
Teaching My Younger Sister About Sex and Love: Countering "Going To Do It Anyway"

by Jessica Burberry, Teacher

I recently completed a graduate course in character education in which we were required to carry out an "action project." For my project I chose to use character-based sex education to try to instill in my younger sister and her friend the self-respect, self-control, and courage needed to lead moral, fulfilling, and healthy lives.

I wanted to inform my 14-year-old sister Kathy about something that I unfortunately just began to take seriously: abstinence. Sure, I have always known what the word meant, but I had never considered it an option for me, until recently. I felt that it was my responsibility to pass the philosophy of abstinence on to my sister because I know that she will not get it in the "going to do it anyway" program that is used at her high school. Also, she is a virgin (her friend is, too), so I wanted to show her how important it is to hold onto that purity.

I started these discussions when I accidentally overheard my sister Kathy, and her friend, Michelle, talking about a "slut" that one of their friends was dating. I asked them why they considered her a slut, and Michelle responded: "She has slept with at least eight guys already, and she is easy." I asked them to think about why this girl is so promiscuous. Kathy said, "She's trying to keep a boyfriend." They assumed that having sex was a way of holding onto a boyfriend and showing love for one another. They also assumed that condoms would protect them from disease and pregnancy and that having sex had no implications for their future adult lives. My goal was to dispel all these myths.

We first tackled the issue of sex as "showing love" or "keeping a boyfriend." I used the girl they were talking about as an example of how boyfriends come and go whether girls have intercourse with them or not. We also talked about girls' feelings when they are rejected after giving part of themselves to another person. I then told them about my having pre-marital sex, and how I wished these relationships had never occurred and that the only true way to find out if a guy loves you is to make him wait until marriage.

The True Meaning of Love

We talked about the self-respect and courage involved in leading sexually abstinent lives until marriage. These two young girls developed a new awareness of how truly loving relationships and commitments develop and are sustained. Their awareness was evident in their response to my disclosing that I recently told my boyfriend that I wanted to abstain from sex from now on and he said he could not do this. I asked Kathy and Michelle if they thought the relationship was worth continuing, and they both said, "No, he does not love you if he won't wait for you." I was proud of their answer.

I also wanted to make these girls aware of the physical dangers of pre-marital sex. I gave real-life examples of teens who became pregnant or who contracted STDs even with the use of condoms; one of those persons was a close friend of mine. They were shocked to find out that this friend contracted herpes from sexual intercourse while using a condom. We considered the possible implications of such diseases: the inability to conceive a baby, passing on a sexual disease to your spouse, and transmitting a disease to your baby in the womb or during delivery.

Besides being more confident in their virginity, Kathy and Michelle have now set the personal goal of saving sex for marriage. They also no longer pick apart boys or girls who are sexually active by calling them "sluts" or "pimps" but instead focus on the deeper consequences of such behaviors and on what promiscuous girls and boys must be lacking in their lives.

My sister and Michelle have recently asked two of their friends to join us in our discussions. I've also shared my project with the parents of these girls. These parents are beginning to realize that abstinence-based sex education is more beneficial than the model now used at their daughters' high school. ■

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