



Explicit PARENTING

Tackling the Tough Topics of the Teen Years **Part 2**

Ann Jahns

Our sons: Teaching them to respect and honor women

I don't care if the feminists of the world consider me old-fashioned—I love it when men open a door for me. I especially love it when my sons open a door for me. This didn't happen automatically, though. Over the years we had a few awkward, teachable moments that went something like this: (1) Stop boy from going through door. (2) Have boy walk back out door. (3) Have boy hold door for Mom. Doing that little exercise a few times was all it took. Now I pray that my boys have enough respect for every woman, no matter her age, to always hold the door for her.

In a world that objectifies women—in movies and music and pornography—how do we show our boys what it means to be a gentleman? We need to help our boys understand that they should value women and respect them, since we are “all one in Christ Jesus” regardless of whether we are male or female (Galatians 3:28).

I believe the key is modeling. We often assume that our kids know the correct thing to do in all situations. Or perhaps we have told them, and we think that's enough. But there is nothing more important—or powerful—than *showing* our kids the correct thing to do.

Dads, it's so crucial for you to model for your sons how to be courteous and respectful to women. How do you treat your wife in front of your son? Do you support her, honor her, and build her up? If you don't love your wife “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25), what message does that send in your home? Do you also avoid movies and TV shows and magazines that are disrespectful to women? If dads model respect for women in the home, it sends an incredibly powerful message for sons to respect not only their moms but also their sisters, their female teachers, the older lady at the grocery store, and the girls they interact with in school.

And moms, let's model graciousness for our daughters. Show them how to express thanks to men and boys who are courteous. My sons have often opened doors for women, young and old, without a thank you or even a glance in return. We can teach our daughters to show gratitude when gratitude is due.

Here are a few conversation starters to get our sons thinking about this topic:

- Read Genesis 1:27: “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” What does it mean that God created man *and* woman in his image? What does that say about God's love for all people?
- Think about the girls in your school. Do you see boys treating them with disrespect? Why do you think they do that? What do you think you can do about it?

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- How does it feel when someone mocks you or disrespects you?
- Consider this: Each girl in your school is someone's daughter or sister or niece. How would you feel if someone treated your mom or sister with disrespect?
- Examine the movies or TV shows you watch. How do they portray women? Are women treated with respect?
- Let's pray about this: *Dear loving Father of all, you created us to be male and female as part of your perfect plan, and you love us all equally. Help me remember this as I interact with friends, classmates, and teachers. If I see someone treating a classmate with disrespect, please give me the courage to defend that person. Forgive me for the times I have not treated others with the respect they deserve. Amen.*

"So Mrs. Jahns, when *do* girls start thinking about sex?"

Years ago, I was driving a friend's son home from school. I'm sure we were chatting about innocuous things—How was school today? How was practice? What do you think you are going to get for Christmas? All of the sudden, the question came from out of the blue, dropping like a small explosion in the car: "So Mrs. Jahns, when *do* girls start thinking about sex?" *Whaaaat?* To this day, I can't clearly remember how I responded. I was so surprised that I think I hedged, "You might want to talk to your mom or dad about that."

Although I get only a 2 out of 10 for the way I handled that little situation, it just proves that this tough topic—sexuality—is something we Christian parents can't avoid. It's too important. We were created to be sexual beings. Our teens—sorry!—were created to be sexual beings. Sexuality, within the sacred bonds of marriage, is truly pleasing to God. But teens—who are turbulent masses of emotions and hormones within changing bodies—do not have the maturity or the rationality to always make wise decisions when it comes to sexuality. In fact, experts

who study the brain tell us that the human brain isn't fully wired until about age 25. This means that even though teens may *know* the right thing to do in many situations, they just don't always *do* the right thing. Their developing brains don't always make the necessary connections to help them make logical, rational decisions. Have you ever demanded of your teen in frustration, "What were you

I believe the key is modeling.

THINKING?" Well, chances are, he or she *wasn't* thinking because his or her brain was not firing on all cylinders. Combine the work-in-progress teen brain with raging hormones and mercurial emotions and what do you get? A teen who won't always make good choices when it comes to sexuality and modesty.

I'm certainly not qualified to offer advice on when and how to have THE TALK. You know the one I mean. But I can say that it's critical you do have that talk with your child when you feel he or she is ready or when circumstances leave the door open for that conversation. Don't leave it up to the internet or your teen's peers or Hollywood to educate your child in this area. Our children need us—godly parents—to guide them and help them understand not only the biological basics but how important sexual purity is and what God's Word says about it.

