

The toddler and sex

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*The*  
**TODDLER**  
AND  
**SEX**





# THE TODDLER AND SEX

*Points for Parents of the Pre-School Child*

*prepared by*

THE BARCLAY STREET INSTITUTE  
OF CATHOLIC ACTION



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## FOREWORD

*The Barclay Street Institute of Catholic Action* is an organization set up under the auspices of Old St. Peter's Church of Barclay Street, New York. Its purpose is to enhance the opportunity of Catholic business men and women of lower New York to achieve their destiny of knowing, loving and serving God in this world and being happy with Him forever in the next. The Barclay Street Institute functions through various activities, such as St. Peter's Catholic Lending Library, Study Clubs, Forums and the like, and through various groups. One of these latter is a small group of business and professional men having the two interlocking objectives of Catholic Action, the bringing of Christ to a greater degree into their own lives and, as far as in them lies, the bringing of Christ through organized effort into the lives of those around them.

In its pursuit of this second objective the group, consisting principally of young married men with families of their own, selected the Family as its special field of activity, and as perhaps the most immediately pressing problem of the family the delicate and complicated matter of sex instruction for children. After much study and much personal heart-searching on the subject, and almost endless discussion, the group has produced the text which follows. It is addressed to the parents themselves, and putting first things first deals with the parent and the very young child. It is planned, in separate publications to be issued later, to take up the more complicated problems that going to school and adolescence bring into the picture.

The Men's Group gratefully acknowledge the valuable

assistance and suggestions of the Very Reverend Monsignor John J. Voight, Superintendent of Schools, Archdiocese of New York; the Very Reverend Monsignor Charles M. Walsh, Director, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; the Reverend Michael F. Dwyer, Director, Cardinal's Campaign for Foster Homes, and Mariette Keane.

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me,” said Our Saviour to His followers. “Suffer your little children to come unto you” might be described as the theme of the pamphlet. Do not drive them away when they ask you *How* or *Why*, nor evade their questions, nor show embarrassment. Above all, do not ridicule them, for to whom should they go if not to you?

It is our hope that the message of this pamphlet may be of help to all parents, especially—the majority? — those dubious and hesitant as to what to say when questions commence. We respectfully place it at your disposal.

RIGHT REVEREND MONSIGNOR EDWARD ROBERTS MOORE,  
*Spiritual Director, Business and Professional Men's Group,  
The Barclay Street Institute of Catholic Action.*

PIUS XII, in his Allocution to Catholic Mothers, October 21, 1941, said:

“Train the minds of your children. Do not give them wrong ideas or wrong reasons for things; whatever their questions may be, do not answer them with evasions or untrue statements which their minds rarely accept, but take occasion from them lovingly and patiently to train their minds, which want only to open to the truth and to grasp it with the first ingenuous gropings of their reasoning and reflective powers.”



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## **SEX EDUCATION OF OUR PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN**

Written by parents to parents, this pamphlet proposes an examination into the serious problem of the sex education of our pre-adolescent children. Since this subject is so vast, we plan no exhaustive treatment but an examination into its various facets. This is the first of a contemplated series of pamphlets, each considering a different age group.

We offer for your consideration some thoughts and suggestions on the following points: (1) the responsibility of parents for sex education of their pre-school children; (2) the importance of sex education; (3) the dividing line in this field between parents and the various agencies intimately linked with the subject (these include the State, the Church and interested social agencies); (4) some thoughts on the nature of sex education itself; (5) consideration of the interest in the subject displayed by pre-adolescents and a brief outline of methods usable for answering their questions; (6) finally, a suggested plan for self-aid by formation of community or parochial "parent educator" groups.

## **The Responsibility of Parents for Sex Education**

As parents we have co-operated with God in producing new beings to honor Him. We co-operated with Him in producing the body of our child and He created the soul He infused into that body. As human beings, possessed of free will, we can do things that dishonor Him. Since our leadership will direct our children toward the type of adult they will become, then our direction can help them in their true goal of honoring God. What has this to do with sex education? Simply this: major "road blocks" in our children's path to God are problems surrounding sex.

