

The Dallas Morning News

Sex Ed 101

By: Daniel Gowan

I guess we should all feel better now that NBC's Katie Couric has given us the code words that teens are using around sex. We can all sleep better with the knowledge that "hooking up" has multiple meanings and that "friends with benefits" does not include health care. It makes for titillating T.V. but how does this information, or the statistic that 4 of 10 fifteen-sixteen year olds have had sex, help us in our community. This subject is not going to go away, and I am sure that it will be controversial to our children's grandchildren as it is to us. It amazes me however how our society wants to argue and delegate around sex education. Should it be in the school? Should the school teach abstinence? What about safe sex? Should STD's be talked about? Where have our kids gone to find out about sex?

I would suggest that we have confused the issue. From an educational point of view, of course we need to teach biology. The reproductive system in the human species is not about values, it is a matter of fact. And our kids need to know these facts.

It is the issue of the timing about reproduction, methods of birth control and issues of sexually transmitted diseases that cause the discussion to heat up. As a counselor and as a minister I offer that *these issues of value and morality do not belong to the government, but rather, to the family, and by extension, the church.* Sexuality is a gift from God, one meant to be enjoyed, expressed and appreciated. This is not a new role for the church, i.e., discussions of morality, simply one that the church needs to reclaim.

Where have you stepped up to enhance the biology lesson with discussions of morality and values with your children? How do you model respect for the other sex in your relationship with your spouse? When have you discussed the differences between men and women and their approach to visual images? How has this discussion informed the way your daughter dresses in public? I am not a prude, but I was dumbfounded last week to see a well developed female teenager 14-15 years old wearing a revealing t-shirt (she had ripped it to show cleavage) with the inscription on the front that said "Porn Star." She was shopping with her mother. How have you talked with your son about pornography and the relationship between these images and real life relationships?

Personally, I do not want PISD teaching morality to my children. That is not their job (and by the way, they don't want it), but becomes their responsibility when we saddle them with teaching anything other than biology. I do however, expect my church to step up to the plate here. Sex education needs to be a process, not a one-time discussion. As kids age, we need to continue to address it as their experience and understanding increases. The pastoral counselor in me tells me that our churches need to be the voice in the wilderness on this issue. We need to provide this structure, influence, support and safety to our kids.

If you think a "just say no" campaign is working, you have your head in the sand.

Daniel Gowan is a Presbyterian minister who offers private counseling at St. Andrew United Methodist Church in Plano. His practice focuses on family issues and addiction. He and his wife are the parents of two adolescents. He can be reached at dgowan@ispwest.com or at 214-291-8077.



214-291-8077