

Phase II: The Big Talk

Preparation Dialogue

A couple of months ahead of the eighth birthday, start having discussions like the following:

DIALOGUE:

Jason, you are getting old enough to understand some really important things, so when you turn eight on your birthday next month, we are going to let you in on a very exciting secret. In fact, we're going to tell you about the most wonderful and awesome thing in the world.

Jason: What is it?

Respond with something like: Oh, we can't give you any clues. You'll have to wait until your birthday. But I can tell you this: I'm excited because this is really something fantastic, and it's going to be such fun to tell you about it.

Jason: Well, just tell me what it's about.

No, that would be too much of a clue. We want this to be kind of like a secret until you turn eight. You probably know a little about the thing we're going to talk about, but on your birthday we're going to share the whole secret. And it is really wonderful, really incredible! I can hardly wait. Let's figure out exactly how long it is until you turn eight.

Jason: I think it's about four more weeks.

The Big Talk

Here is a suggested dialogue.

DIALOGUE:

Well, Kathy, we told you this talk would be about the most wonderful, amazing, beautiful, awesome thing on earth. Are you excited?



Kathy responds. Be positive and encouraging about every answer; make the child feel important and special.

Before we start, we just want to tell you how much we love you. You already know that, but do you really know how much we love you? Do you know we love you way more than our jobs or our car or our house or any of our friends? We love you more than anything, except maybe each other -- did you know that?

Response.

And that's one reason we're excited to tell you this fantastic secret. Because it's about love and it's about you! Does that give you any clues?

Response. If Kathy has asked some earlier questions that you've deferred, refer to them and let her know that this talk is about the answers.

Actually what we've been telling you for weeks is a clue -- that this was going to be about something really amazing and awesome. What do you think is the most awesome thing on earth?

Let her mention some things -- all answers are good.

Yes, an airplane is pretty awesome. What can it do? A whale? Yes -- why? When a person is mentioned say: Now I think we're getting the best answer. Why is a person the most awesome thing of all?

Response. Discuss all the things body and mind can do.

Okay, if a person is the most awesome thing, then the most awesome secret would be how a person gets made. Let's think about that. We're all big now, but what did we all start out as? What were we when we were just born?

Kathy: Babies.

Have you seen a baby lately? Did he have all his parts -- fingers, toes, little eyelashes, a little belly button?

Response.



Babies are pretty amazing, aren't they! We remember so well when you were a little tiny baby. You were so cute and so special. And you had all your parts. You just had to grow bigger to become you. Do you remember when you were a baby?

Response.

Now here's the big question, Kathy. Where do you think babies come from?

The hospital.

Yes, but how do they get there?

Mommy's tummy.

Yes, but how did the baby get in Mommy's tummy?

Response: (Child may say, "From God" or "From a little seed.")

Good, but do you have any idea how that little body got started in there? (Ask each question with awe and excitement, not as a test or a quiz. Respond positively to each answer by repeating it and seeing if the child will go on. Then, when the response runs down, start a slightly different line of questions.) Who do you think should become parents? What kind of people would be the best parents?

Kathy [help, clues]: People who love kids and take care of them.

Why would that be important?

Kathy: Kids need love and a loving family.

Would it be important for a baby's mom and dad to love each other?

Yes, very important.

How do you show someone you love them?

Tell them, do nice things for them.



Can you show someone you love them physically -- with your body, with your arms or your lips?

You can kiss or hug.

Exactly. And if a man and woman are falling love with each other, what kind of kissing might they do?

Kathy [help, clues]: Longer, more romantic kisses on each other's lips.

Good Kathy. Now, did you know there is an even bigger, better kind of hug that a husband and a wife can do? It makes each of them feel really good and really loved *and* -- this is the most exciting part -- this special kind of a big hug is what can get a baby to start growing inside the mom. Isn't *that* exciting?

Response.

Now, we've got a book here with pictures and everything. It shows about the special big hug that mommies and daddies can have and about how it starts babies, and about how those babies grow inside their moms. Are you ready?

Yes.

Let's have you read it and we'll stop and talk about things as we go along, okay? Isn't this exciting?

(Read the book. If the child is a comfortable reader, let her read. If not, you read, or perhaps alternate. Go slowly; frequently ask what she thinks. Answer questions as they come up. Emphasize at every opportunity how amazing, how beautiful, how marvelous it all is.)

How did you like that, Kathy?

(Some children think the pictures in some of the recommended books are a little bit comical, but emphasize how "awesome" the actual process is. Be personal about how much it lets you show your love and how private and wonderful it is when you save it for just one special person. And isn't it amazing that a whole baby -- a whole person -- grows from just that one tiny cell?)