Under normal circumstances no one but a parent can properly instruct pre-school children in sex matters. Constant companionship and deep interest enable parents to gauge the child's mind and mood with greater accuracy than anyone else. Parents are in the best position to give simple, truthful and timely answers to the questions of our pre-adolescents. The careful and gradual unfolding of God's plan is thus naturally interwoven with the rest of the child's development through early youth. This results in the child having a clean and healthy sense of values.

No two children are identical and no one other than the parent realizes the fine line of distinction between growing human beings; no one other than a

parent has the bond of flesh and blood which allows for an almost instinctive understanding of this difference between children. In addition, under normal circumstances, only a parent is physically available to the average child when a question pops into the child's mind. Finally, on this point, only a parent can blend the whole question into the daily life of the child and surround his education on the subject with the moral aspects involving considerations of total life.

### **Importance of Sex Education of Our Pre-School Children**

Since temptations are inevitable, the child must be trained from earliest years to meet them with every weapon which God has placed within reach; these aids include prayer, the Sacraments, a wholesome environment, training of the will, a healthy body and *sound instruction*. In this pamphlet we stress the last of the above mentioned aids, since it is the one most often neglected.

Despite contradictory reasons, there is no known school of thought which does not appreciate the importance of sex education of the child from earliest years. Some schools, with the best of intentions, consider the problem as purely a physiological one; they argue that merely exposing the child to a complete course in the anatomical and other physiological fea-

tures of the sex problem will remove any improper tendencies on the part of the child; that through such training, the child will become chaste.

This mistaken emphasis on the biological and hygienic aspects of the problem to the exclusion of the moral considerations is a tragic blunder. The problem is primarily moral; physiology plays an important but secondary part. Every adult realizes that the instinct of sex, uncontrolled, is a powerful agency of moral deterioration. It must be controlled and directed in conformity with the Will of God. The basis of our contention is that proper sex instruction is essential but is only one phase of the training in chastity.

Lack of timely and adequate sex instruction by parents is an important contributing factor to the many physical, social and spiritual evils afflicting modern man. The mental and physical self-discipline essential to chastity is far more easily developed when there is a healthy knowledge and understanding of the subject of sex.

Despite this, there are far too many of us who set up taboos on the sex question; too many of us feel the sex act is something to be done only because it is a duty as a partner in marriage. From those who feel that way emerge the children burdened with false ideas stemming from roots dug deep in earliest childhood.

Such parents place a heavy and needless cross both on their own married life and the lives of their children. We hope this pamphlet induces action against this misinterpretation of an important healthy, pleasurable and sacred function.

### **The Dividing Line Between Parents and Agencies Involved**

A difficult problem exists in the field of sex education induced by the failure of parents to assume their responsibilities and, secondly, because of the natural interest shown in the subject by the State, the Church and social agencies in the field.

We trust and pray that parents will, as their awareness and knowledge increase, solve this problem. The interest of social agencies can be most helpful and frequently is highly desirable. The Church and the State have also great and important contributions to make and may be called upon to safeguard against abuses by parents. But their interest should be that of a supporter rather than a usurper of parental prerogatives.

As we have indicated, parents have the primary right to educate because they are the normal, natural teachers of their children. The complexities of modern life have, however, resulted in parents calling upon

the State, the Church and other agencies to assist them in this task. By this use of proffered assistance, however, parents have not abdicated their fundamental prerogative; actually it is not within the power of a parent, except in certain circumstances, to do so. Especially in the field of sex education, the parent must not allow anyone to usurp his rights and duties. Parents may, however, gratefully use assistance from varied sources, such as teachers, pediatricians, nurses, social workers, clergymen and nuns, but the major responsibility remains with them.

