



## **For Parents:**

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## **When is the right time for kids to go to slumber parties?**

It's back to school time. And if you're like most parents, you are in a tailspin filling out paperwork, learning new schedules, buying school supplies, and futilely attempting to get your kids out of bed before they miss the bus.

The first few weeks of school can be overwhelming for everyone. So, when your kids come home with a phone number messily scribbled on a torn piece of notebook paper, asking you to make arrangements for a sleepover, you need to be prepared with a well thought out answer.

## **To Sleep Over or Not to Sleep Over**

As our children's social circles expand, so does their access to all sorts of experiences, good and bad. While we can't raise our kids in a bubble, we can take steps to protect them spiritually and physically. If you aren't sure how you feel about your children attending sleepovers, follow these three steps.

### **Pray for wisdom.**

- James 1:5 tells us that when we are struggling to figure out what to do in a situation, God will generously give us wisdom if we simply ask Him!
- One place God gives us wisdom for raising kids is in the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."
- Two verses I've found helpful in raising children and making wise decisions for them include:
- Proverbs 29:17 - "Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire."
- Proverbs 22:6 - "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

### **Don't be afraid to call the parents.**

- Never feel ashamed for asking direct questions such as:
- Are there older kids in the house? If so, will any of their friends be sleeping over as well?
- Are the kids allowed unsupervised time on the internet or television?
- What are the sleeping arrangements?
- The answers you receive will help you make an informed decision. If you don't feel comfortable asking these questions, then it's probably a good indication that you don't feel comfortable with the sleepover.

### **Have (multiple) honest conversations with your children.**

- Relationships built on trust provide space for open communication from everyone involved. As you stay in tune with your children, you are the best judge of their maturity and character. You will know if they are ready to handle the responsibility of sleeping

over at a friend's house. It's helpful to talk with your kids about body safety and make sure they feel comfortable speaking up for themselves.

- Sleepovers can be lots of fun, but the truth is, they are not necessary to have a happy childhood. If you're not feeling great about allowing sleepovers, half sleepovers are a good compromise.

You can have all the fun — food, playtime and a movie — but everyone goes home and sleeps in their own beds! Our family does half sleepovers. This decision doesn't always make us the most popular parents, but it's one we feel good about.

## **How to battle bullies**

Many of us have faced bullying as a child or through the experience of our children. We hear about it on the playground and in the national news. Bullying involves one person, who thinks they are better than or more powerful than someone else, acting out aggressively against the other verbally, socially, physically, or through technology. In movies, the bully is the tough guy stealing lunch money, tripping other students, or knocking their books to the floor. In real life, bullying can include all of these behaviors and more — making threats, spreading rumors, calling others names. Bullies do more than hurt someone one time out of vengeance or anger. Bullying behaviors are usually repeated behaviors and can have tragic results.

**Bullying is a sin, and through the Bible, God has given us instructions on how to respond.**

### **What if My Child Is Being Bullied?**

Psalm 127:3 reminds us, “Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.” As parents, it is our job to protect and defend our children. If you believe your child is being bullied, try the following:

#### **1. Talk to your child.**

A bully wants your child to feel alone and afraid. You can fight these lies with communication. Ask questions and share your experiences with bullying. God brings us through difficulty so we share the comfort we’ve received with others (2 Corinthians 1:4).

#### **2. Talk with other adults.**

Work together with your child and other adults in authority to make a plan. The Bible says, “plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22). Seek advice from another Christ follower who will give you a biblical perspective.

#### **3. Follow up with your child.**

Keep talking to your child. Monitor whether things are getting better or worse. When God describes what it’s like to teach children about our faith, it’s not a class or a family meeting but a continual conversation between parents and their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Guiding our children through difficulty is a similar process; it takes many conversations over a long period of time.

#### **4. Focus on the positive.**

Talk about the good things happening in your child’s life, too. Involve your child with positive people and activities. Learning to focus on what’s good is a spiritual discipline that will serve us and our children well into the future (Philippians 4:8).