Did you know any of that before?

Response.

Which parts?

Response.

What have you heard about sex?

Response.

Do you think your friends know about very much of this?

Response.

Sometimes when kids haven't learned about sex from their parents -- maybe they've just heard stuff on TV or from their friends -- they only know parts of it, and they really don't know how awesome or how special it is. So they sometimes joke about it or make fun of it, but it's just because they don't know all the things you know now. So when you hear something silly or weird about sex, just be glad you know the real truth about it. You can always come and tell me if you hear something you don't understand, okay?

Kathy: Okay.

How old do you think you have to be to have sex?

Response.

(Explain that puberty is something that happens "to kids a little older than you." It makes people grow bigger and stronger and also gets their bodies ready to have babies. Promise that you'll have another talk soon -- about puberty -- about the amazing changes and good things "that will happen to you as you go from being a girl to being a woman" (or a boy to a man).

Even if a boy and girl had gone through puberty and are big enough to have a baby, do you think they should?

Kathy: No.



Why not?

Kathy: They're too young. They're not old enough to start a baby, or to take care of one.

And do you think, with something this special, it might be better to wait and have sex with just the one person you love most -- like your own husband or wife?

Kathy: Yes.

Why?

Response.

Do you think the big, awesome kind of hug we talked about is pretty important and pretty special?

Response.

So would you want to do it with a lot of people or just with one really special person?

Kathy: One really special person.

Kathy, remember that when we started, we said this would be a talk about love and about you?

Kathy: Yes.

Well, some day *you* will fall in love with someone and want to be with him all the time, and you'll want to share all your love with that person. Do you think it would be a good idea to save that big special hug -- as you know, the short name for it is "sex"-- for someone totally special?

Kathy: Yes.

So do I! We love you so much and it's because of this wonderful thing called sex that you will someday have a child that you'll love as much as we love you. Maybe when your little son or daughter is eight, you'll have this kind of talk with him or her. Do you think so?



Response.

Kathy, you'll hear a lot about sex in the next few years. Some of it will be good, but some will be pretty mixed up since a lot of people don't know the awesome stuff we've told you today. Anytime you hear anything that bothers you or makes you have a question in your mind, ask us and we'll give you the answer. Will you do that?

Kathy: Okay.

The big special hug is called lots of things. Probably the best one is "making love," because two people should really, really love each other before they do it, and it's a way of making the other person know how much you love him. Sometimes the big special hug is called "having sex." Sometimes it's called some pretty silly and dirty names like "screwing" or a word that we call the "f" word because we don't even like to say it. Have you heard any of those words? How did they make you feel?

(If child says yes and something similar to "kind of weird," say something like:) Usually people who use those words aren't really thinking about how beautiful and awesome sex should be. And when kids use those other words, they're just trying to sound grownup or cool, or maybe they just haven't been told about all the things we've told you about.

So, Kathy, when you hear words like that in music or on TV or from other kids, just realize they're probably not thinking about what it means, that they might not know about all the good stuff.

Why would it be kind of bad for you to use words like that?

Kathy [help, clues]: Because I know the real words and because I know sex is too beautiful and special to make fun of or tell weird jokes about or even to use disrespectful words when we talk about it.

Now, "making love" or "having sex" doesn't always start a baby, but it should always show how much a man and woman love each other, and it shouldn't happen unless they are committed and loyal to each other. Do you know what those two words mean? What do you think loyal means?"

Kathy [help and clues]: Caring about someone, supporting them, keeping promises.



What do you think commitment means?

Kathy [help and clues]: Being true to someone. Loving the person more than anyone else. Staying with the person. [Help her see that marriage is all about loyalty and commitment, and that the best way to show loyalty and commitment is through marriage.]

Why would it be a bad idea to have sex with someone you didn't feel committed and loyal to?

Kathy [help and clues]: It's just too special. If you did it with other people, it wouldn't be as special with the one you loved most. You wouldn't be loyal or committed to the one you loved.

Right. One other bad thing about having sex with just anyone is that there are some pretty bad sicknesses that people can catch. Have you heard of AIDS? (Explain as much as you think is appropriate, but don't go too far or cause worry or fear. Continue to get back to the essence -- that sex, unless misused, is the most beautiful and awesome thing and that the reason for saving it is because it is so special.)

It's been so great to have this discussion with you. (Conclude with your arm around your child. Hold her close, let her feel your love.) It's great that you're old enough to know about something this awesome. It makes me feel really close to you to have this kind of talk. I think you and I could talk to each other about just about anything, don't you?

Response.

Sometimes, as kids get older, they start thinking their parents don't understand them, so they don't talk about what they're thinking or what they're worried about. Do you think that will ever happen with us?

