

Maturo, Steve. (2003) "Sexuality of Middle School Students," S. Hamilton, MA: Center for Youth Studies.

OVERVIEW

No one wants to admit it, but our Middle School/Junior High School students are increasingly sexually active due to a number of reasons. Unfortunately, it is a topic that is virtually untouched in most research. Statistics are mostly limited to older teens, but they show that as many as half of the entering freshmen have already had sexual intercourse and many participate in other forms of sexual activity. (Rabey, Fast Easy p.8)

Our hypersexed society is having an impact on kids aged 10-14. Television, films, music and magazines have had a major impact on the preteen and early teen culture. These venues of media are objectifying women and promoting sexual behavior to younger and younger audiences. It appears like everyone who is cool is having some kind of sexual contact, from the evening soap operas (Dawson's Creek, The OC, MTV's Undressed) to sitcoms and prime time TV shows (Friends, Will & Grace, Simple Life) and movies (Cruel Intentions, My Girl) and these are being watched and promoted to younger and younger children.

Music has also affected this with the so-called "Britney look" named for pop artist Britney Spears and popularized by Christina Aguilera, Mandy Moore, and Jessica Simpson that shows young women trying to appear sophisticated, sexy and young all at the same time. These artists are especially popular among girls age 8-15.

A result of all this is a change in clothing styles marketed that lower the waistline in clothing. Clothing for girls has been most affected by this. T-shirts for girls are smaller and tighter fitting than ever before and pants have lower waistlines, making the belly more visible and the breasts appear larger. Eating disorders are common at this age as girls try to imitate the thin girls and women that are portrayed on television and in films. Boys tend to wear baggy clothes and show off their underwear. (Holt, Boxers p.29-30)

Middle school aged kids are concrete thinkers for whom perception is

everything. They want to "fit in." (Clark, Youth Ministry, p.42) As Youthworker magazine notes, "According to teen culture, sexy rules and if you don't have it, you're nobody." (Holt, Boxers p.29)

Pornography addictions are becoming common and more normalized among this age group. Access is easier due to the internet with programs called "mousetrapping" where porn sites lock your computer and every time you close a window, another shows up to trap a user on the porn sites. Online chatrooms also open teens to conversations with mostly older men that prey on them. (Women also do this, but the percentage is small.)

Sex education classes in public schools have done an adequate job teaching about major STDs and birth control methods, but they are largely academic and are poor at dealing with emotional and spiritual aspects of sex and the effects of having multiple partners. As a result, students know the process of sex but they are left to figure out what it is. The assumption among these educational programs is that kids are going to have sex anyway, so they offer prevention methods, thus giving kids the green light to have sex because no one tells them not to. Kids know far more about sex than we think they do. Most kids say they learned about sex from friends more so than parents and other adults.

An increasing issue, especially among Middle School students is a sharp increase in oral sex and heavy petting rather than intercourse. They believe oral sex is "less intimate" and "preserved their virginity." (Rabey, Fast Easy p.7-8) James, a youth leader in Louisiana, told a story during a meeting of the Baptist Convention of New England that a 12 year old girl in his youth group who was going to a "BJ party." He asked her what that was and without blinking an eye the girl told him that it was a "blowjob party." To these youths, it is a viable alternative to sex.

Being concrete thinkers, Middle schoolers have preconceived notions about sex. These include: everyone is doing it, sex is the most important thing there is and you prove your manhood/womanhood by having it a lot. For a further treatment of this issue, see [Junior High Ministry: A Guide to Early Adolescence for Youth Workers](#) by Wayne Rice p. 79-81.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is sex? When does "fooling around" become sex?
2. What does God think about sex and sexuality?
3. What has your own sexual history been like? Are there concerns as a result?
4. What strategies can be developed to help youths to stay pure?
5. When is clothing inappropriate?
6. Can you discuss this issue with youths of the opposite sex? If not, is there someone you can send them to?

IMPLICATIONS

As youth leaders we must follow seven rules for dealing with sexuality of middle schoolers. As a youth leader, you are a lantern, lighting the path and guiding the way for youth and these principles should help you to fulfill that role.

1. Do not allow yourself to be shocked by what you hear or see in their behavior. They know far more about sex than we think they do. Be aware of their preconceived notions about what sex and isn't.
2. Think about this topic before a situation comes up and develop your theology about sex so that you know how to deal with the problems when they arise. Chapter 10 in Dean Borgman's [When Kumbaya is Not Enough](#) is a good starting point for this. Connected to this is to know your limitations based on your own past sexual experiences. Refer them to another youth leader or professional if you cannot be involved in the process.
3. Educate parents and involve them in the process. Parents can be a minefield for this topic, so be deliberate with them and tell them exactly what you are going to do and be up front about it. If they do not expect your response, it can create a problem in your efforts to deal with any issues.
4. Do not condemn the youths in question. Restoration is what we are after, not retribution or embarrassment. Middle school teens are very impressionable and emotionally delicate and your ability to

restore them can be damaged if you are not careful.

5. Tell them the truth frankly and honestly. Teens will trust you more if you are completely honest and open with them. Besides, they already know much about sex, so your job is to correct the information they have and help them to move forward
6. Help them to develop practical strategies for maintaining purity. They cannot move forward on their own. Give them leadership and guidance to give them a starting point to work from. Channel their energies into healthy relationships and friendships.
7. Affirm them as often as possible the good things they do and the progress they are making. Many of these youths enter into sex as a way of gaining affirmation because they do not get affirmation in other relationships. Be deliberate about this and give attention and time to them in this way.

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