#### **5. Point your child to Jesus.**

Encourage your child by reminding him what the Bible says about God’s purpose, presence, protection, and love. These verses are great ones to share with your child: Deuteronomy 31:6, Isaiah 43:1-3, 2 Samuel 22:3-4, and Matthew 5:44.

## How do I respond if my child is the bully?

Bullying is sin, which means the most loving thing we can do for our children is to help them break the hold bullying has on them. If you believe your child is bullying others, try the following:

### **1. Talk to your child.**

Try to uncover insecurities and fears that could be causing this behavior. Like us, our children are born with deep feelings and a tendency to sin. If we can understand the emotions behind the behavior, we can begin to explain how to process those feelings in healthier, God-honoring ways.

### **2. Discipline your child.**

Take a firm but loving stance as you direct your child away from unacceptable behavior. Allow these verses to encourage you: Proverbs 22:6, Hebrews 12:6, Hebrews 12:11, and Ephesians 6:4.

### **3. Talk with other adults.**

Throughout the Bible, we're encouraged to seek wisdom. Proverbs 8:11 says, "Wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her." So don't be afraid to ask other parents for help. Find people who love Jesus, love your family, and have experience raising children, then learn as much from them as you can.

### **4. Follow up with your child.**

If your child's behavior isn't changing, it might be necessary to re- move your child from the activity or situation. This isn't mean or an overreaction — it's love. In the Bible, we're told to flee from all kinds of temptation and to help others do the same (2 Timothy 2:22, James 5:20).

### **5. Focus on the positive.**

Reading stories about Jesus' followers is a great reminder that change happens over time. So often, the disciples first response to a situation or question was the wrong one. But Jesus never gave up. He corrected them when they were wrong and celebrated with them when they finally got it right. The way Jesus trained His disciples is the same way we're called to train our children — firmly but lovingly, helping them see what they're doing right, not just what they are doing wrong (Ephesians 6:4).

### **6. Point your child to Jesus and how he loves.**

True change only occurs through a relationship with Jesus. That's why the best thing we can do for our children is to continually remind them of who Jesus is (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

### **Is It Wrong for Your Child to Fight Back?**

Ignoring bullying will not make it go away, but taking revenge is not an option either. Hebrews 12:14 encourages us to “make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.” When others harm us (or our children), God teaches us not to repay evil with evil, but instead to forgive and to trust Him bring justice (Romans 12:17, Exodus 14:14).

Whether your child is the bully or is being bullied, how you respond to the situation can leave him or her with a lasting impression of who Jesus is and what matters to Him. So consider: How am I showing love in this situation? How am I seeking peace and justice in this situation? How am I teaching repentance and forgiveness in this situation?

This might mean having difficult conversations with your child and with other parents. It might mean changing schools, quitting teams, or breaking with family traditions to protect your child from harm or to get your child the help he or she needs.

## Having The Sex Talk with your Kid

“Where did I come from?”

“How come he can go outside without a shirt but I can’t?”

“What were those people in the movie doing?”

### Kids ask the best questions, don’t they?

It can be awkward, funny, surprising, or any combination of those when a conversation turns to sex. Yet if we’re going to prepare our kids to face real life and make choices to follow Jesus in every way, we have to step up and train them (Proverbs 22:6: Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.)

How do we respond when our children—of any age—ask us questions about sex?

