboard that has the word "Sexuality" written on it. Contrast that image with one of walking into a spacious, lamp-lit, carpeted room with pillows on the floor and chairs in a circle. Obviously, resources to design a room are limited for each parish, but many positive changes can easily be done in just a few short minutes, and the results can be striking.

To add to the inviting physical environment, be sure to extend a positive, warm, and open greeting to each young person. This greeting, along with the physical atmosphere of the meeting space, is the participants' first impression of your approach to the topic of sexuality.

Session 1 begins with several introductory exercises meant to create an atmosphere in which the young people can openly and respectfully discuss the topic of sexuality. In order for this to happen, the teacher must model the kind of honest sharing and appropriate self-disclosure the young people are expected to demonstrate. In particular, the discussion following the opening exercise provides the opportunity to do this kind of modeling. Here the

teacher is asked to share an experience from his or her life that brings out the main idea for the discussion.

Before proceeding with the main activities of the session, you are asked to take some time to discuss the group's ground rules and expectations. Discussing the ground rules with the group and upholding the rules with caring and love also contribute to creating a positive atmosphere for sharing and discussion. Most discipline problems occur during the first session as the young people test the limits of behavior allowed by the teacher. Problems that are ignored tend to get worse, which means that you may spend more time trying to control the young people than teaching them. If one group member persists in disregarding any of the ground rules, it is essential that you ask that person to leave the room for several minutes. Do this with genuine care and chances are very good that the young person's behavior will improve quickly.

By the time the introductory activities and the discussion of ground rules have taken place, the young people should be relaxed enough to delve into the topic of sexuality. At this point the young people are asked to anonymously write down the last thing they did to express their sexuality. Their responses are then shared with the group by the teacher. The statements reflect the group members' starting points in terms of their understanding of sexuality. This exercise leads into a discussion on the question, Does sex equal sexuality?

After a 10-minute break, the group spends a few minutes filling out handout 1-A in preparation for session 2.

The remaining activities for session 1 revolve around helping the young people explore male and female cultural stereotypes and introducing the idea that each person, male or female, possesses characteristics that the culture defines as "masculine" and "feminine." The session closes with a reflection on the Scriptures and a prayer that addresses the concept of Jesus as a person who possessed both masculine and feminine characteristics. He serves as a model and a guide on what it means to be a wholly integrated, sexual person.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- a soft foam ball
- a watch
- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- index cards
- pencils
- a copy of handout 1-A, "Questions and Concerns for Session 2," for each person
- a copy of handout 1-B, "The Gender Spectrum," for each person
- a candle and matches (optional)
- nine Bibles, with bookmarks
- a tape or CD player, and reflective music (optional)

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Set up the room before the session. Prepare your brief example for the opening discussion.
- For step F.* Make four wall signs, as directed in step F. Read through the statements and choose the top five items you will read to the group.
- For step G.* Draw the gender spectrum scale, as directed in step G.
- For step H.* Mark the scriptural passages in the Bibles (one passage per Bible).

🕯 Opening Teacher Prayer

The introduction to this course asserts that our sexuality flows from God, who created each of us in God's own image and likeness, and in doing so was very pleased: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:27-31).

In order to share the good news about the gift of sexuality, you must be able to claim your own sexuality as good. Prayerfully review the examination of your sexuality that you did as part of your general preparation for teaching the course (see page 11). Then take a moment to be present to God's divine life within you. Allow yourself to embrace that divine life and to recognize your sexuality as part of it.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on the question, How can God help me share the goodness of sexuality with the young people in my course? Write down your ideas and offer a prayer for guidance.

Procedure

🕯 Welcome, Opening Exercise, and Discussion (20 minutes)

Before the session. Set up the room to be as warm and inviting as possible. Think of an example from your own life to illustrate some of the discussion points. Post a sheet of newsprint.

1. As the young people enter, greet each of them warmly and ask them to take a seat until the session begins. Once all the participants have arrived, extend a formal welcome to everyone and thank them for their interest in this course. Introduce yourself and say a few words about why you chose to work with them on the topic of sexuality. Be genuine and sincere with your comments, but do not linger on the topic of sexuality, as this will be covered later.

