

Introduction

If you are preparing to lead a group of young people through the *Theology of the Body for Teens* program, it is recommended that you conduct a **Parent Information Session**. The purpose is for you to:

- Educate your teens' parents about the Theology of the Body
- Introduce them to the curriculum their teens will be studying
- Encourage them to take seriously their role as primary educators of their teens in matters of faith and morals
- Empower them to talk with their teens about the true meaning of their sexuality

The purpose of this **Leader's Guide** is to assist you in conducting a **Parent Information Session**. In this Guide you will find:

- A checklist of things to consider prior, during and after the Parent Session
- Tips for helping parents create a culture of Theology of the Body in their homes
- Resources for further study
- Sample letters for the parents

Ideally, the same instructor(s) who will be teaching the *Theology of the Body for Teens* program would also facilitate the **Parent Information Session**. This will provide optimum continuity between the parents and their teens.



Preparing for the Parent Information Session

1. Schedule the Parent Information Session prior to teaching the curriculum.
2. Use the sample parent letter found at the end of this document to announce your meeting.
3. Allow approximately ninety minutes for the session.
4. Consider offering refreshments.
5. Take attendance. Follow up with parents who do not attend. (More information on this topic is provided later in this guide.)
6. Prepare to show the “Parent Overview,” which is the fourth title on Disc #4 of the *Theology of the Body for Teens* DVD series.
7. The DVD can be played on either a laptop with Windows Media Player or by using a DVD player. You will need a suitable projector and screen or a television if a projector is not available.
8. Prepare to distribute the *Theology of the Body for Teens* Parent’s Guide, one per family. It is recommended that the facilitator becomes conversant with the content of the Parent’s Guide prior to the Information Session.
9. Familiarize yourself with the *Theology of the Body for Teens* Frequently Asked Questions document, as it contains more than forty commonly-asked questions about the program. Also consult *A Guide for TOB for Teens Facilitators* FAQs. Although written for your instruction with the teens, some parents may have similar theological comments and/or questions. This sixteen-page document is a wonderful resource, offering helpful advice and excellent answers to the theological and moral questions that may arise during your parent meeting. Both documents are available as free downloads on www.TOBFforTeens.com.

During the Parent Information Session

1. As an introduction, explain that the purpose of the meeting is to learn about the exciting new curriculum *Theology of the Body for Teens: Discovering God's Plan for Love and Life*.
2. Tell them that a Parent Information Session is offered as part of this curriculum for a number of reasons:
 - First of all, the Church recognizes and acknowledges that parents are the primary educators of their children in matters of faith and morals. Because of the sexual content of the material, it is important for parents to understand the context in which sexuality is being presented. Again, parents are the first and primary educators of their children, especially in teaching the virtues of truth, faith, hope and love in their relationships with God and others. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1632; Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 49; and the Pontifical Council for the Family document *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*).
 - In this session we want to encourage parents to engage their children in meaningful conversation regarding the curriculum as it pertains to their lives. The Parent's Guide that they will receive later in the session will greatly help with this communication.
 - Tell the parents that they will view a forty-minute DVD that features the authors explaining the curriculum and providing an overview of the entire *Theology of the Body for Teens* program.
3. Show the Parent Overview DVD. It is possible that some parents may be familiar with renowned speaker Jason Evert from one of his many presentations around the country, perhaps in your own diocese. If so, they will appreciate seeing him again.
4. After the DVD, distribute copies of the Parent's Guide, one per family. Point out the format of the booklet and select a chapter to show how the curriculum content is summarized and that the last two pages of each chapter contain "Questions for Your Teens" followed by "Family Applications." Explain that these sections are meant to foster discussion of the material and strengthen family bonds.
5. Explain to the parents your overall plans, including the timing and format, for teaching the *Theology of the Body for Teens* program to their teens. Mention that their teens will be told that their parents have attended an information meeting and have received the Parent's Guide. (Be sure to tell your students!)

Following the Parent Information Session:

1. For those parents who did not attend the Information Session, send them a copy of the Parent's Guide with a letter of explanation. Use the sample letter at the end of this document, or a modified version of it.
2. Some parents not attending the meeting may contact you with questions. You may want to offer them an opportunity to watch the "Parent's Overview" on DVD #4 at a mutually agreed upon time. We envision that they would view it alone while you are conducting other business thus not requiring you to view the overview multiple times. Offering to show the DVD to individual parents is optional.

We recognize that although it is your responsibility to offer a Parent Information Session, it is ultimately the responsibility of the parents to attend the meeting and become informed about the curriculum.