Here are some thoughts to get you started on discussing this sensitive subject:

- Start with 1 Corinthians 6:18-20: *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."*

- What does it mean to you that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?
- How does the way you dress and act affect how the opposite sex views you? Are you portraying an image that would please God?
- How do you think not remaining sexually pure could affect your relationship with your future spouse?
- Even though the world tells you that sex outside of marriage is okay—"everyone is doing it"—what does God's Word say about that?
- Let's pray about this: *Dear loving Father, remaining pure in this world is so hard. Give me the strength to guard my thoughts, words, and actions in this area. Help me to always treat others as God's precious children. Please give me the strength to remember that my body is a temple of your Holy Spirit, and please forgive me for the times I fail in this area. Amen.*

Parents, hang in there! These teen years are tough, but they are also so rewarding. Enjoy the ride as much as you can, and remember to arm yourself and your teen with constant prayer, faithful attendance at worship, regular study of God's Word together, and open lines of communication. Consider seeking the counsel and encouragement of battle-scarred, veteran parents. Set reasonable boundaries, and be clear about God's expectations during these years. Although they'd never admit it, teens want boundaries, and they crave the security of limits set by loving parents.

And when mistakes are made—both by you and your teen—lay your concerns at God's throne and ask for forgiveness. It is yours through the blood of Christ.

Ann Jahns and her husband, Thad, are blessed to be the parents of three young men—two in college and one in graduate school. Ann is the Director of Marketing at WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions in Germantown, WI, and she and her family belong to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in West Bend, WI.

Use the picture code to complete the message below. It will reveal a promise you can believe. Create your own messages and share them with your family and friends.



Code:

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= G	= H	= I	= J	= K	= L	= M
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THE PRE-BIRTH PARENT



Ann Ponath

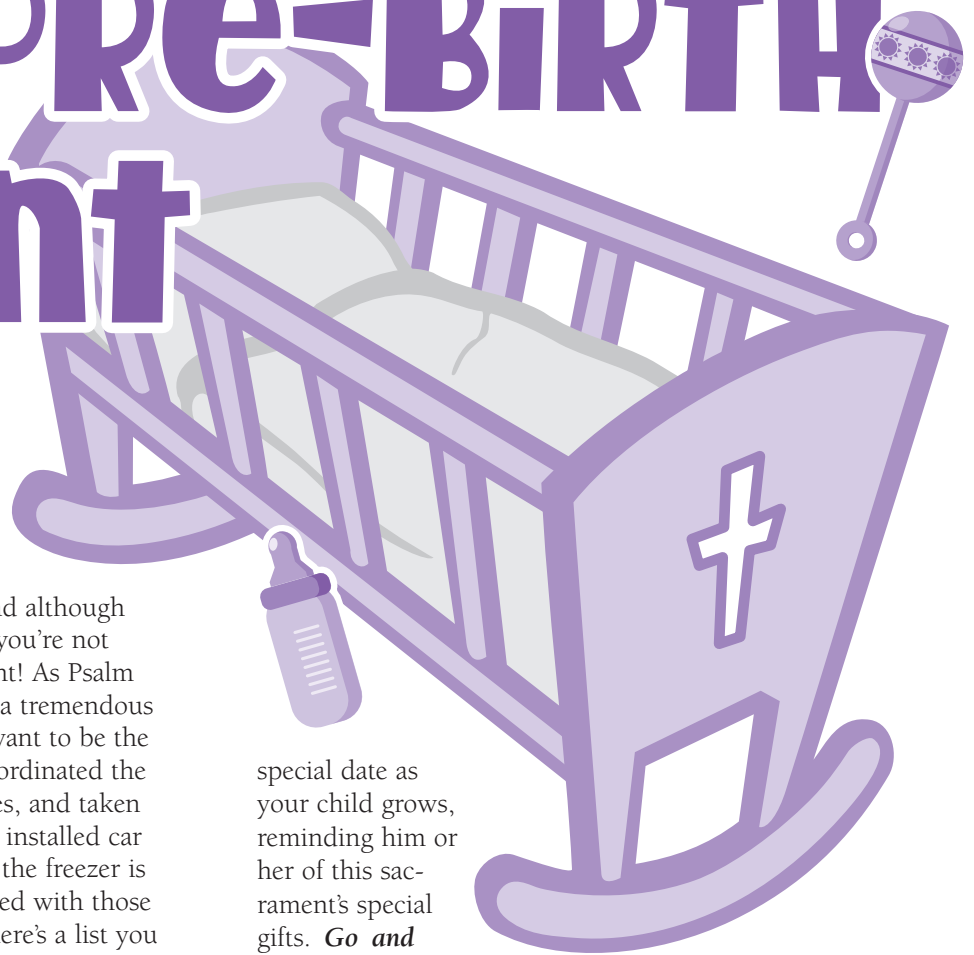
Congratulations! You're having a baby! And although labor and delivery are still to come and you're not changing diapers yet, you are already a parent! As Psalm 51:5 attests, life begins at conception. What a tremendous blessing and responsibility! Of course, you want to be the best parent possible. You've already color-coordinated the nursery, whittled down the list of baby names, and taken a test run to the hospital with your correctly installed car seat. After-birth, in-home help is scheduled; the freezer is bursting with meals; and the cupboard is filled with those adorable, freshly washed baby clothes. But here's a list you may not find in all those parenting mags/books/online articles you've been reading: The Top Ten Things a Christian Pre-Birth Parent Should Consider. Or, as one wise parent put it, "If your primary goal is to raise a child whose life will glorify God and who will ultimately be in heaven, what do you do before the child is born to prepare yourself to aim for that goal?"

