

Sex, Gender, and Identity: Helping our Children Understand

Handout for Northridge High School Parents

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I. Four Pedagogical Principles that Govern these Conversations w. Our Kids

A. Speak in Natural law¹

Our kids need to understand the reasons for sexual integrity that are based in secular natural law reasoning

This is not to say you should neglect their religious formation, but simply that you should focus on fortifying the truths of marriage and sexual integrity with reasons based on natural law

See the definition of natural law in the glossary of terms at the end

Natural law reasoning depends upon a clear view of the purpose of our body's natural design and what is good for our body/ us, as embodied beings. We are not spirits inhabiting "bodies" that don't matter. We are body-soul unities. To care for our bodies is to care for ourselves.

B. Speak Intimately

Talking about sex is an intimate subject so you have to build a lot of intimacy for it to feel natural and be proper to talk about these matters with our kids

Intimacy: close familiarity

Understand the inner life of your child

Intimate **conversations** build intimacy, many conversations

Learn to feel what they feel so they feel *understood*

Aim to be their personal life coach. You need to earn their trust and confidence

Remember to *stay calm* when they reveal surprising stuff about what they know

C. Speak Age-Appropriately

Develop a sixth sense for what is the right explanation for their age

CanaVox rule of thumb:

Ages 1-10: Immerse them in truth, goodness, beauty. Keep things simple.

Ages 10-15: Begin to expose them to errors and talk it through. Build the filter

Ages 15-18: Let them exert more independence and autonomy to live the truth

You remain on the sidelines watching/ ready to offer assistance.

If in doubt about how much to say to them, talk *more* rather than less.

As we like to say at CanaVox: "Better a year too early than five minutes too late."

¹ See glossary of terms at the end

D. Balance Empathy and Mercy with Truth and Justice

In each of our explanations, we should aim to touch on these four areas well: we have to show empathy and mercy towards those who are in error, but also stand firm in the truth and uphold justice for the vulnerable.

Progressives are good at the virtues of the left (mercy and empathy)

Conservatives are good at the virtues of the right (truth and justice)

As parents, we need to strive to be good at all four areas and model these for our kids

II. THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS: 10 AND UNDER

Scenario 1: “Alex has two mommies” --1st grader

Some key messages for this hypothetical conversation

- Alex lives with two women who are probably very nice (Empathy/kindness)
- But they are pretending they are married. (They are not really married.) (Truth)²
- Alex is fatherless. Alex doesn't experience the love of her father. This is very sad. (Injustice towards the child)
- This conversation stays here. (Discretion)

Message that Kids and Families Need both a Mom and a Dad:

At other moments of family life, “advertise” that our kids benefit from their mom *and* dad

“Didn't I pick an awesome man to be your daddy?”

“Let's ask your mother, she always sees something I overlook.” Etc.

The culture is saying moms and dads are interchangeable, sex/gender doesn't matter

At home you can push back against that by showing your kids why moms and dads are unique and important as parents, not interchangeable, but very valuable team players in the home

Scenario 2: “Becca said she's going to marry Felicity!” --2nd grader

Key messages for a 2nd grader:

- Becca really *likes* Felicity
- They have a close friendship, but they cannot really marry.
- Only a man and a woman can be married.
- They can be good friends!

Reflect upon strong friendships in books:

Frog + Toad. Fancy Nancy + her BFF Bree.

Good friendships are wonderful, and they are not marriages.

² See Robert George, Sherif Girgis, Ryan Anderson, *What is Marriage?*

Crushes

Reflecting upon crushes can provide great opportunity for teaching important truths

A crush is an exciting feeling we get when we like someone very much

That feeling can make some kids feel like they want to own or *have* the person they like

If they don't want to share someone, that's not being a good friend.

Crushes will help you when you are *older* to figure out who you may want to marry someday

But right now they are silly because you are too young to marry

Scenario 3: "Why does Graydon's mom paint his nails purple?"

-Painting nails is something women do

-Painting his nails could confuse Graydon about his biological sex

-He is not a female, but he could start to *imagine* he's a girl and pretend play

-He could begin to enjoy the idea and want to be something he can't ever be.

-So it's not a good idea for his mom to encourage that confusion.