Additional Information in Your Outreach to Parents

Although the following information is found in the Parent's Guide and DVD, feel free to adapt and incorporate it into the Parent Information Session if you find it helpful.

An additional reason why this Information Session is being held is because so many Catholic parents have asked for help in talking to their kids about sex. They see their kids being inundated with advertising, music, and television programs that shout out the message, "There's something wrong with you if you don't have sex." Parents want the best for their kids—good health, quality education, and, in most cases, the hope of meeting the right spouse and sharing a lifelong marriage with children of their own. Even if their children are not called to the vocation of marriage but to a religious vocation, parents want them to have a proper understanding of the awesome gift of human sexuality.

You are the first and best educators of your children. Yes, it is hard to find the right words to talk with your kids about sex, but it is not impossible. Your kids need you. Be there for them. The information contained in the resource material will help. But the most important part of the conversation is you. Don't be afraid to start the conversation—and remember to keep it going. Christ has promised that "the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

Sex is part of God's plan of spousal love for us. We shouldn't be afraid of it. It is a gift to be treasured and shared. What a wonderful gift it will be for your children to know and experience sexual love as God intended

The DVD Series

The *TOB for Teens* DVD addresses many of the following questions. However, should a question come up that you cannot answer, simply acknowledge that you do not know but will find out the answer and get back to them.

- Do you talk to your kids about sex?
- What do you say to them?
- How can parents speak with credibility to their kids about sex outside of marriage if they have done the very same thing they are telling their kids not to do?
- What good does it do for parents to talk with their kids about sex?
- What does God have to do with sex?
- Why did God create us as male and female sexual beings?
- Why did God create sex?
- If God made us as sexual beings, what is wrong with having sex with someone we love, even if we aren't married to each other?
- I had sex before marriage – so did most of my contemporaries. How can I expect my kids to behave any differently?

Additional Topics for Discussion with Parents

- ***Keep the lines of communication open.*** Find the times and places that best work for talking with your teen. Having dinner together as a family is a proven communication tool.
- ***Set boundaries that are respected.*** Make sure there are consequences when your boundaries are not respected. Curfew times, calling home when a child will be late, responsibility for school work and household chores, and rules about company at the house must be clearly understood and obeyed. When they are not, it is your responsibility as a parent to take the appropriate remedial action, firmly but fairly. Every child makes mistakes. A parent's job is to ensure he or she learns from those mistakes and does not repeat them.
- ***Don't allow one-on-one dating in the early teen years.*** The earlier girls begin dating, the higher the risk of engaging in premarital sex, having multiple sex partners, becoming pregnant and having an abortion. This is especially true when the boyfriend is older.
- ***Keep alcohol off-limits to your teens.*** One in five sexually-active teens says they were using drugs or alcohol when they lost their virginity. (See "SexSmarts" survey, conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation and *Seventeen* magazine, 2003, www.kff.org. summary publication #3368 or www.seventeen.com/sexsmarts.)
- ***Live your faith as a family.*** Teens in families who actively practice a religious faith are less likely to engage in premarital sex and other risky behaviors. (In its 2001 national survey, *Faithful Nation*, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy found that religious and moral values were the most important factors affecting a teen's decision whether to have sex. Parents were the most influential people influencing their decisions. (See www.teenpregnancy.org.)

For your information as a facilitator, below are government data and statistics regarding sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) or sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). *Note:* STDs are *not* the focus of any of the chapters of this curriculum, but the topic is briefly touched on in some sections and will likely come up in discussion. This information may be useful to you:

- More than sixty-eight million Americans are currently infected with a sexually transmitted disease. Each year, fifteen million new STD cases are reported.
- Approximately twenty-five percent of these new cases are found in teens, even though teens make up only ten percent of the population.
- Teens are more likely than adults to engage in riskier sexual behavior, including multiple sex partners.
- An estimated twenty million people in the U.S. are believed to be infected with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) with five and a half million people becoming newly infected each year. (HPV is an STD that causes genital warts. It also is responsible for more than ninety percent of all cases of cervical cancer.)
- Sexually-transmitted diseases can be transmitted from a woman to her unborn or newborn child. Some cannot be treated and may result in premature birth, eye disease, pneumonia, permanent neurological damage or even death.
- Many STDs do not have immediate symptoms. They remain undiagnosed but can still be transmitted to others.