2. Have the young people introduce themselves to the group, if necessary, and share one thing that no one else in the room knows about them. Complete the sharing portion of the exercise even if everyone in the group already knows one another. Go around the circle until everyone has had a chance to share something.

3. Instruct the young people to stand in a circle. Hand someone a soft foam ball and convey the following instructions to the group:

- The person with the ball is to call out the name of another person in the circle and then throw the ball to that person. The receiver then calls out the name of another person in the circle and throws that person the ball. Repeat this process until everyone in the group has had the ball thrown to them. Pay close attention to the pattern that is established as the process unfolds. Each person must remember who he or she threw the ball to in order to repeat this pattern later.

Before the group begins, tell them that they will be timed to see how long it takes them to complete the pattern. Chances are it will take longer the first time around as people decide who they want to throw the ball to and as they determine who has not yet received it.

4. After the group has finished the pattern, announce the time it took and write it on the sheet of newsprint that you posted. Challenge the group to cut this time in half using the same pattern as before. Let the participants repeat the pattern until they have cut the time in half. Once they have cut their time in half, write the new time on the sheet and ask them to cut this new time in half. Do not say any more or volunteer any information—it is important for the group to struggle to figure this out. If they ask to change positions, tell them the decision is up to them. The only rules are that they must pass the ball to the same person they did before and they must call out the person's name before throwing them the ball.

If the group members are not able to cut the time in half, encourage them to think in new ways. Chances are they will figure out a system to cut the time in half, such as getting next to the person they pass it to or forming two rows and standing across from the person they are to pass it to. Again, however, do not volunteer any suggestions. Once they have achieved success, celebrate it and ask them to sit down.

5. Use this opening discussion to acquaint the participants with the overall purpose of the course and to model for the group how they will be expected to share and listen to one another throughout the course. Ask the young people what they discovered by doing the warm-up activity. Highlight any responses that touch on the idea that they had to think in new ways or they had to do something different in order to achieve their goal.

6. Encourage the group to think about how both of these points relate to growing up and being an adolescent. In your own words, offer the following points to help the group see the similarity. Incorporate a brief example from your life into your comments to illustrate what you mean.

- Up until puberty, you tend to do what you are told and “go with the flow” of life. Parents and friends tend to expect you to behave in a certain way. It is as if you are put into a box labeled with the instructions, “This is the way you are expected to be. Do not change.”
- But upon adolescence, you do change—whether you want to or not! Your body changes, your feelings change, your thoughts and actions change. You do not act or behave the same way as you did when you were younger, and this confuses a lot of people, including yourself.
- At this time in your life, like in the name game earlier, you begin searching for new ways of thinking and acting. You climb out of the box in which you have been placed by others and possibly by yourself. This can be an awkward and difficult time, especially if you do not understand that what is going on is a normal and necessary part of growth.
- Because of the significant changes happening to your body right now, each of you is beginning to think in new ways about who you are and who you are becoming. These changes make you especially ready to start thinking about yourself in new ways in the area of sexuality. Ever since you were little, one of the major ways you have thought about yourself has been as a boy or a girl. But now your body's changes are sending you on your way to becoming a mature man or woman. That is why now is a great time in your life to explore the topic of sexuality in a class like this. It is hoped that some of the information and insights about sexuality offered in this course will help you think of your new emerging self in positive and affirming ways.

B Discussion Exercise: Setting Ground Rules (10 minutes)

One of the best ways to make this course a positive experience for everyone is for the participants to follow some basic ground rules or guidelines. This process helps the group develop such rules.

1. Tell the group that they will help create some ground rules to ensure that this course is a positive experience for everyone. Divide the group into small groups of four or five. Give each small group a piece of newsprint and a marker and instruct the participants to work together to come up with three rules that will help everyone in the course get as much out of it as they can. The rules can be about the material, the participants' interactions with the teacher, or their interactions with one another. Allow 5 minutes for this task.

2. When the groups are finished, post the guidelines so that all the participants can see them. Comment on the results of their work, highlighting those that seem critical to the course. If their guidelines do not include the following points, add these as a conclusion to your comments:

- Mutual respect means, among other things, the recognition of the right of everyone to speak openly and honestly without fear of ridicule or rejection. Participants should have the courtesy to be attentive and to listen to one another. Explain that you will not tolerate snide remarks or put-downs.
- The rights of those who are not present, such as parents, other family members, classmates that are not part of the group, and so on, must also be respected. Encourage the young people to be open with one another without mentioning specific people or relationships.

