

How Detailed Should Info Be In Telling a Child Facts of Life?

My eight-year-old daughter has started asking me many questions about babies. Two years ago, when she first asked me where babies come from, I told her from a seed, like a flower or vegetable. When she asked where the seed came from, I told her from God. Such answers no longer satisfy her, because her classmates are evidently discussing the subject and she wants more information. What do I tell her, and how?



As you have probably discovered, Lucy, little girls are just as curious and inquisitive as their grown sisters—and tend to talk just as much. Since babies are very much the concern of women, it is not surprising that your daughter and her classmates want more information.

They're running true to form in this regard, and you should be thankful that your daughter feels free to come to you with her problems. Learning about life is a gradual process. You will have to answer the same questions over and over again, regulating your instructions each time according to what the child is prepared to understand.

THIS IMPLIES that you have given some thought to what your daughter needs to know at different stages in her development. Many parents probably intend to give their children adequate instructions in such matters, but they keep putting it off month after month and year after year because they have never taken the time to formulate a definite program of action.

Many parents secretly hope their children won't ask questions or will get their information from others. Some act as if they were raising a batch of mummies who would blissfully pass through childhood and adolescence without ever wondering what sex was all about. A few make serious efforts to give adequate instructions, even to the extent of keeping pens as practical examples, though as one weary mother remarked, "It's nice for the child to have pens until pens start having children."

Why do many parents find it so difficult to meet the needs of their children in this regard? Well, most of them receive little help from their own parents, so they have no precedents to guide them. Having been trained never to think about anything related to sex, many adults cannot take an objective view of it even in their own lives and consequently find it convenient to ignore it in their growing children.

At the same time because mature sexuality involves highly personal, intimate, emotion-loaded experiences, many parents tend to forget that it does not have similar meaning or significance for their children.

WHAT SHOULD you tell your daughter? Until she is nine or ten, most of her questions will be related to the following points: What are the physical differences between boys and girls and why? What is pregnancy—where does the baby come from? How does it get there? How is it born? These are questions of fact that a child's normally

inquisitive mind is bound to raise.

Your daughter has a right to honest answers, but like all the questions she asks, the completeness of the answers you give will depend upon what she is prepared to receive. That's why she will ask the same questions again and again, while you must patiently repeat your explanations, adding more adequate details as her ability to understand them increases.

If she feels free to come to you with all her questions because you are always willing to discuss them with her, you will generally know why she is asking a given question and what kind of answer she is ready to receive. Sometimes it will prove helpful to ask her what she thinks the answer may be, and having received what she has already been told, you can then offer more information as needed.

Some mothers feel they don't know the answers or how to explain the pertinent facts to young children. This is foolish. Children aren't interested in a course in anatomy or obstetrics. You don't have to use technical terms. Following the matter-of-fact, simple method you use when they ask you about

eating, cooking, household gadgets, and so on. In other words, you give them the best explanation you can in terms of their experience and your knowledge.

Moreover, Lucy, by the time your daughter reaches the age of ten, she should have received some explanation of menstruation and of the bodily changes to be expected during puberty. You can give her this information gradually, relating it to her questions about her physical growth, her thinking about the future, and your instructions on modesty.

The main point is that she look forward toward puberty and all that it implies as a normal, desirable sign in her development as a woman, that is, as a potential mother.

In general, remember that before puberty, children regard sexual matters as objective, impersonal facts unless their curiosity is aroused by the emotional reactions provoked by their questions. Simple, honest answers relating sex to the divine plan and the source of life not only allay undue curiosity but aid children to acquire the balanced attitudes and knowledge needed to deal with the inevitable personal experience of sex at puberty.



Enroll for Convent Life

Seven young women of St. Thomas the Apostle parish, Irondequoit, will leave this month to begin convent life. Five were on hand for a farewell dinner given by the Sisters of Mercy who staff the parish school. With Monsignor Richard Burns are Maureen Casey, Barbara Aldrich, Kathleen Zillioux, Vivian Gibson, Sharon Bailey and Sister Joanne, superior. The other two are Suzanne Klingler and Margaret Mary Roney. Orders represented are Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph, Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart and the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart.

Bible Experts Rap Criticism

Cincinnati — (RNS) — A resolution protesting against the "defamation" of Catholic Biblical scholars by a leading Catholic theological publication in this country was adopted here at the 24th general meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America.

(Rev. Joseph P. Brennan of St. Bernard's Seminary attended the meeting.) The resolution said that "during the last few years, the American Ecclesiastical Review has carried some articles on contemporary studies charging Catholic Biblical scholars with gross ignorance of basic theological truths, if not of deliberately malicious perversion of these same truths."

IT COMPLAINED that "no evidence" had been "adduced" of any particular error published by any particular scholar.

Adopted by an overwhelming vote of some 200 Scripture experts attending the meeting the resolution cautioned that such a

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New Abbot For Trappists

Spencer, Mass. — (NC) — Father M. Thomas Aquinas Keating, O.C.S.O., 38, has been elected a blot of St. Joseph's Trappist Monastery here.

He succeeds Abbot M. Edmund Flaherty, O.C.S.O., who died August 1 because of ill health, after 18 years as spiritual head of the monastery.

THE ELECTION of Abbot Keating was conducted by secret ballot under the direction of Abbot Emmannuel Conant, O.C.S.O., of the Abbey of Our Lady of Bellefontaine, France, who also installed the new abbot (Aug. 30).

Abbot Keating, an alumnus of Fordham University and a native of New York City, has been superior of St. Benedict Monastery, Snowmass, Colo., since 1958. He joined the Trappists in 1944 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1949.



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