-I'm proud of you because you played with Graydon normally

-Let's hope and pray he doesn't become confused about his male identity³

Scenario 4: "Roman said Thomas is gay. What is gay?"

-we must never use the word "gay" as an insult under any circumstances.

-examples of incorrect, modern definitions of what "gay" means (California Sex Ed curricula for 3rd grade)

-CanaVox recommends we tell kids that

People who say they are "gay" are saying they have a *crush* on someone of the same sex or that they want to marry someone of the same sex, but they are a little confused.

-We can have strong friendships with people of the same sex, and these are awesome and wonderful.

But no one can really marry someone of the same-sex or have children with someone of the same sex.

-You should always be kind and respectful to others, especially anyone who is confused about marriage or is teased about whom they like to be with

Summary of Elementary School years:

1) The simple truth that marriage is between a man and a woman because only a man and a woman can make a baby.

2) That children need their biological mommy and daddy--and conversely and when a child doesn't have mommy or daddy or both, then that child is hurting.

³ For further reading on this important subject, see Walt Heyer, *Trans Survivors*. And Ryan Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*

- 3) That it's important that we have very good and healthy friendships with kids of the same-sex. love our friends and
- 4) Crushes are helpful when looking to start thinking about marriage and that it's too early to entertain crushes.
- 5) Boys have boy parts, and girls have girl parts. That boys need to be boys and love being boys, that girls need to be girls and love being female. That there are many different ways to be female or male (drop the stereotypes) and love who we are.
(See our *Dear Katy* videos on this)⁴

III. THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS: 10-14

“The boys in my class are so mean. I hate school.”

“The girls in my class are so mean. I feel more comfortable around the guys”

- A child who is able to bond with kids of the same-sex will subconsciously confirm and identify with kids of the same-sex. “I belong with the boys.” “I belong with the girls.”
- The causes of gender identity disorders (GIDs) are very complex and we should not oversimplify them. There are many causes of GIDs.⁵
- However, I believe a good parenting skill today is to keep an eye on how well your child is assimilating into their same-sex peer groups and give them behind-the-scenes help if needed.

“Our [lesbian] neighbors are such kind, fun-loving people -- and nice moms too. I don't see what's wrong with being gay.”

- They are wonderful neighbors! They do seem like very nice moms. (kindness)
- For little Willow to be there, she could only have come to them in one of three ways (truth)
 - She was either adopted or
 - one of her mothers was artificially inseminated or
 - she was made with IVF--laboratory and then implanted into her mother's womb (with or without a surrogate)

Adoption: Some same-sex couples adopt a child, and you know that adoption is it's a heroic act which aims to give a vulnerable child a second chance at being raised by a loving family. The absolute ideal is for the adopted child to have a mom and a dad. These children already suffered the loss of biological parents once, and moms and dads are really important to kids, so

⁴ Dear Katy by CanaVox, [Transgender Talking Points for Kids](#)
Dear Katy by CanaVox, [Gender Dysphoria: What To Do](#)
Dear Katy by CanaVox, [Shattering Stereotypes](#)

⁵ See glossary of terms at the end for Gender Identity Disorders.

while it's very kind and sacrificial of these women to adopt, and they *mean* well, if we think about it from the child's perspective, this child is suffering a loss *a second time* by being denied a mother or a father. (injustice)

Artificial insemination and IVF:

Both cases use 3PR (third party reproduction). Essentially, the father is instrumentalized and used for his sperm and he abandons his biological daughter before even meeting her. (injustice towards the child)⁶

IVF has the added difficulty of usually involving the intentional killing or freezing of sibling embryos in the lab. (injustice towards killed or frozen embryos)

-We must extend **love and forgiveness** towards these same-sex couples who do not usually realize what they are doing. Forgiveness and mercy.

But we must also seek to find ways to build friendships with them, because we deeply desire their good (love), and so we must learn to speak the right language

-More adults need to understand why these are violations against *children's* rights,

As adults we must reproduce responsibly and not deny children their rights to life or to a relationship with a biological mother or father and extended kin.

THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

John joined the Gay PRIDE Alliance and "came out as Gay" --14 year old

-Distinguish between **same-sex attractions and the gay identity**,

-These are two different things.