Response.

We'll be sure it doesn't! We'll trust each other and talk about everything, especially when we're worried about something or don't understand something. That's what families are for!



Booster Discussions

Here is a suggested dialogue for two follow up discussions that can take place in the months following “The Big Talk.”

Questions and Feelings

DIALOGUE:

James, it’s been a couple of weeks since your birthday and our special date. How have you been feeling about that awesome stuff we talked about?

Response.

Isn’t it amazing how babies start and grow and become real little people inside their moms?

Response. Expand, appreciate and deal with any observation kids make or any answer they give.

And don’t you think it’s cool how the dad’s sperm and the mom’s egg get together so the baby is kind of like the mom and kind of like the dad?

Response.

The best part is that it all gets started with that big special kind of hug we talked about. What do you think about that big special hug? Does it seem pretty neat to you?

Response. It’s important to get more than one-word answers on these questions. You want to know how your child feels about what you discussed. Ask small related questions until you sense what he or she feels. If the child feels anything is strange or “gross” or “weird,” do some reassuring.

You probably feel that a little just because it’s so new to you. But as a dad (mom) let me tell you, that big hug is the greatest. It feels really good, and it lets your wife (husband) know you really love her and want to be with her for a long time. You’ll feel that some day with the person you really, really love! James, from what I’m saying, can you feel how special and cool I think it is?



Response.

You know, James, I was just wondering if, since our talk, you've heard other kids talking about sex in some way, or if you've heard or seen anything about it on TV?

Response. If James has heard something "dirty" or "weird" at school or from peers, carry on as follows.

You know James, kids who don't know all that stuff we talked about just don't understand how wonderful and awesome sex can be. Since they only know parts of it, they can be a little confused and think sex is gross or weird. If they knew all that you do, do you think they would think it was cool and awesome?

James: Probably.

And then they wouldn't tell jokes or be silly or laugh about it, would they?

James: No.

(If child has seen something on TV, ask him to explain what happened and to say whether he thought it was good or bad. Depending on what it was, what the child thought, and what your objective is, say something like:)

You know, one problem with TV or movies is that they sometimes show sex happening too soon, before people are really in love and really committed and loyal to each other. What is the problem with this?

James responds. Help him get back to the idea that it should be saved for someone really special -- when there is commitment. Perhaps it didn't show how those people might feel the next day or in a year, or if one of them got sick, or if a baby started to grow, and so forth.

James, you'll hear a lot about sex in the next few years -- from your friends, on TV, in movies, in music. Some of it will be pretty mixed up and sometimes you'll hear words and things you've never heard and don't understand. Always come and tell me what you hear and we can have these special talks about it -- just you and me -- so you'll understand everything. Okay?

James: Okay.



How much do you think your friends know about what we talked about on your birthday?

James responds. Help him to see that different families talk or don't talk in different ways, but in this family we always try to be honest and open and talk about everything!

Family (our family now and your family later)

Whenever possible, in our discussions with our children, we should connect sex with family. Children can understand quite readily and quite naturally that sex is best (and most natural, and most important, and most special) when it happens within marriage. They can also learn that saving sex can make families stronger. One discussion approach follows:

DIALOGUE:

Harmon, who are the most important people in the world to you?

Harmon: My family and my friends.

Good. Who are the people you probably love the most in the whole world?

Harmon: The people in my family.

Can you imagine ever loving anyone even more than your brother or your mom or dad?

Harmon: No.

But you know, someday you'll probably have a wife and children, and believe it or not, in some ways you'll love them even more. You'll have two families. The family you have now *and* the family you'll have then. Now Harmon, what does sex have to do with families?

Harmon [help and clues]: It's how babies get started in families.

Right -- anything else?

Harmon [help and clues]: It's how couples show their love -- they show that they love one person more than anyone else.



Harmon, how long do you think a family should last?

Harmon: As long as possible.

Why?

Harmon: Because we need families; we need their love.

We do! Now divorce comes into many families, and people get separated by where they're living or what they're doing. But we're always linked to our families, aren't we? Especially to our own parents and our own children and our own husband or wife if we're married. How long can these relationships last, do you think?

Harmon: All our lives. Forever, I guess.

Can sex have anything to do with how long a family lasts?

Harmon: I don't know.

Let's think about it. If a married couple only had sex with each other, would it help their marriage feel safe and loyal and committed so it would last?

Harmon: Yes.

And what would be the opposite of that?

Harmon [help and clues]: If they had sex with other people, they could lose that feeling. They wouldn't trust each other, and maybe the marriage wouldn't last.

That's right. Do you know what it's called when two married people love only each other and only make love with each other?