The Power of Prayer

Pray for the health and safety of mother and child throughout the pregnancy and birth and for the supporting father, family members, and caregivers. Pray for forgiveness when energy and patience fail. Pray for energy and patience! Pray with thanksgiving for the amazing opportunity to train one of God's children in faith. **Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people** (Ephesians 6:18).

Baptism

Talk to your pastor about your baby's baptism. Will it be a hospital baptism later affirmed in church? How about the Sunday after the baby's birth, in church or privately at home? Don't wait too long to bestow this blessing on your newborn! The important thing is what takes place through the baptism, not that you are able to host an elaborate celebration. And plan to mark this



special date as your child grows, reminding him or her of this sacrament's special gifts. **Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age** (Matthew 28:19,20).

Big Topics

If this is your first child, take this relatively quiet time to have some deep discussions. Talk about what your Christian child will "look" like. How will you nurture in your child a love for God and his Word, a loving attitude towards others, a servant heart? What are your ideas on Christian discipline? What kind of nutrition is important for your growing child of God? How will you steward the financial gifts God has given you in service to your family and others? How will your child be encouraged to use his or her talents in music, academics, leadership, athletics, etc.? Will one of you stay home with the baby, or will you use child care? Who's making dinner? One family I know actually created a Christian family mission statement, which is posted over their kitchen table and reviewed often. **Impress them [God's commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up** (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Observation 101

Maybe it's your own parents or a couple at church, but find examples of good Christian parents and take the time to observe how they parent. Talk to them and ask them questions like, "What do you wish you'd thought about or done before the baby was born?" Take notes! Think about incorporating some of their ideas into your family life. **But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus** (2 Timothy 3:14,15).

Playgroups

One of the most wonderful blessings of our early family days was our playgroup. These Christian moms met twice a month to play and talk and eat and laugh and cry and share the exciting, exhausting, exhilarating early days. We could pray for and encourage one another and make meals when baby number two came around! **A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity** (Proverbs 17:17).

Date Nights

Every parenting expert will tell you to make time for date nights. That advice makes the spiritual parenting list as well! Your relationship with the spouse God has given you is second only to your relationship with him. You are going to be leaning on each other harder than you ever have before—and not just in the delivery room! Read God's Word together, worship together, pray together, and take time to be alone together. A good relationship takes work! You may not always feel like leaving your precious child with a babysitter and heading to the movies or out on a walk, but it will be a blessing for all concerned! And when the inevitable life surprises hit, you will be thankful for the blessing of a trusting, loving, stable relationship! **Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken** (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Transition Time

How are you with change? You are headed for a big one! Are there other siblings or pets that will also be affected? It's impossible to prepare for everything, but talk about the changes and how, as a family, you will deal with them. Remember, God is there for the happy times (the baby slept through the night!) as well as the fearful, anxious ones (the teenager is driving across town for the first time!). Add a request for flexibility to the prayer list! **Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear** (Isaiah 65:24).

Christian Resources

In addition to getting the crib set up, look for resources that will support your Christian parenting goals. Take advantage of your church's cradle roll program, Power Hour, Sunday school, VBS, Lutheran

elementary school, and library of children's Bible-based books. Can you "register" for a baby Bible, CDs of religious songs, or a picture with a Bible passage to hang in the baby's room (also for you to see in the wee hours of the morning)? Consider Christmas decorations that focus on Jesus, a collection of books for church and the car that focus on God's love, Bible story puppets—surround your growing family with Scripture! **Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path** (Psalm 119:105).

