**GUIDING ADOLESCENTS INTO HEALTHY EXPERIENCES**

**OF THEIR SEXUALITY, ROMANCE, AND GENDER**

Let’s define healthy as *what does the most good and the least harm to the most people in the long run*. By this definition, **here are some beliefs about healthy Love, Sex, and Gender** which teenagers don’t often believe to be true, but which most of them will realize as true when they’re a generation older:

1. Like money, anger, and nuclear energy, sexual energy/desire is not good or bad – its effect depends on what you use it for.
2. Compared to promiscuity and cheating, fidelity, and monogamy lead to more honest, stable, loving, *healthy* lives.
3. Using sex for mutual fun and pleasure benefits only two people, and only in the short run.
4. Using sex for power, domination, and one person’s greater pleasure is very unhealthy.
5. Opposites attract throughout nature, adding energy, creativity, strength, and inspiration.
6. Attraction to people for how similar they are to ourselves will fade over time as we grow, and will turn into attraction to the new and different.
7. In mate selection, choosing people with *different gifts, interests, skills, and temperament* is more difficult at first, and more beneficial as time goes on.
8. Choosing people with *similar values and beliefs* gives less chemistry at first, but enables a couple to partner better in working toward common goals; the chemistry can bloom later and last longer.

# Many personal problems are easier to solve within a relationship if the solutions were practiced by both parties beforehand. A healthy love relationship partners with outside help needed to solve problems like these:

* Seeing yourself as trapped or helpless, or as *a permanent victim* of anything
* *Idolizing* any created person or thing as a source for your identity, security, or wellbeing
* Seeing any aspect of yourself as *unable to grow, change, or improve*
* *Publicizing online sexual things* that happened in private
* *Expressing yourself sexually* (with someone or online) *before becoming mostly self-sufficient*
* *Falling in love with someone who disrespects, idealizes, lies to, or depends on you*
* Comparing your body to others, and *wishing it looked more like somebody else’s*
* Believing that to be healthy, *you must receive regular orgasms from someone or yourself*
* *Expecting someone else to make you feel good enough to feel comfortable in your own skin*

If your teenager wants you to bless or approve a love relationship, you need to **ask them how they would solve these problems** if they resurface in the relationship. If their solutions involve no outside help, you can ask: *how would you know if your love relationship made you lose interest in what you need to solve problems like this? What would you do about it? Have you two discussed this?*

***General Guidelines for Parents***

Until your children are 21, have been living stably and responsibly out of the home, and are on their own financially, you can use these guidelines for your conversations.

• **Seek first to understand, then to be understood.** Until they know you care, they won’t care what you know.

• **Acknowledge and appreciate their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values, decisions,** and even public confessions of who they are, **but you do not need to say whether you agree, will support, or feel good** about them. You respect their privacy, and you respect your own privacy as well.

• **When** **they say they are sure they won’t change their mind and heart and will on this matter**, it is OK to say, “Your mind, heart, and life become bigger each year, and each year you have new things to bring to this (gender identity/love relationship/etc.). The longer you wait to promise yourself you won’t change your lifestyle, the better you will get along with yourself down the road.”

Finally, respect that these *issues of romance, sex, and gender are very personal.* So have been all the other eight issues written about here: truth, safety, respect, caring, mercy, money, purpose, and health. Talking about personal things works better when we try not to be preachy or pushy with our children, or with our grandchildren. We *can* push questions, but not so much answers. Let’s give ways for trust to be earned. In this spirit, you and your family can *make a few healthier choices* down the road.