Harmon [help and clues]: Being faithful or having fidelity. [Be sure he also knows what these words mean. Also introduce the words "loyalty" and "commitment" and what they mean in this setting.]

Right, being *faithful* or having *fidelity*. So what do those words mean?

Harmon: Only having sex with each other.



Harmon, it's the happiest and the safest way to live. That's how I hope it is for you, because I love you and I want you to be the happiest you can be. Do you think that sounds pretty important -- to be faithful to your wife once you find her and marry her?

Harmon: Yes.

Now here's a hard question, Harmon. Do you think you could be faithful to your wife before you married her; before you even know who she is?

Harmon: I don't know. How?

Well, there's an interesting song about that [from Alexander's Amazing Adventures]. Here, let's read the words to it out loud and see if you know what it means:

Faithful to a Dream

Where in the world, where can she be?
Maybe she's out there, dreaming of me.
Wondering my name,
The things that I do,
All of the things I wonder, too.

Faithful to a dream,
Faithful to someone I've never seen.
Someone who's out there, trying to be
Faithful, faithful to me.

What do you think that means?

Harmon [help and clues]: I guess you can have a dream of the kind of person you want to marry and be faithful to that dream even before you meet that person.

Why would that be good?

Harmon [help and clues]: It would make your marriage last longer?

Probably. Why?



Harmon: Sex would be more special and more beautiful and awesome, and you would trust each other more.

That's a good dream, isn't it Harmon!

Making Decisions in Advance

We have one particular seminar discussion that we love to present to older kids (fifth or sixth grade) at elementary schools and middle schools. You can adapt it into a point-by-point dialogue with your child. The sequence goes something like this:

1. As young as you are, and given our ongoing medical advances, your life expectancy is somewhere around eighty-four years. That means you will live seven life segments of twelve years each.
2. All of you are just starting (or about to start) the "second seventh" of your life. In your first seventh you went through your childhood and through elementary school.
3. Now, what do you think are the most important decisions you will make during your whole life?

(The first answers are usually what profession to have, whom to marry, college -- whether to go, where to go, what to major in, where to live. Then a slightly different type of decision usually comes up: whether to do drugs, whether to be honest, whether to smoke, whether to have sex, whether to really apply myself and do one's best.)

4. It's interesting that there are two kinds of decisions here. There's the multi-alternative kind, which we can't make until we get a little older and know all the options, like whom to marry or what profession to pursue. Let's call these "category one decisions." The other type of decision is the "right-or-wrong" kind, just two alternatives -- and one is right and the other is wrong. Let's call these "category two decisions."
5. Now let's go back to the thought about the sevenths of life. Here's the big question: In which seventh of life do we make most of life's most important decisions, category one and category two? (Kids realize quickly that virtually all of their most important decisions, the ones with the longest-lasting



consequences, will likely be made in the second seventh -- the twelve-year period they are entering.)

6. Isn't that a little scary? You're so young in the second seventh but you have to make the decisions that will determine how healthy, how successful, and how happy you'll be for the other five sevenths!
7. There is a way that you can make all of the important category two decisions (the right-or-wrong ones) now, or in the next few days -- and make right decisions on them. Then you'll never have to worry about them again, and you can save your energy and thought for the other important ones -- the category one decisions -- where you'll have to think through lots of alternatives.
8. Here's how you do it. In a very special, very private place, like the back of your journal or diary, make up a list called Decisions in Advance. These are decisions where you can figure out right now what is right and what is wrong, and if you decide strongly enough and write that decision down, date it, and sign it, it can be like a contract and a promise to yourself. Any decision you write down there and sign is made, and you won't ever have to decide it again. For example, if you decide (totally firmly, in advance, and in writing) that you won't do drugs, then you don't have to keep making that decision whenever someone offers them to you.

Most early adolescent kids, even in a large group setting, with a little help and encouragement can make a solid list of six or eight decisions in advance. In the more intimate setting of a family, with a parent's help, even stronger advance commitments can be made. These decisions can involve anything from "not smoking" to "going to college." Parents can make up little case studies or scenarios to firm up the advance decisions ("You're fifteen, and you're at a party where everyone is smoking. Even the girl you're there with is trying to get you smoking. What will you do? What will you say?") This kind of dress rehearsal prepares a child for the real event.

Decisions in Advance can be particularly useful (and powerful) with regard to sex. A young child who "gets it" about "the most beautiful, wonderful thing in the world" will want to make a decision to save sex for a time of true love and long-term commitment. Once this advance decision is written and signed in the child's private journal, it can be "revisited" as years go by, and a parent can reinforce it through praise and perhaps through presenting scenarios about situations and helping him rehearse what he would say or do.

