

# Shepherding parents in a sexually confused world

## The world our children are growing up in

### We are saddened

- The multiplicity of authoritative voices, but none of those voices love them
- Their bodies will never be perfect enough
- Loneliness is more common as you go *down* the generations
- Gender has few limits and sex is variable
- Sexuality is a public label to be worn with pride
- Marriage has no discernible purpose if sex and relationships are consumer choices
- An unsatisfied search for identity and belonging

### There are some positives to be found

- Unhelpful gender stereotypes are disappearing
- Personal choice is King. 'You do you'
- Diversity is celebrated
- Pastoral care and the needs of the individual are prioritised
- There is a widespread understanding that the younger generation needs to be listened to
- Consent is being taught strongly in schools
- Parents are engaging in the harder conversations

## An effective approach for a new generation?

### The moral matrix of American liberals<sup>1</sup>

1. Care/harm
2. Liberty/oppression
3. Fairness/cheating
4. Loyalty/betrayal
5. Authority/subversion
6. Sanctity/degradation

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Penguin, 2012), p.351 & for Christian analysis go to the blog at [www.livingout.org](http://www.livingout.org)

## The issues we face

- Usually parents understand what their churches teach on these issues, but can not translate that into a conversation with their children. They do not know what to say at a level that their children will understand.
- “One survey found that 88% of teens said it would be easier to postpone sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about sex with their parents. The same study found that only 32% of parents believe they are most influential in their teens’ decisions about sex.”<sup>2</sup>
- The great search is for **identity and belonging**. (1 John 3: 1 & Luke 15: 11-24)
- **Body Image** Bodies are rarely seen as created beautiful and worth valuing (Isaiah 53: 2). The contradiction of bodies being endlessly adjusted and photographed but also not worth valuing.
- **Marriage** Sex is transactional not relational. Marriage is to avoid loneliness and find intimacy (almost as celibacy). Our young people usually know the ‘Thou shalt nots’ of marriage but not the beauty and glory of marriage.
- **Sex & intimacy** Boys are often searching for sex and arousal while girls are often searching for relational intimacy and belonging. Both are created for great friendship.
- **Gender** Sex on the outside, gender on the inside. Identity!
- **Sexting & pornography** It is estimated that the majority have seen porn by the age of 11, usually by accident.
- **Sexuality** Absolutely mainstream and dominant in some subcultures. Often variable through teenage years. Ongoing discussions about the doctrine of concupiscence may affect the pastoral advice that is offered in churches.

## Some practical suggestions

- Are elders agreed on the headlines of how to pastorally respond to these issues (before the pastoral crisis arrives)?
- Teach a topical series on some of these issues with all over 11s present. (eg ‘gender’, ‘relationships & marriage’ or ‘sex and sexuality’)
- Can our teaching include suggested **questions** that parents can take home to their children so that we are helping them to start conversations? (For instance, “Do you think your friends are watching porn?” and “What do you think sex is for?”)
- Where do our young people find belonging and community where it feels like their safe place to ask the hardest questions? *Youth group? Age differentiated groups or inter-generational home groups?*
- Involve parents in discipling *other* people’s children. Model for them creating places of honesty and care. Allow for honest conversation over giving right answers.
- A parents’ lunch on one of these issues to start the conversation. A place where hard words are said out loud. Could some godly parents can be encouraged to speak honestly (rather than offering the scripted answers) offering their stories and wisdom? A simple structure could be: **Discover** what the world is saying, **Discuss** what the Bible says, **Decide** what you think.

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<sup>2</sup> 5 conversations you must have with your son”, Vicki Courtney, B&H Books, p126

## Case Studies

1. A Mum approaches you after church
  - a. She and her husband are committed Christians.
  - b. Their 13 year old daughter, Hannah, attended your church throughout primary school. Since going to secondary school she has become spiritually disengaged and hostile to talking about Christian things at home.
  - c. She started going to the LGBT club at school. She says that she has found acceptance and care there.
  - d. Hannah says wants to be a boy. She wants to be known as 'Red' from now on.

What help can you offer the Mum?

2. A volunteer youth leader comes to you after church
  - a. At the end of youth group, Johnny, a 14 year old son of Christian parents, said to the leader that he thinks he is gay. He says he has no interest in girls but enjoys spending time with boys.
  - b. The youth leader has understood that Johnny doesn't like sport, he prefers reading and takes a lot of care of his appearance, as he goes through puberty.
  - c. Johnny has been thinking he is gay for the last few years. He thinks it is time to tell his parents and his friends at school
  - d. Johnny wants help and advice for what to do next.

If Johnny becomes increasingly sure he is sexually attracted to other boys, how will you support him and his family?

3. Leah is a 16 year old girl
  - a. She has grown up in a Christian home, but she is drifting away from Christian beliefs
  - b. She loves spending time with a few of the other girls in the church youth group
  - c. There are numerous friends, boys and girls, at school who say they are gay. Leah can not bear that her friends would be rejected by the church
  - d. Her parents have let you know that they have just discovered that she has been self-harming.

How can you support her and her family?

### Recommended resources:

Raising Confident Kids by Ed Drew.

Growing Up: God's good story. Available for U11's and 11+ (6 sessions covering bodies, desires, gender and marriage. Free to download from [faithinkids.org](http://faithinkids.org))

Who am I? (7 sessions of foundational sessions on identity. Free to download from [faithinkids.org](http://faithinkids.org))

The Sex Thing by Rachel Gardner.

Purposeful Sexuality by Ed Shaw.

**faithinkids**

[www.faithinkids.org](http://www.faithinkids.org)