Repetition

Put all of the above—prayer, Christian discussions, playgroups, date nights, and Christian resources on repeat mode! With God's help, evaluate what is working and what's not, and make adjustments to your family life—always keeping the heavenly goal in mind. **Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it** (Proverbs 22:6).

Thankfulness

You've heard it before—long days, short years. Even on difficult days, take the time to joyfully savor the pregnant, baby, toddler, preschool, elementary, and, yes, even the teenage and young adult times. Thank God for the amazing blessing of parenthood as you cradle your newborn or reach up to hug your college student and take another moment to not only assure them of your love but of God's extravagant love in Christ: "We love you, but Jesus loves you even more!" **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Corinthians 15:57).

So congratulations! You are having a baby; you are already a parent! Know that God's goal for your child is the same as your own: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth* (3 John 4). May God bless you and your child as you seek God's ways in nurturing this young Christian all the days of his or her life!

Ann Ponath lives and writes in Stillwater, MN, with her husband, David, and their four blessings, ages 13-22.



**I HAVE NO
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Telling YOUR FIRST...

Wendi Guenterberg

As an athlete, trancelike, imagines every curve, every turn in the course, seconds before stepping to the starting line, I had visualized the whole precious moment in my head. Our firstborn, an only child for more than three years, would be sitting quietly on my lap. We would cuddle, and she would tell me again (for the umpteenth time) how she longed to have a brother or sister to play with.

At that opportune moment, I would move her small hand to my already swelling stomach and whisper in her ear that her new brother or sister was on the way. Her round, little face would be radiant with joy and excitement. And this event would live on in our memories—one of those highlights that families thrive on and relive as the years pass.

My precious moment never materialized. Rather, my three-year-old almost knocked me over as she raced to my side after Sunday school one morning. A flushed look of desperation and urgency masked her face. Her question demanded an immediate answer: “Are you really going to have a baby? Mrs. Thompson said you are going to have a baby.” I smiled and tried to block out the people around me as I thought of a good way to handle this awkward moment.

This was not what I had wanted. This was not how I had planned to share the news with her. It wasn’t time yet. She shouldn’t know . . . not yet! Not like this!

Perhaps you are not nearly as romantic in your thinking as I was. I had to learn that the sentimentality that surrounds sharing such happy news isn’t nearly as important as the sensitivity one projects in breaking the news. The moment doesn’t have to be very magical at all. Nor does it have

to be memorable. But paving the way for a child to become a big brother or a big sister is an important event. It can also be a traumatic event. We have an obligation to share the joy of adding a new person to the family in the most loving way.

Keeping the big news a secret can be very difficult.

After all, both parents know. And they are excited about the changes this will mean for their family. Other family members may also know. Mom may be running to the bathroom with bouts of morning sickness. Conversations occur, often within a child’s earshot. Mom is making trips to the doctor’s office for prenatal visits.

Most experts advise against telling children before the 12th week. The chance of miscarriage decreases after the first trimester. Mom’s health and pregnancy history and the child’s age and curiosity level are key factors in deciding how and when is the best time to share the news. Our daughter’s big question in the parking lot turned out to be a nonevent for us. She heard the information. She processed it. But until her mother and father sat down to explain it all to her, the news didn’t really register. It was hard to detect

any impact the news may have had on her life. She really didn’t care a whole lot about the pregnancy. It certainly was a much bigger deal to me than it was to her.

If you are planning to keep the news of your pregnancy a secret from your child for a while, it is probably necessary to withhold it from other friends and family members as well. In any case, a child’s understanding of what will soon be taking place is critical. For this reason it is important that your child understands that this is his or her news as well as Mommy and Daddy’s. Sharing the happy news first with your child will make her feel trusted and important; the baby will be ours, not just Mommy and Daddy’s.

**IT IS IMPORTANT
THAT YOUR CHILD
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ABOUT YOUR SECOND

Once an older sibling knows that a newborn brother or sister is on the way, the months of pregnancy can become a new adventure for the whole family. This is the perfect time to have a conversation about how life will be when the new baby comes. Talk about where the new baby will sleep. Look at baby pictures together to help your child understand that he or she was once a baby too. Include your child in making preparations for the new baby, with constant reminders that being a big brother or a big sister is a very important job.

My vision of sharing the news that a new baby brother or sister would soon be living in our house turned out to be nothing more than a romantic dream.

Once again, God's approach proved to be far better than my own. Now we have a wonderful scrapbook of memories filled with the unexpected surprises that occur every day in the life of a Christian family.