-Some people experience same-sex attractions and simply need to *describe* their feelings accurately to others

-Others take the further step of adopting a gay **identity**, which is not a mere description of feelings but a declaration, usually a more public declaration, which today is typically taken to mean a declaration of a lifestyle, an awareness of one's self as defined by those feelings

-**The Gay Script** is misleading young people to believe that they *need* to accept a gay identity if they have feelings of same-sex attraction.

-The Gay Script is a social script⁷

-Social scripts are expectations our culture has about how we ought to behave.

⁶ Alana Newman, *Anonymous Us Project*. This work has important testimonies of children who were created by anonymous sperm donation, and it shows the pain that these children suffer.

⁷ See especially Mark Yarouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*. p. 48

-for example, a dominant social script used to be that we date, fall in love, get engaged, get married, have children. Today, a dominant social script is that young people date, hook-up, move-in together, and *perhaps* get married and have children.

Dr Mark Yarhouse on the Gay Script:

1. Same sex attractions are naturally occurring
2. Same-sex attractions tell you who you *really* are as a person
3. Same sex attractions are at the *core* of who you are as a person
4. Behaviors that match your sexual identity are *crucial* for your fulfillment

Welcome to the Club! You will find many friends in the LGBT community

-This script promotes a deeply flawed understanding of human identity.

-Dr. Yarhouse offers an alternate script based upon Christian identity

-Following Yarhouse's example, I'm going to offer a different script

This alternate script is based upon the natural law tradition

A Natural Law Script:

1. Some people experience same-sex attractions.

This doesn't mean the person is broken or bad. Individuals who experience same-sex attractions cannot exactly help how they feel about people around them...

2. Our sexual feelings do not *define* us.

Feelings of same sex attraction are a real part of the experience of some people, they are there. But they don't determine our identity.

3. Our identity is grounded in human nature and is multi-dimensional.

Human nature is a spiritual and bodily unity.

Spiritual capacities: intellect, free will, emotions

Bodily capacities: nervous system, circulatory system, respiratory system, digestive system, and a reproductive system that is either male or female, *inter alia*.

These bodily systems are an important part of who we are.

We are not simply spiritual beings.

We have a social nature/ desire to be in relationship with others

We are made to love others

These aspects describe our **core** identity. We do nothing to merit or choose this nature

Contingent aspects of our identity

Ancestry,

Time period into which we are born;

Faith tradition into which we are initiated as children by our parents

All of these things *mark* us

We react to these with our own free will

We choose a profession

We choose a faith system for ourselves, perhaps one that is distinct from our parents'
We choose a vocation
We choose communities
We are this beautiful mix of a received human nature and freely chosen characteristics
that blend into who we are

the natural law tradition understands personal identity in a rich multi-dimensional way
Partly received human nature, partly chosen personal aspects of my identity
It is very narrow-minded of the Gay Script to say that the feeling of sexual attraction is at
the *core* of our identity.

Gay Script puts vulnerable kids into tiny boxes that don't capture how amazing they are
by nature. It closes their horizons. It limits their freedom.

The Gay Script is depersonalizing as well.

It asks teens to treat their sexual feelings in a way we don't treat any other feelings-

It tells teens that they **MUST** follow their sexual urges.....etc.

The Gay Script treats sexual minorities as if they were less than human.

The Gay Script is part of the broader umbrella of identity politics, which also takes one
feature of human experience and elevates it/ wants to make it the core of who we are.

4. You can choose to integrate your sexual feelings into your human identity.

You can direct your passions in accord with what is good for you as a human being.

The idea is to *acknowledge* the feelings of same-sex attraction but not give them more
importance than they deserve.

The individual chooses instead to *center* his or her identity on his/her human nature,
personal faith (Identity in Christ, for example), family relationships, professional pursuits,
hobbies, communities, etc. "This is who I am."

5. Strong, intimate friendships are crucial for your self-fulfillment & happiness.

We all need close family and friends to be happy.

Sam and Frodo, Anne of Green Gables and her best friend Diana,

Jonathan and David. None of these were sexualized.

These were intense friendships, desiring the good for each other, willing to sacrifice for
each other. Beautiful. Show them the way forward.