C Discussion Exercise: Does Sex Equal Sexuality? (15 minutes)

More than likely, the young people participating in this course have a limited understanding of what the term *sexuality* refers to, or how it differs from the term *sex*. This activity clarifies the distinctions and connections between the two terms.

1. Distribute index cards and pencils and tell the young people to *anonymously* write their response to the question, What was the last thing you did to express your sexuality? Do not elaborate on the instructions; simply allow the young people to write whatever they understand the question to mean.

2. While the group members are writing their responses, write the word *sex* on one piece of newsprint and *sexuality* on another piece and post the signs.

3. When everyone has finished, collect the cards and announce that you will now share with the group what they wrote on the cards. Ask the group to listen carefully as you read the cards. Resist the urge to alter any of the language used by the young people in describing their experiences. Allow the young people to react spontaneously to what they hear.

4. When you have read all the cards to the group, begin a discussion of the question, Does sex equal sexuality? Let the group work at coming up with some of their own ideas before offering your comments. Use questions such as the following to start the discussion:

- How would you define the term *sex*? the term *sexuality*?
- Based on these definitions, which of the responses to the question, What was the last thing you did to express your sexuality? were about sex and which were about sexuality? Give some examples.

During the discussion, highlight and record any comments that reflect the following points. If the points do not get mentioned by the group, offer them in your own words, or use these to clarify any comments made by the young people:

- The terms *sex* and *sexuality* are two related but different things:

Sex is the biological aspect of sexuality. Whether a person is female or male is a matter of their sex. Sex also refers to physical genital activity for reproduction, pleasure, and tension release. Sex, however, is only part of the broader reality called sexuality.

Sexuality has a biological aspect, but it also includes emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects. Sexuality refers to the total experience of being male or female—a person's actions, thoughts, feelings, prayers, ways of relating to others, ways of experiencing the world, as well as the physical appearance and genitals of an individual.

5. Once the distinctions and relationship between sex and sexuality have been clarified, ask the young people to reflect on how they might now respond to the question, What was the last thing you did to express your sexuality? Invite them to share their ideas. Examples might be what they chose to wear today, who they chose to sit next to or throw the ball to, how they responded to the questions that have been asked, and so forth.

6. Conclude by emphasizing that sexuality is not limited to genitals, body parts, or what a person does with those parts. Explain that a purpose of this minicourse is to break down common stereotypes regarding sexuality so that it is seen as a powerful and beautiful force that is shaping who the young people are now and who they are becoming. This is the understanding of sexuality that this program is based on.

D Break (10 minutes)

E Handout Exercise: Preparation for Session 2 (10 minutes)

Before continuing with the activities for session 1, some preparation work for session 2 needs to be done. The idea behind preparing for the next session now rather than at the end of the session is so that the participants will take the time to fill out the handout thoroughly. If you wait until the end of the session, the young people may not give the task their full attention. Nor can you assign the handout as homework, as you will need it to prepare yourself and the presenters for session 2.

1. Distribute handout 1-A, "Questions and Concerns for Session 2." Tell the young people that before continuing with this session's activities, they are to fill out the handout in preparation for the next session. Inform them that session 2 will look at the physical and emotional changes associated with growing up, with special emphasis on their questions and concerns about issues of sex and sexuality. Explain that you are aware that they may have had some basic biology and sex education courses in school already and that the purpose of session 2 is not to repeat this information. Session 2 will respond to the specific questions and concerns they write down on the handout.

2. Review the handout instructions with the participants and tell them they have about 10 minutes to complete it. Explain that their completed surveys will be passed on to a group of experts who will address their questions and concerns during session 2, and that the "Dear Wise Wanda" letters will be used in another exercise. Reiterate that they are to keep their responses anonymous, serious, and

as specific as possible. When everyone is finished, collect the surveys and letters and proceed with session 1.