The listing below should not be construed as an endorsement of the opinions of the author(s) of these works but are provided as source material, as needed:

1. Scott Lehigh, "The Casual Emptiness of Teenage Sex," *Boston Globe*, June 2, 2004
2. Jonathan D. Klein, MD, American Academy of Pediatrics, Teenage Pregnancy Policy Update, *Adolescent Pregnancy: Current Trends and Issues*, July 7, 2005
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Tracking the Hidden Epidemics--Trends in STDs in the United States 2000*, Accessed Sept. 20, 2001
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance data, 2001.
5. Laura Sessions Stepp, Washington Post, *Study: Half of All Teens Have Had Oral Sex*, September 16, 2005
6. Deborah A. Wilburn, Family Circle, "It's Not Really Sex," October 9, 2004 (2003 Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation survey of adolescents information)
7. Eric J. Keroack, MD, FACOG and John R. Diggs Jr., MD, Medical Abstinence Council, *Bonding Imperative*, December 31, 2002 (Information on oxytocin and vasopressin)
8. The National Catholic Bioethics Center on Health Care and Life Sciences, *Ethics & Medics, And The Two Shall Become One, Biochemistry and Pair-Bonding*, Dianne S. Vadney, MTS, April 2005, Vol. 30, No.4
9. *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health* published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* September 10, 1997 v 278, n 10, p 823.
10. Alan Guttmacher Institute, www.agi.org
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV Prevention Strategic Plan Through 2005*, September 2000.
12. *SexSmarts* survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Seventeen magazine, 2003, www.kff.org. summary publication #3368 or www.seventeen.com/sexsmarts.
13. Dr. Meg Meeker in *Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*, Washington DC, LifeLine Press, 2002.

Letter to Parents

To be used to invite parents to the *Theology of the Body for Teens* Parent Information Session. It is recommended that you print on official letterhead of your school, parish, or organization. Please modify as needed.

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation, e.g., “our youth ministry,” “our confirmation class,” “our tenth grade students,” etc.]

We are introducing an exciting new program called *Theology of the Body for Teens: Discovering God’s Plan for Love and Life*. This curriculum is based on Pope John Paul II’s landmark and revolutionary Theology of the Body, which offers a very positive message of the gift of sexuality as a good and essential part of love and life. It is our hope that this curriculum will provide your teens with the knowledge and understanding they need concerning the meaning and purpose of their sexuality and of their very existence.

Recognizing parents as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith and morals, this curriculum includes a rich parental component. To review the contents of *Theology of the Body for Teens* and view an explanatory DVD from the authors, we invite you to attend a Parent Information Session on [add date/time] to be held at [location].

The meeting will not only inform you of the beautiful message we will be sharing with your teen(s), but give you assistance and encourage you to discuss critical issues with them. At the Information Session, you will receive a *Theology of the Body for Teens Parent’s Guide*, a booklet that summarizes the curriculum chapter by chapter, allowing you to follow along as your teen receives the instruction. The booklet also provides helpful questions and family applications to foster meaningful conversation at home.

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your teenager’s spiritual development. We look forward to seeing you at the Parent Information Session.

Sincerely,

Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation, e.g., “our youth ministry,” “our confirmation class,” “our tenth grade students,” etc.]

We are sorry you were unable to attend the Parent Information Session on [add date/time].

For your information and review, the enclosed booklet will inform you of the new and beautiful program we are introducing into our curriculum called *Theology of the Body for Teens: Discovering God’s Plan for Love and Life*.

This curriculum is based on Pope John Paul II’s landmark and revolutionary Theology of the Body, which gives a very positive message of the gift of sexuality as a good and essential part of love and life. It is our hope that it will provide your teens with the knowledge and understanding they need concerning the meaning and purpose of their sexuality and of their very existence.

Recognizing that parents are the primary educators of their children in matters of faith and morals, this curriculum includes a parental component. We have enclosed a copy of *Theology of the Body for Teens Parent’s Guide*, a booklet that summarizes the contents of the new program chapter by chapter. It will not only inform you of the beautiful message we will be sharing with your teen(s), but give you assistance and encourage you to discuss critical issues with them at home. Please note that the last two pages of each chapter provide questions and family applications to foster meaningful conversation at home.

We will begin teaching *Theology of the Body for Teens* on [start date]. We encourage you to follow along in the *Parent’s Guide*.

I encourage you to contact me should you have questions and to schedule a time to view the Parent Overview DVD, a thorough explanation of the entire program presented by the authors of the curriculum.

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your teenager’s spiritual development.

Sincerely,

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For more information, call 1-800-376-0520 or visit TOBforTeens.com.