Wendi Guenterberg and her husband, Tom, live in Appleton, WI, where Wendi serves as Worship Coordinator at Immanuel, Greenville. Her husband has taught at Fox Valley Lutheran High School for 17 years, and they are nearly empty nesters. Their daughter, Kati, is in her fourth year at MLC, and their son, Ryan, is in his junior year at FVL.

Paving the way

- **Pray together** during your child's bedtime prayers for the good health of the new baby and the pregnant mommy.
- **Read books** about animal characters that have babies, or read books about being a big brother or sister.
- **Point out infants** at the grocery store or in church. Make note of crying babies, as well as ones who smile, so your older child understands a new baby's full range of behaviors.
- **Take your child along** with you on visits to the doctor's office. Let your child hear the unborn baby's heartbeat.
- **Buy a doll** for your older child—even your son. Have your child practice being gentle, and encourage appropriate baby care.



BIRTH ORDER—DOES IT MATTER?

Why are over half of the US presidents, the majority of astronauts, and a large percentage of Rhodes scholars firstborn children? Why is there a high percentage of firstborns in the fields of medicine, law, and ministry? Why do firstborns tend to have high motivation and a strong need to achieve?

Firstborn children seem to have a head start on life that often follows them through life. Research shows that firstborns tend to walk and talk at an earlier age. For a time, the firstborn gets all the parents' attention, interest, and expectations. In response to the individual attention, firstborns tend to be more responsible, better communicators, and more goal-oriented.

Being firstborn, however, is not without its drawbacks. Because of their higher need to achieve, firstborns tend to experience more anxiety and frustration. Even as adults, they tend to be perfectionists or hyper-responsible in their daily activities. They are often more guilt prone than children born later in the birth order.

In contrast, by the time the youngest child comes along, parents are usually more relaxed and comfortable with their parenting ability. The rules may often be more relaxed, and day-to-day expectations may be lower. Since

older children are available to take on responsibilities, the youngest child may become less responsible and more dependent. On the other hand, the youngest child may become more sociable and free of stress because he or she is less likely to be competitive and achievement-oriented.

By the time the youngest child comes along, parents are usually more relaxed.

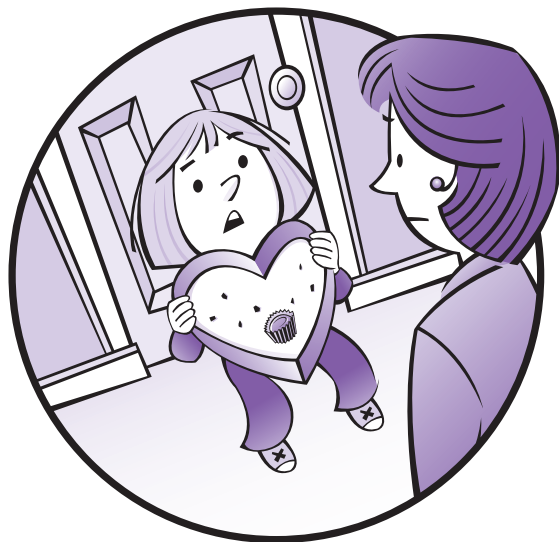
In between these two extremes is the middle child (or children). This child often finds that, in any activity, the oldest can do it the best and the youngest can do it the cutest. There may be some jealousy, or the middle child may feel left out. It often seems that middle children are searching for their particular "claim to fame" in the family. They establish their identities by filling a niche into which no other member of the family has become involved.

While birth order is fun to examine and interesting to speculate about, it isn't all that important. What is important is that all children know they are loved by their parents . . . and their Savior.

Dr. John Juern



Illustration: Shutterstock



"That candy store was farther from home than I thought!"

Cartoon: Ed Koehler

Parents & Crosslink

Parents Crosslink is published by Northwestern Publishing House four times annually in partnership with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Commissions on Youth Discipleship, Adult Discipleship, and Lutheran Schools. All comments should be directed in writing to **Ray Schumacher**, Editor, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226 or schumacherr@nph.wels.net.

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Copy Editor – **Sara Strauss**
Art Director – **Karen Knutson**
Designer – **Pam Dunn**

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THE FORGIVING LOVE OF JESUS

by MaryAnn Sundby

*All God's children, do you pray,
"Jesus guide me through the day.
Please forgive my every wrong.
Shine in me your love so strong?"*

*All God's children, do you show
God's good love to folks you know—
neighbors, friends, and everyone—
so they know what he has done?*

*All God's children, do you share
God's forgiving love so rare?
His forgiveness makes us free,
binding us in harmony!*