F Forced-Choice Exercise: Where Do You Stand? (30 minutes)

In this exercise, the group begins to explore male and female stereotypes. The teacher reads a series of stereotypical statements and then each young person must decide if she or he agrees or disagrees with each statement and why. In the process, the young people gain self-awareness and learn to think in new ways about what it means to be male or female.

Before the session. Make the following four wall signs, using half a sheet of newsprint for each: "Agree," "Strongly Agree," "Disagree," "Strongly Disagree." Select five of the following statements to use in this exercise:

- Boys are physically superior, and girls are intellectually superior.
- Women make better teachers than men.
- Boys who do drama and dance are kind of feminine.
- Girls always want to gossip.
- Boys do not really care how they look.
- Girls should not play organized football.
- Women would be good priests.
- Boys should always pay on a date.
- Women should be allowed to enter combat.
- Raising children is mostly the mother's responsibility.
- Boys talk about girls in the locker room.
- The man should be the chief wage earner in the family.
- Girls are more spiritual than boys.
- All boys think about is sex.
- If things are going too far on a date, it is the girl's responsibility to say no.
- Jocks are usually below average students.
- Parents let their boys have more freedom than their girls.

1. During the break, post on different walls the signs you prepared before the session. Call the young people back from the break and point out the wall signs to them. Tell the group members that you will read a statement to them and that they are to stand near the sign that best reflects their opinion about the statement.

Emphasize that they are to do this without saying anything or looking to see where their friends are going. If they find a statement unclear, tell them they must interpret it as well as they can.

2. Read the first statement aloud. Once everyone has moved to their selected sign, ask each person to briefly explain why she or he chose a particular stance. Request that everyone listen to the person who is speaking. Limit the responses to one per person so that everyone has a chance to say something. If time allows, return to those who wish to add to or change their views.

3. When you have heard comments from everyone regarding the first statement, read the second one and continue the process until you have covered all five of the statements you chose to read.

Note: It may be tempting to jump in when you hear an inaccurate statement or see inconsistent opinions. Please resist this temptation. Chances are good that other young people will point out these inconsistencies or correct the misinformation. Your role is to facilitate the sharing, ensuring that each person is allowed to say something and that the young people listen to one another. You may highlight a point or summarize what you heard, but only after everyone else has finished speaking. To offer your opinions prematurely will only squelch the sharing and inhibit the discussion.

4. Conclude the activity with comments such as these:

- By stereotyping one another, we are really trying to lock others into a box and impose our expectations on them. Locking people into our expectations and ideas about who they are supposed to be and what they are supposed to do denies the wholeness, beauty, and uniqueness of each person God created.

G Discussion Exercise: The Gender Spectrum (15 minutes)

In this gender spectrum exercise, the young people examine how they understand themselves as female or male in relationship to cultural understandings of feminine and masculine characteristics.

The purpose of the activity is to help the young people recognize that all people possess both feminine and masculine characteristics and that the labeling of characteristics as "feminine" or "masculine" has more to do with cultural bias than with being female or male.

Before the session. Tape together two pieces of newsprint at the narrow end to form one long piece. Draw the following gender spectrum on the paper:

Totally Feminine	Totally Masculine

1. Distribute handout 1-B, "The Gender Spectrum," and review the instructions on it. Give the young people 3 to 4 minutes to complete the handout. While they are filling in their circles, post the copy of the gender spectrum that you drew before class.

2. Draw the group's attention to the posted gender spectrum chart. Then select about ten characteristics from handout 1-B that are stereotypically identified with one sex. Examples might include talkative, gentle, or protective (stereotypically feminine characteristics), or aggressive, practical, or logical (stereotypically masculine characteristics). Ask the group members to decide where they would place each characteristic along the spectrum. Write the characteristic under the appropriate place on the spectrum. Tape on more pieces of newsprint if needed.

3. Invite the young people to re-examine their responses to part 2 of handout 1-B. Ask them to assign a masculine or feminine label to each of the characteristics listed in their circles and then add up how many masculine and how many feminine traits they have. (Note that they should feel free to label a particular trait differently than the group did.) When they are finished, they are to compare their initial self-placement along the gender spectrum (in part 1) with their tally of their masculine and feminine traits.