### Tips For Talking To Your Kids About Sex

- **Start early.** As soon as they ask any question about sex, it’s time to start the conversation. Try to think on their level and explain it in a way they can understand, but don’t feel pressured to tell them everything at once.
- **Be approachable.** We can’t expect to be the ones who teach them about sex if we’re not around and already building relationships with our children.
- **Make it a conversation, not a one-time event.** Don’t make “the talk” a one-and-done. Be available for follow-up questions and keep the conversation open. Help them feel comfortable asking you absolutely anything so they go to you to learn about something first, rather than their friends, the Internet, or outside influences.
- **Get past the awkwardness.** Sex is part of normal life, so discuss it like it is. If children sense you are uneasy, embarrassed, or shamed, this sends the message that sex is an uncomfortable subject instead of a good thing from God.
- **Embrace curiosity.** It’s natural for kids to be curious about sex. And it’s natural for that curiosity to grow stronger as they grow from children to teenagers. Use their curiosity to help them understand their bodies, how they work, and what sex is about.
- **Start at the beginning.** God made man and woman similar, yet different. Use the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 in which God says it’s not good for man to be alone, and talk about both the similarities and differences of men and women.
- **Point to God.** Sex is God’s Idea! It was created to be enjoyed by husbands and wives (Song of Songs—all of it). Show in the Bible that God made sex to be a beautiful thing for a marriage (Ecclesiastes 9:9, Matthew 19:4-6, 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). And practically, sex is how God brings more kids into the world and makes families grow.
- **Pray.** Pray that you will be able to recognize when your child is ready to talk. Ask God to prepare you and your child for the conversation. If you’re not sure how to talk about sex with your kids, ask God for help and the best things to say (James 1:5).
- **Learn from others.** See what worked for other parents and their children. Ask what Bible verses or additional books were helpful.

- Don't worry if you stumble through the first conversations with your kids. We can make the most of every opportunity to teach them about sex in the right time and in the right way for them. As we help them see God's best for their lives, they'll be better prepared to keep talking next steps with Jesus with every choice they make.



## **Is My Child Ready to Date?**

Your little boy brought you flowers and worms from the yard to show his love. Your little girl serenaded you with sweet, original songs. Could this child who is asking to go on a date be that same little boy or girl?

In a parent's heart, it's never time. But, it may be,. Here are some ways I suggest to keep in mind as we work to parent well

If you type "dating" in a Bible search, you're not going to find any verses that specifically address the topic. Dating is a relatively new practice, but thankfully, the Bible does speak truth that can be applied to the area of dating.

### **6 Questions to Consider When Your Child Wants to Start Dating**

#### **1. Is your child following Jesus?**

Has there been a time when your child gave their life to Jesus and have you seen change? In several gospel accounts, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." A child with this love will better know how to conduct themselves and treat another person in a dating relationship.

#### **2. Is the person your child wants to date following Jesus?**

Your child should not date someone he or she would not consider a good marriage partner. Yes, Even to prom. Don't freak out here! It's not that marriage is in the near future, but dating should be glorifying to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." And 2 Corinthians 6:14 instructs us to "not be yoked together with unbelievers." Your child's dating relationship will only be glorifying to God if they are dating someone whose life is also glorifying to God.

#### **3. Has your child shown self-control in other areas of life?**

Galatians 5:22-23 teaches, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." The world teaches our children to use dating as an opportunity to experiment with sex and experience freedom from your authority. It is crucial your child has shown the ability to delay getting what they want in other areas of life before you can have any hope of them resisting temptations dating brings.

#### **4. Has your child spent time around the other person in different contexts?**

Your child needs to spend time around the other person in different situations before spending time alone with them. This time builds trust in who the person is and how they react to feelings like disappointment and frustration.

#### **5. Is your child ready for the responsibilities of dating?**

If your child is going to date alone, they should carry the responsibility that comes with dating. It is not your responsibility to pay for dates. Are they able to get to the date and back? If not, it may be too early for dating alone. If dating is important to your child, they will do the hard work to prepare for it, even the hard work of waiting.

#### **6. Why does your child want to date?**

A child should not date to deal with boredom or loneliness. If this is the child or parent's motivation, dating could prove to be a harmful solution to the problem.

Keep Psalms 16:5 in mind: "Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup." If your child is using dating to fill a void, they are looking for fulfillment in the wrong place. Dating should be a genuine desire to get to know a person better and be in a relationship with them.

Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Every detail of our lives, what we say and what we do, should point others back to Jesus. How we lead our children through this season should point them back to Jesus. And, how our children date has the potential to point their friends, classmates, and even their crush back to Jesus. As we read the Bible and ask God for wisdom, He is faithful to fill us with the grace and perspective we need to guide our kids through this new, exciting time in their lives.

