

How to talk to kids about LGBTQ

The “birds and the bees” talk is a thing of the past – or it should be. Now, more than ever, children need honest conversations about sexuality to be part of everyday family life. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer: it’s not a matter of “if” but “when” children will encounter an unfamiliar term or alternate perspective on sexuality. How can we as parents, mentors and church leaders talk about these issues with each other and with our children in ways that honour the God we love and serve?

1 Before starting the conversation, be informed about the issues.

- Don’t stick your head in the sand. Our culture’s values on gender, sex and marriage don’t line up with the way we understand the Bible – and that’s not likely to change. We need to understand our culture and affirm God’s design.
- Understand and use the current terminology, read articles, watch the news, talk with your spouse and good friends in preparation for discussions with children.

2 Regularly affirm the truths we learn from the Bible:

- God’s Word is our authority for life (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- Each person is created in God’s image, fearfully and wonderfully made, regardless of life choices or circumstances (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:14).
- Each person is sinful, and if we continue in unrepentant sin, we will not receive eternal life (Romans 3:23, 6:23).
- Jesus Christ is the solution to the problem of sin. We are called to confess our sins, repent and live in submission to God’s Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Romans 10:9; 1 John 1:5–10).
- God’s design for sex is only between one man and one woman inside the covenant

of marriage (Genesis 2:24). And even within marriage, we are to pursue holy sexuality (1 Peter 1:14–16).

- All sexual activity outside God’s design is sin. For example, adultery, living together before marriage, pornography, same-sex sexual behaviour (Leviticus 18–20; Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20).

Nevertheless, we are not robots. Teach children that we can each choose to follow God’s design (obey God) – even when it is difficult – or we can choose not to follow God’s design (sin).

3 Read the Bible regularly with children.

- The stories offer many opportunities to bring up challenging words and topics. As you read, ask, “Do you know what *[this word/phrase]* means?” (E.g., Abraham “knew” Sarah. Other words like harem, rape, prostitute, circumcision, etc., are pathways to conversations on difficult subjects around sexuality and gender.)

4 Teach children how to treat all people with respect and love.

- It is not okay to reject, abandon or treat anyone with disgust. We are to be kind, polite and respectful even if we disagree with someone’s lifestyle and choices.

- Find ways to build relationships with family members and friends whose views conflict with your own. (E.g., pray for them, send “Happy Birthday” texts or cards, deliver care packages, invite to picnics, etc.)

5 Find ways to expose children (gently) to these issues while they are in your care.

- If you wait for children to ask questions, they may not ever speak up. Here are some ideas to help initiate conversations: get involved with neighbours who are different from your family, read articles out loud at home, talk about what you see on TV, etc.
- Have discussions with another trusted adult where children can “overhear” you.
- If a child is exposed to perspectives on sexuality that are new to them, capitalize on the teaching opportunity.
- Expect unexpected questions from children at unexpected times. You can respond with, “That’s a good question. Let me think about it, and we will talk later as we drive to soccer.”
- Try not to discuss any difficult or emotional topics right before bed. Bedtime should be a peaceful time of day.

6 Regularly, using the appropriate level of detail for the child's development, discuss the language and concepts of sexuality and gender.

- Ask the child, "What are some words you are hearing (at school or baseball or...)?" Some children are more comfortable writing these words down rather than saying them out loud.
- Explain swear words and your family rules around these words.
- Explain all the different words for private body parts (both proper and crude words).
- Explain the terminology behind LGBTQ:
 - Lesbian = a woman who identifies as romantically or sexually attracted to another woman. It is not helpful to say "a woman who likes women."
 - Transgender = a person who believes that their mind does not match up with their physical anatomy. E.g., a person is biologically female, but in this person's mind, they feel like a man. This person's response may or may not involve surgery or hormone treatment.
- Discuss how to disagree with behaviours, yet have compassion for people. Sexual identity often causes significant anxiety, distress, confusion, depression, despair and hatred of self. Talk about some examples in your own relationships.

7 What if a child/teenager experiences same-sex attraction? Or is confused about their gender?

- Stay calm and reassure the child that you – and God – love them no matter what.
- Seek help from a trusted Christian pastor, counsellor, family member or friend, while protecting the child's privacy.

- Listen to the child and ask clarifying questions. Pray with them for God's help in this struggle.
- Teach the child that God created people to be male or female, but there is a vast spectrum of how "maleness" and "femaleness" can be lived out. (E.g., boys can be emotional and enjoy art and drama. Girls can enjoy extreme sports and prefer activity to talking about feelings.)

Remind your children that how we feel does not determine our identity: God's adoption of us as his children does. As Christians, we recognize that our feelings may change, but God's Word endures forever.

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