6. You are worthy of great love.

You have dignity by design. Nothing you do can shake that. No matter what feelings you
feel, or how many mistakes you make, no matter how many fumbles and falls, your
human nature is one of great dignity and you are worthy of unconditional love.

Give your teenagers an alternative script to compare with the gay script

This will help them to process how narrow the Gay Script is

It will help them call their friends to greatness, and help their friends with same-sex attractions to *hold off* on labeling themselves, so that they can take the time they need to embrace their feelings of same-sex attraction and embrace the challenge of living as free men and women. We must encourage our teens to accompany their friends who struggle with SSA
Don't tell your kids to keep away! Kids with SSA need strong, close healthy friends

“But what’s wrong with two guys kissing? Aren’t they just showing their love for one another?” --15 year old

Modesty in speech has prevented many of good parents from being direct with their kids
We are in an emergency situation which requires clarity.
We need to do all we can to protect our children from misinformation.
It's like a vaccine: give them a small dose of the evil in order to inoculate them from greater harms

Sexual passions can be very strong and tricky to control, especially in youth.
Kissing and holding someone can stoke sexual desire, desire for sexual union
When two men arouse each other they cannot achieve the sexual union their bodies desire
They will perform acts that try to imitate that sexual desire as closely as possible
Unfortunately this can lead to major abuses of their bodies
Since men do not have vaginas they substitute with the rectum and have rectal intercourse
The rectum is part of the digestive system
It is not part of the reproductive system
(There's a mismatch of systems)
The job of the rectum is to eliminate waste. “It is an exit, not an entrance.”⁸
This behavior can cause severe damage, pass bacteria, spread terrible diseases

When two women arouse each other, they cannot achieve the sexual union their bodies desire.
They will sometimes use artificial objects to substitute.
These actions go against the natural design of the human body. It's like a person who sniffs glue and abuses his lungs, which are made to breathe clean air and get oxygen.⁹
These actions are not just another form of sexual intercourse.
They go against our natural design in a very serious way.
When persons treat their bodies in this way, they alienate themselves from who they are.
They treat themselves as if they were objects rather than as subjects / persons with dignity.
They depersonalize themselves.

So if a guy has a crush on another guy, and he begins to cuddle and kiss another guy, *in the long run* he will get into the habit of arousing himself with that guy and be on a path towards these

⁸ Miriam Grossman, *You're Teaching My Child What?*

⁹ J Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*. See also Robert Riley, *Making Gay Okay*.

more serious behaviors. So it is better for him to learn to manage his crushes early on and direct his feelings towards a better place, chaste same-sex friendships. (Ditto with women)

Our teens will probably be very shocked to hear that some people think these acts are OK
Shocked to discover that lifestyle magazines and sex ed programs around the country promote these behaviors.

So a good strategy is to channel their shock to a better place and end on a positive note
Tell them they need to help bring light and peace to this confused world
They can be undercover agents for the truth!

“That Netflix series is really interesting and fun to watch. Why can’t I watch it? The homosexual subplot isn’t even that important to the main storyline.”

Option A: The Direct and To-the-Point Approach

What if that Netflix show had a racist sub-plot instead?

What if it were a great TV show that everyone was watching and the racism was just “mild.”

Would we want to watch racism in even tiny amounts? No, right?!

Racism involves treating people of a different race as sub-human.

LGBT ideology involves treating children and sexual minorities as if they are sub-human. LGBT ideology, like racism, is a major violation of human dignity.

So we don’t want to say or *do* anything that would condone or promote that false ideology. The directors of those TV shows probably *don’t* fully *realize* that they are treating some members of our society as sub-human.

They are usually ignorant of the wrong they do. We must forgive, but we know better.

Option B: The Calm and Patient Approach

Watch the Netflix show with them. Dissect it together, calmly, as co-investigators

Talk them through why the plot is deceptive

Get their buy-in or at least try

“My classmate Jane says she is a boy now. Should I use the transgender pronouns?”

The answer is simple. No.

Otherwise, we become complicit in a lie and can begin to confuse ourselves too about the truth and reality of the matter.

What we say out loud to ourselves becomes insinuated into our hearts.

Stand firm in the truth and speak truth always.