While the young people are completing the exercise, begin preparing the room for prayer by lighting candles (leave the lights on until the actual prayer begins), setting up the music, setting out the Bibles, and doing whatever else is needed to transform the room into a prayerful space.

4. Draw the exercise to a close by inviting the young people to offer any insights they have gained. If the following points do not surface from the group, add them yourself:

- In reality, every person, male or female, possesses characteristics that we label as “masculine” and “feminine.” How these traits are combined varies from person to person—that is why each of us is unique. For example, there are varying degrees of being “affectionate.” Someone who is only slightly affectionate might show affection with just a pat on the back. A very affectionate person might show affection with a hug and a kiss.
- How a trait is labeled as feminine or masculine is largely determined by the culture in which we live. A characteristic labeled masculine in our culture might be considered feminine in another culture, or vice versa.

Tell the group to keep handout 1-B because it will be used in the upcoming prayer experience.

H Scripture Reflection and Prayer (10 minutes)

In the closing Scripture reflection and prayer, the group continues to think in new ways about being male or female. The young people learn that Jesus expressed both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Before the session. Mark the following Scripture passages in the Bibles you have collected (one passage per Bible). Write the assigned number of the passage on the marker so that the readers will know when it is their turn to read:

1. Matt. 21:12–13
2. Matt. 26:39
3. Mark 15:34
4. Luke 19:41–42
5. John 15:15
6. Matt. 23:25
7. Mark 14:33–34
8. Luke 10:21
9. John 11:33,35

1. Call for volunteers to read the Scripture passages and distribute the Bibles to them. Complete the transformation of the room into a space for prayer by lowering the lights and playing soft, reflective music.

2. Relate to the group that Jesus, our role model and guide, was someone who possessed many characteristics of both genders. Invite the young people to pay attention to Jesus’ actions, emotions, and other traits as they listen to the passages.

Direct the young person with the first passage to read it slowly. Pause a moment or two before asking for the second passage. Continue in this manner until all the passages have been read.

3. Summarize some of Jesus’ actions, emotions, and other characteristics as reflected in the Scripture readings. Point out how he showed many emotions, from anger to fear to tears. He was forceful and peaceful, spiritual and active, quiet and loud. He could be gentle and warm and assertive and direct. He enjoyed being with friends and being alone. He embraced both men and women. He was humble and patient as well as confrontational and stern.

Invite the young people to draw a cross on their handout’s gender chart where they feel Jesus fits on the spectrum.

4. Conclude the experience with a brief prayer such as this:

- Gracious, loving God, you created each of us, male and female, in your likeness and image. We lift up our heart and thank you for the gift of life, and for the wondrous gift of our sexuality.

We thank you for sending us your son, Jesus, to show us how to be more fully human. Help us to express your Divine Presence within us.

Let us not be afraid to let both our masculine and our feminine sides shine through. Keep us from putting ourselves and others in categories that deny our full humanity and uniqueness.

We turn to you in prayer with Jesus in our midst. Amen.

After the prayer, congratulate the group members on their good work for the session and remind them of the meeting time of the next session.

Alternative Approaches

After reading through the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to add a step to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step H. If time is running short at the end of the gender spectrum activity and you think the prayer experience will take too long, use the following reading instead. Invite the young people to join hands in a circle (preferably alternating boy-girl).

Introduce the reading with a comment such as this:

- God created human beings, male and female, in God’s own image and likeness. Jesus came to show us how to live in more fully human ways. This means celebrating our sexuality as a wonderful gift and expressing in love both our feminine and our masculine sides.

Then slowly and prayerfully read the following poem:

- And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world
that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to
another’s will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way
to the needs of many
And then all will share equally
in the Earth’s abundance
And then all will care for the sick
and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life’s creatures
And then all will live in harmony
with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden
once again.

(Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, p. 256)

Journal Options for Between Sessions

If you decide to add a journal component to the course, the suggested format is to have the participants do their journal writing between sessions.

After completing the gender spectrum exercise, assign the following questions for journal reflection:

- In what ways do you feel boxed in by yourself or others? Write about a specific experience of being stereotyped and its impact on you.

- What do you consider to be the characteristics that most clearly define you as a male or a female? What impact do these traits have on your relationships with others? Offer a specific example.