Even under the best of conditions, an outside agency can never present the matter with the privacy and selectivity so easily obtained at home. No outside agency is in the position to choose the exact time for presentation of the subject, nor is it physically in the position to do so at this time. No agency can substitute for the parent in deciding whether the time is ripe for detailed or cursory discussion. The outsider who would substitute for the parent would have to be an extremely clever psychologist, equipped with a great wealth of learning, experience and religious zeal. But the parent, by God's providence, needs to be only an average person, with ordinary common sense, plus knowledge and an active religious motivation.

Behind this thinking lies the fact that no two children are identical. No two people have the same

emotional and mental makeup. Common discussion and presentation may arouse varied emotional reactions which a parent-child conversation would not. Common handling of this delicate subject breaks down the protective barrier carefully erected over the centuries by civilization.

### **The Nature of Sex Education**

The primary point in sex education is stress on the fact that sex is good and not evil, and was designed by God as such. Sex can result in great evil when the individual ceases to be its master and becomes its slave; or when any individual uses it in violation of God's plan. But we must never forget that God created mankind male and female, blessed them and commanded them to increase and multiply. The family was the first social unit established by God, and when parents bring a child into the world they act in partnership with God who has simultaneously endowed that child with an immortal soul; that child will become a temple of the Holy Ghost, literally a tabernacle through the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Therefore, sex instruction should be wholly rounded to consider all aspects, not only the physical but the moral and psychic aspects as well. We parents should strive to instill in our children a complete realization

of the orderly happiness accompanying the habit of sinlessness, the habit of a virtuous life. Instruction in chastity cannot limit itself to biological aspects. These must be clearly explained but always with the deep overtone of their purpose in God's plan.

Chastity is not achieved without great struggle. Man has a fallen nature inherited from our first parents. Because of this inheritance we tend strongly to misuse our natures in order to satisfy our sensual desires. We seek pleasure in overeating and commit the sin of gluttony; we pervert the natural end of our faculty of speech and commit the sin of lying; we refuse to endure hard work and commit the sin of laziness. To overcome these and similar tendencies and earn Heaven we must build up our power to resist temptation and to do good. That power does not come naturally but requires hard, hard work. It is work required of parents and children alike. And it is the most important kind of work because without it our chances of salvation are slight.

### **Interest Displayed by Pre-School Children**

It must be remembered that we are not considering in this pamphlet the terrific problems of adolescents torn and swayed in the tides and surges of nascent passions. The pre-adolescent, on the other hand, has no



particular thoughts on sin and sex. Questions are thoroughly innocent, natural and proper. But they are questions, and if the parent looks shocked, is evasive or ridicules the child, the child will hesitate to ask again, and will look elsewhere for information. The seed of a suspicion that sex is evil has been planted.

Analyses have been made of the typical questions asked by pre-adolescents and they fall into four general classes, each of which can be answered simply, directly and reverentially by any parent.

1. Why is Johnny or Mary made differently than I am? (Area of bodily difference.)
2. Where does a baby come from? (Origin of life.)
3. How does the baby get out? (Childbirth.)
4. How did it get there in the first place? (Sexual intercourse.)

There is one important factor common to each of the above. None is concerned with any of the emotional disturbances normally surrounding considerations of sex. Each is concerned with, at most, origins and the mechanics of natural things. They follow the

usual lines of childhood questions. Why should not a child ask "Where does the train come from?" "How did it get to this station?" "Who made the train?" "What's the difference between a train and a car?" Answers to questions such as these are always confidently answered by the ever present Mommy or Daddy. Why should not the same Daddy and Mommy be equally quick with answers on matters equally natural?

These questions in the sex field are asked with no more intensity than any other question. The answers should be framed with the same casualness and, depending on each child, with the same thoroughness with which other questions on nature are answered.

The presentation by the parent requires clear understanding, faith, patience and common sense against the background of parent-child intimacy. It is common sense that such instruction within the home be individual, private and suited to the need of the child at the particular moment. It is common sense, too, that says: tell the truth; don't go into unnecessary detail; be natural. Observation proves that the pre-school child will quickly forget both question and answer, and ask the same question a number of times. Nevertheless, the willingness of the parent to answer greatly strengthens the bond of confidence between the child and parent.