We must teach our children to do the hard right thing.

Teach our children to be especially kind and compassionate towards Trans kids

We can their preferred name, but exert ourselves to avoid using the wrong pronouns

“Ash went to the bathroom.” “The teacher is going to the music room with Ash.” “That backpack is Ash’s”.

Encourage your teen to exert him/herself to be respectful and get to know the trans teen well
Don’t tell them to stay away. Show goodwill, friendship, friendship, friendship.
We have a sexual crisis because we have a friendship crisis

Conclusion:

Mothers and Fathers:

You are National Treasures

You aren’t Bigots

Take the Long View

We are the first generation to raise kids in era of legalized gay marriage / in the midst of a transgender revolution. There’s no playbook for what we are trying to accomplish
we must be patient and merciful towards ourselves too.

Do the best we can as we fumble around

Just think 10 yards. We won’t see the touchdowns in our lifetimes.

Our great-grandchildren will score the touchdowns.

Get the ball rolling in the right direction with a lot of peace and hope.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS (in order of appearance)

NATURAL LAW:

1. a universal body of unchanging moral principles regarded as the basis for all ethical human conduct

2. system of right or justice held to be common to all humans and derived from human nature rather than from the rules of society or positive law (Britannica). In this sense, natural law is "above" the human law and all rules of society should be in harmony with natural law and never be in direct violation of natural law. Hence Augustine's dictum "an unjust law is not a law."

3. a system of thought that holds standards of morality are in some sense derived from, or entailed by the nature of the world and the nature of the human person (Internet encyclopedia of Philosophy).

4. the main system of ethical thought opposed to moral relativism or subjectivism, the view that there is no universal moral theory and that everyone has a different truth. Moral relativism usually leads to positivism, that what is right is determined by some sort of human consensus or written law. It can lead to a "might = right" attitude, or that the strongest will win. It takes Darwinism into ethics and lets the most powerful in society dictate what is right. Therefore, natural law is often shield and armor of the vulnerable in society.

GENDER IDENTITY DISORDERS (GIDs)

1: disorders in which an individual exhibits marked and persistent identification with the opposite sex and persistent discomfort (dysphoria) with his or her own sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. For further reading, [see here](#).

SEX AND GENDER ¹⁰

Sex: is about our genotype and phenotype. Genotype is our genetic constitution. Females are XX. Males are XY. Phenotype regards the observable anatomical traits that develop through a person's lifespan. (There are some important exceptions to this general trend, called intersex cases, but the exceptions do not overturn the general rule.)

Gender has two senses. First it is a psychological concept: the consciousness or awareness of our sex. Because we are rational animals, we are capable of thinking about our sexual identity and understanding ourselves as sexed beings, and capable of expressing our biological reality through language, dress, mores, manners and behaviors. Secondly, it is a sociological concept: how we express that consciousness of our sex to others and in society. Our sense of gender should always be in harmony with and not in contradiction with our biology. This is related to a key idea in epistemology called the correspondence theory of truth.

A common question I often get from participants is whether we should even use the term "gender" at all. It does have a dark history. However, the term does capture an important very specialized reality. I think that the vast majority of the time, we can stick to using the word "sex" because it serves the truth well in most ordinary situations. "What is the sex of the baby?" (Rather than "what is the gender?") or "There are differences between the sexes (rather than 'between the genders')." Or: "Is this a single-sex dorm?" However, there are some specialized moments when only the word "gender" captures the reality at hand. For example, there is no other way to say "gender dysphoria" than that way. Or when sociologists study gender roles, they note that these roles are not synonymous with "sexual roles" but pertain to what is appropriate for male or females beyond strictly reproductive functions. Some theologians speak of God the Father as having a male gender, even though he has no biological sex. And linguists

¹⁰ For more in depth study of this subject, see my class [Sex, Gender and Identity](#) (38 min video) available in English and Spanish.

observe that in some languages, nouns have a gender. (In Spanish, “la mesa,” the table, has a female gender even though the table has no biological sex). In short, there are some highly specialized cases where the term “gender” does capture an important reality which the term “sex” does not. However, unless we are speaking in one of these specialized contexts, the term “sex” usually captures what we are trying to say and can help to restore some commonsense back to our culture.