Family Connections

- Suggest to the participants that they discuss with their parents any sexual stereotypes the parents grew up with in their homes. Encourage the participants to question their parents on the standards in their home now and why those standards exist.
- Pass out extra copies of handout 1-B and invite the young people to share them with their parents or siblings to see where they place themselves on the spectrum and why.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Closing Teacher Prayer

God, protector of young people, be present to all the young people this day, and thank you for letting me share their enthusiasm and spirit.

Allow me to be a path of your unconditional love in the coming weeks, as together we come to recognize the beautiful work of art you have created each of us to be. Amen.



Evaluation

Take a few moments after the session to record your impressions and observations of what worked and what needed improvement. Write your thoughts in the spaces provided, for future reference.

1. What really worked well in this session?

2. What would you change about this session?

3. Circle the number on the following scale that, on the whole, reflects how you would rate this session:

Poor				Average				Excellent	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. What are the reasons for your rating?

5. What do you need to follow up on?

Questions and Concerns for Session 2

Part 1: Sex Survey

Check the areas below that you would like discussed during the next session. Then use the spaces provided to spell out any specific questions or concerns that you would like addressed.

AIDS, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS): _____

body parts: _____

church teachings on sexuality: _____

contraception and risks: _____

homosexuality: _____

masturbation and arousal: _____

menstruation (periods): _____

pornography: _____

pregnancy: _____

puberty and sexual development: _____

sexual abuse, date rape, and incest: _____

sexually transmitted diseases: _____

wet dreams and spontaneous erections: _____

other (list): _____

Part 2: Dear Wise Wanda

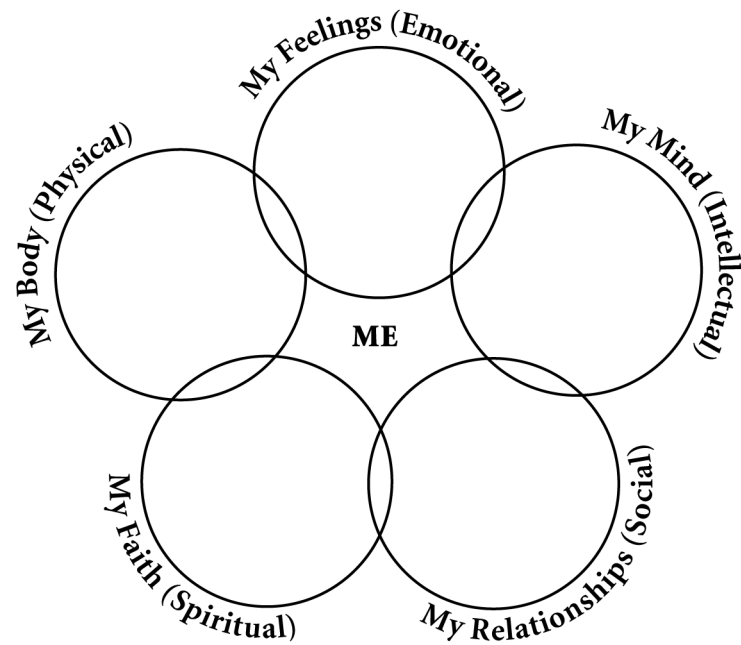
On a separate piece of paper, write a brief letter to Dear Wise Wanda concerning a specific issue or question about sex or sexuality that you or a friend may want advice about. Please keep the letter brief, serious, and anonymous—do not use real names or schools.

THE Gender SPECTRUM

Part 1 Using your intuition (going with your gut feeling, rather than thinking about it), mark where you feel you fit on the following gender spectrum:



Part 2 Inside each circle, write three characteristics that best describe you. Use the list for ideas, but feel free to include other terms.



-
- | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|------------|
| trustworthy | talkative | questioning | reliable | logical |
| loving | competitive | loyal | vengeful | ambitious |
| caring | decisive | free-spirited | assertive | courageous |
| responsible | independent | helpless | protective | confident |
| private | snobbish | reckless | passive | dramatic |
| funny | manipulative | gentle | practical | silent |
| athletic | peaceful | curious | affectionate | timid |
| aggressive | angry | sensitive | disciplined | romantic |
| | | strong | | |