The importance of handling these questions properly in pre-adolescence is the fact that they will not have to be asked again during puberty if answered properly during pre-puberty days. As any parent will testify, puberty greatly complicates the problem and a groundwork of positive instruction, character building, training in prayerfulness and love of our Blessed Mother laid before those difficult days makes puberty so much less dreadful a problem. Also, to even the most harassed child, the source of information has been established, the parent rather than the "gutter." Thus not only is the child strengthened but the family structure as well.

### **Community or Parochial "Parent Educator" Groups**

Small groups of parents are a great help in solving the problem of "what, when and how to say it." The formation of such groups can be discussed at any activity attended exclusively by adults. Meetings of married women's societies and of parent-teacher associations are particularly appropriate places at which to initiate the formation of such groups.

The groups may consist of married couples meeting occasionally at each other's homes with a group leader. This leader need not be an "expert" but should be familiar with the subject. He or she may have to

initiate the discussion, stimulate it, or confine it to the subject. He or she may have to assist parents who are diffident about expressing their views and problems.

The purpose of such groups is for exchange of ideas and information on the many problems connected with raising children, including sex instruction. Leaders must be constantly on guard to prevent such meetings from degenerating into mere *social* functions. Standard printed matter should be available for reference to the group and to individual members.

In conclusion: there is no escape for parents from their obligation to instruct their children in sex matters. We have the inescapable obligation of impressing on them the need of traveling the road of positive good; children must know that this cannot be accomplished by man alone; he needs God's aid. This aid He gives us freely and died for us to prove He wanted to give it. We must help our children to use these aids. We must school them and help them in the continued use of prayer and the Sacraments. When they have fallen into sin we must aid them to go immediately to the source of forgiveness for not only is separation from the life of Grace deadly to any soul but a habit of sin once formed is far more difficult to overcome than an occasional error. As parents we must remember that our children's souls are steered by us toward Heaven or Hell. We must give them a hatred of sin,

the natural knowledge God intended them to have and a positive love of virtue, principally by example. With these aids, our children will move toward God in such a manner, that even if, like St. Augustine, they slip, they will turn back to God even as he, with the significant example of his saintly mother before him.

## THE TODDLER'S FIRST QUESTIONS

### Basic Guiding Principles

These principles are so important in formulating the parent's own attitude that they should become a part of the parent's thinking. Do not hesitate to consult your priest or doctor for advice. The subjoined questions are merely samples of the thousands of different questions that may be asked by very young children.

The final object is to help your children to save their souls and to lead useful and happy lives. This goal can be obtained only when proper emphasis is placed respectively upon religious instruction, training, character building, sound education and bodily health. Nothing in the world will take the place of prayer, the Sacraments and good example. Obviously, in the complete training of the child, information about sex is merely one phase, but a very important one.

1. If you do not tell your children the facts about sex, they will get misinformation, along with some very bad habits and some dangerous temptations. They will get the twisted point of view that sex itself is dirty and they will gloat in secret over things which they should regard as holy.

2. Sex is holy, planned by God Himself. Marriage is a Sacrament. Sexual intercourse, within marriage, is sacred in character and is blessed by God. The protecting veil of modesty (which should never be destroyed) is thrown about it and impurity may be visited by terrible penalties of body and soul. You may feel some embarrassment about sex. The very young child feels none for there is no sin or knowledge of sin in his background. You must consciously and persistently train yourself to realize that the sex faculty, used as God intended, is good. This correction of your own attitude is, perhaps, the most fundamental practical difficulty you will encounter. You must never let the child get the idea that sex in itself is something dirty or shameful. You must remind him, whenever questions arise, that he is talking about something which God has ordained and consecrated.

3. As our language has no colloquial words for the genital organs except vulgar expressions, you must use proper terms. (See Glossary on Page 30.) It would help for you, when alone, to repeat the names of the genital organs aloud until you are thoroughly familiar with the words themselves and are no longer afraid to say them.

