

"What are some common ideas that a lot of middle school students have about sex and dating?"

"What does respecting yourself look like in this situation? What does respecting someone else look like in this situation?"

"What are some ways we can honor the people we date or want to date?"

"What does dating mean to you?"

"What do you think is the wise choice?"

"Do you want to talk about how to create some boundaries to help you make wise decisions?"

"Have you talked to your parent or guardian about that? That seems like a good conversation to have with them."

"Wow. That's a serious, but a REALLY good question/story. Thank you for trusting me with that. Can I think about it before I get back to you?"

"Does the media you consume matter? If so, why? How can it affect you?"

"Remember, this is a conversation about our future, not our past. Anyone, regardless of history, can practice sexual integrity."

A Volunteer's Guide to . . .

Talking About Sexual Integrity



with Middle Schoolers



How to Talk About Sexual Integrity

Interpret what is changing for middle schoolers, so they will respect themselves and grow in confidence.

—————> Before we can talk about sexual integrity, we have to define it. Sexual integrity is guarding my potential for intimacy through appropriate boundaries and mutual respect.

In middle school, puberty causes a new interest in sex and a new experience of sexual feelings and desires. Normalizing conversation as middle schoolers develop the skills of making wise decisions and advocating for themselves is important. Regardless of whether middle schoolers are ready to “date” or have sexual relationships, many are experiencing both or know people who are, so it’s important to help them develop the skills to talk about it.

In this Phase . . . As a volunteer, your role is to **affirm their personal journey** by reminding them that they’re not bad or broken for having sexual desires or weird if they feel awkward about dating or have questions.

Middle schoolers are primarily motivated by acceptance. That’s why it’s essential to give specific encouragement, listen patiently, and never invite shame into the conversation. Remind them that no matter their experiences, they’re made in the image of God and have the capacity to practice sexual integrity.

In Your Conversations . . .

BEFORE

Know your group. Middle schoolers are at different places in terms of what they know or don’t know as some kids don’t know what sex is, and others are participating in sexual acts.

Define terms. Remember, middle schoolers may not know much and what they think they know may be based on poor, incomplete, or inaccurate information by untrustworthy sources. So, it can be helpful to define terms, speak clearly, and avoid metaphors.

Bring hope. Are there any activities or illustrations that might be painful to a teenager with a history of sexual activity or sexual abuse? Be mindful that you don’t know the personal history of every teenager and, as a leader, your job is to express hope for their future, not shame for their past.

Cue the parent. Keep in mind, parents are VERY much involved in this conversation, so it’s important to make parents aware of all conversations around this topic and give them tools to have conversations at home.

DURING

Demonstrate curiosity and openness. Try not to make or demonstrate assumptions in the way you speak about sex in your group. Be open to understanding by asking clarifying questions and asking them to elaborate.

Create a safe place. Remember, it’s never

okay to make jokes at a person’s expense (whether or not that person is in the room). Do not permit jokes in your group that degrade someone based on gender, sexuality, or sexual experiences.

Cue them to ask a parent. By creating a safe place, you may find students asking questions. Remember, you don’t have to answer every question. In fact, sometimes it’s helpful for them to ask their parents instead.

Honor the family. Remind yourself that every family has a different set of values around sexuality, and there may be family members living in situations that conflict with your values. Even if you don’t agree with someone’s actions, it’s important to speak about that person in an honorable way.

AFTER

Follow up. It’s important to check back in with any middle schooler who may have shared sensitive or personal information. Thank them for trusting you with that information, and let them know you’re proud of them for sharing.

Connect with your ministry leader. Ask about your church’s policies and make a plan for who you’ll report to if a teenager shares experiences with sexual harassment, violence, or abuse.