4. Individual instruction in private is important. Public discussion may destroy modesty. Each child is different from the others. Each has his own tem-

perament, his own moods, his own moments for wanting to know, his own capacity to understand.

5. (a) The child's questions should be answered *when he first asks them*, no matter how young he may be. The very young child has no thought about sin or sex. He merely wants to know and he has a strict right in justice to know.

(b) His interest is momentary and his questions can readily be answered briefly and simply and without embarrassment. Suppose your child asks you a question in public? Of course questions asked in public must be put off until later. The child will soon learn that you are not "dodging" anything, but that sex questions, like bathroom questions, are simply not discussed in public. The opportunity should be taken to point out that a child does not discuss these matters with anyone except his parents.

6. Is your answer to a child's questions the most important point? No, your manner in answering is even more important. Be easy, be casual; be gentle, be reverent; be brief; and be truthful. Do not look shocked or embarrassed. Never laugh. Never tell in front of the child what "he said."

7. How much should you tell your child? Don't try to make your answers too complete; the shorter the better. The very young child has a limited interest. He requires very little information, and that of the



simplest sort. Too much detail would confuse him. Brief generalities are recommended for the very young, with more details added when called for; but we must not, by resorting to generalities, dodge giving the further details at the right time. Such words as "vagina" and "penis" should be explained frankly and simply when required.

8. The child may ask the same questions many times. He quickly learns that you are the easiest person in the world to ask. This is one reason why God has entrusted this child to you. He will be more apt to come to you with the problems of adolescence if you have laid this groundwork.

9. The child's curiosity is universal. He has interest in all parts of his body. Consequently he will be interested in the sexual organs of the body as well as other parts of the body. At first, the child will not understand all that you say to him. But in his own way, in his own time, he will put it together and begin to understand, in the same way as he begins to understand about all the other things in the new world into which he has come.

10. As the child grows, point out, again and again, that all of this is God's plan. Mention family love as shown in the Bible stories, the Holy Family, the care our heavenly Father takes of us, the Joyful mysteries of the Rosary, so that the child may come gradually

to realize that human reproduction is really part of a pattern of love and beauty and holiness, traced by God Himself for peopling Heaven with His children.

11. No one gives what he has not got. If a parent is going to give a child an appreciation of the beauty and holiness of the creative power of sex the parent must build this appreciation in himself. Such appreciation cannot exist as an isolated spiritual concept. It must be part of the prayerful, sacramental and sacrificial life to which all true parents are called by God. Perhaps the failure of many parents to handle this difficult matter successfully lies right here, namely, in their failure to build a sound integrated spirituality of their own.

12. Many of the questions suggested below may not be asked for a long time, and then, in a very round-about way. Every household and every child is different. Be ready to answer the questions when they are asked and make the answer short and simple. Indication of the place of the organs can be more general until it is understood that the child demands local knowledge.

13. You need not follow the exact wording of the answers given below. They are merely examples of what may be said. However, do use the correct names for the sex organs.

## SOME TYPICAL QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

Q. Where do I come from?

A. God made you; God made me; God made Daddy (Mother); God made everyone and everything in the whole world.

Q. How did God make me?

A. You came from inside Mother. All babies come from their mothers. The Baby Jesus came from His Mother.

Q. How did I come from inside Mother?

A. Babies grow inside their mothers. When they are big enough and able, they come out. Christmas is the day the Baby Jesus was born.

Q. Where are the babies in their mothers?

A. They're very small and they're right about here (indicating). The place where the baby is, is called the womb. It's a nice, soft, warm place. Remember? — We say to our Blessed Mother in the Hail Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus."

Q. Does it hurt the baby?

A. No, it is very nice and warm in the mother's womb.

Q. How can the baby breathe?

A. The baby doesn't have to breathe when it's inside its mother. It gets all its food and everything it needs from its mother, something like a little bird in an egg.

Q. How does the baby start?

A. There is a tiny egg in mother's womb which grows into a baby when a seed gets into it.

Q. Where does the seed come from?

A. From father.

Q. Where does the father have the seed?

A. In a little sac or bag called the scrotum.

Q. How does the seed get in the mother?

A. The father places it there.

Q. How does the father put the seed in the mother?

A. The father uses his penis to place the seed inside the mother.

Q. What is the penis?

A. It is a special part of the body which all boys have for that purpose.

Q. Where does the father put the penis?

A. Inside the mother's vagina.

Q. What is the vagina?

A. It is an opening in the body that all girls have for that purpose.

Q. How does the baby get out?

A. When it is ready it comes out through the vagina — the same opening the seed went in. When the baby comes out we say it is born. Usually the doctor helps the baby get born.

Q. How long is the baby inside the mother?

A. About nine months after it starts.

Q. Why does it take so long?

A. The baby has to grow from a little seed into a real baby. It takes a long time.

Q. Do all babies have a father and a mother?

A. Yes. God wants the baby to have a father and mother to love him and take care of him.

Q. Why is Mrs. X so fat?

A. She is going to have a baby. Isn't that nice!

Q. Are you going to have a baby?

A. (If not pregnant): No, not now.

(If pregnant): Yes, I hope so, in about — months. See, this is where the baby is (indicating). Let's say a prayer for the baby.

Q. How do you have a boy baby or a girl baby?

A. We don't know ahead of time. God makes it a boy or a girl. We love boys and girls just the same.

Q. How can you have another baby after you had a baby?

A. After the baby is born God makes it so that another seed from the father and the mother can get together and another baby is started.

Q. Can I have a baby?

A. (To a boy): No—boys can't have babies—but when you grow up and marry you can be a father.

(To a girl): Yes, when you grow up and marry.

Q. Why do I have to grow up first?

A. God makes it so that the seeds aren't in boys and girls until they get big. God wants parents to have babies and make a home for them like our home.

Q. Can you have a baby without being married?

A. You could; but God wants only married people to have babies. He wants the father and mother to love each other and take care of the baby.

Q. Can father have babies?

A. No, only mothers have babies.

Q. Why is sister different from me?

A. Sister will grow up to be a woman like mother.  
You will grow up to be a man like father.

Q. Is our cat married?

A. No. People go to church and get married. They know about God, and God wants them to be married before they have babies. But cats are *animals*. Father cats and mother cats don't have churches and don't get married.

Q. Does God make babies?

A. God makes fathers and mothers so they can have babies, and when the baby starts, God gives the baby a soul.

## GLOSSARY

- Copulation* (cop''-yu-la'-shun)—sexual intercourse—the uniting of the sexes in the generative act.
- Embryo* (em'-bree-oh)—the child in the womb during the first three months of development.
- Fallopian Tubes* (fa-low'-pee-an) (*oviducts*) (oh'-vee-dukts)—the two passages by which the ovum (ova) is conveyed from the ovary to the uterus.
- Fetus* (fee'-tus)—the child in the womb after the third month of development.
- Ovum* (oh'-vum) (*pl. ova*) (oh'-vah)—Female sexual cell or egg.
- Ovary* (oh'-vah-ree) (*pl. ovaries*) (oh'-vah-rees)—One of two glands in the female, producing the reproductive cell, the ovum.
- Penis* (pee'-nis)—the male organ of copulation.
- Scrotum* (skroh'-tum)—the double pouch that contains the testicles and the lower part of the spermatic cord.
- Semen* (see'-men)—a secretion discharged by the male at the climax of the sexual act which fertilizes the ovum.
- Spermatozoa* (sper'-mah-tuh-zoh'-ah)—Male germ cells.
- Testicle* (tes'-ti-kl) (*testis*) (tes'tis)—one of the two male reproductive glands in the scrotum which produce the spermatozoa and some of the fluid elements of the semen.
- Uterus* (yu'-teh-rus) (*womb*) (woom)—Female organ for protection and nourishment of the fetus.
- Vagina* (va-gī'-nah)—a sheathlike tube which forms the passageway between the uterus and the external opening.



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