



# SALEM Digest

Spring 2003 • Topics of interest to friends of Salem Christian Mental Health Association

## DID I COME FROM AN EGG?

Judy Cook

The experience of our sexuality is one of the most potent forces in human relationships which God created. Our sex drive can be as strong as the drive to put food in our stomachs when we are hungry. Our popular culture is obsessed with exploring sexual relationships, and for most people thoughts about sex are a daily occurrence. And yet, in many families, conversations about sexuality are rare or nonexistent. Many children sense very early on that sex is a taboo subject. Consequently, many children's questions remain unasked, and instead children often glean erroneous information about sex from TV and their friends. Distorted beliefs and attitudes about sex can be as harmful to us and our children as a belief that humans can fly would be if we were standing on the roof of a tall building.

Often people are very uncomfortable with sexual words. Words such as penis, vagina, intercourse, orgasm and breast are powerful words because they are connected to a powerful reality—the reality of sexual experience. Couples would do well to learn to communicate with each other right from the beginning of their marriage about the shared experience of their sexual relationship. If they learn to be comfortable expressing their likes and dislikes, their experiences

of arousal and sexual fulfillment, even their fears and frustrations with sex together, they will have gone a long way toward developing a climate of openness and

The time for parents to begin thinking about how to teach their children about sex is right at birth. Babies already learn that to be held and touched feels good and brings a sense of wellbeing. During the first stage of a child's development between the age of zero to five, a child's sexual identity will be developing as part of his/her overall personality. Since we are sexual beings, one of the most crucial aspects of development is our identity as male or female. Parents are amazed to notice their son's preference for dinky toys or their daughter's attraction to Barbie dolls, in spite of their attempts to predispose their children to play with both. Children who have a secure sense of themselves as male or female at an early age grow up to be confident men and women.

Parents can teach preschool children about their own bodies by using correct names for body parts. Children's questions during this stage of development will relate to something a child sees most often, such as a pregnancy. Typical questions which children will ask or which parents can raise are: Where does the baby come from? Did I come from an egg? Why don't I have a penis? Where was I before I was born?

Before the age of five is also not



Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*, 1886

permission for their eventual children's questions as well, when the time comes. A good resource to help parents develop ways they can communicate with their kids about sex is: *Sex is Not a Four-Letter Word!* written by Patricia Martens Miller, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1995.

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## Executive Corner

Rev. Al Dreise

Salem's goal is to provide and support mental health care services.

Since 1991 Salem has been involved in 14 community-based partnership projects with either funding, consultation services, or both. Some of them are:

- Family Outreach Teams
- Durham Office
- Genesis Place Richmond Hill
- Oshawa Counselling
- Christian Counselling Centre St. Thomas
- Peel Halton District Counselling Service
- Wellspring Christian Counselling in Alliston
- The Lighthouse in Toronto
- Homestead Residential and Support Services
- The New Life Counselling Services, Arthur, Drayton Palmerston, Fergus Listowel.

### Services in development

Salem is setting up support services for persons and families affected by mental health issues.

We are also developing a Web-based referral and information service. Churches, schools, consumers, and professionals are encouraged to take advantage of this referral service.

As well Salem coordinates a life-enrichment network which provides resources, speakers, support-systems, and educational material for current mental health issues such as care of the elderly, abuse awareness and support for survivors and perpetrators, addiction, parenting, marriage, divorce, grief, and church-based support for families struggling with mental illness.



Rev. Al Dreise

“  
**Why is sex before marriage wrong if you love each other?**  
 ”

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**Rev. Albert Dreise, Executive Director**

### DID I COME FROM AN EGG?

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too early to begin to teach a child about good touch and bad touch. In a culture where child pornography is readily available and where a child predator could be a relative, a neighbour, or another trusted person a child has contact with, a child's best protection is knowledge. The public library is a good resource to help parents find the best way to street-proof their young children. A video recording made in 1984 by Paramount Pictures Corp. called *Strong Kids, Safe Kids - A Family Guide* is still a good resource. For parents to model loving touch between themselves and toward their children also teaches them about good touch, closeness, and safety, which all help to establish a secure foundation for the development of self-identity.

Between the ages of five and nine children are mostly interested in how various aspects of their bodies work. It is important for parents to teach their child about body care and good hygiene. At the same time, it is also important not to give messages that suggest that their sex organs are dirty, for instance, by demanding excessive hand-washing after bathroom use. During this time, children often develop a sense of modesty and a greater need for privacy. Parents must respect this need as it helps their children recognize their rights with respect to their own bodies, as well as the rights of others. During this time parents should use opportunities to again street-

proof their kids about sexual abuse. Typical questions for this period are: How does the sperm get into the egg? How do we stay alive in our mother's stomach? Why do girls have periods? What are they?

Between ages nine and thirteen kids often begin a growth spurt. They are curious about their bodies and the changes that become evident towards the end of this period. They begin to show interest in the opposite sex. During this period girls usually have a first experience of menstruation, and boys of ejaculation (often via wet dreams). What this means must be explained to them well in advance of when it happens. At this age children often need reassurance about their own physical development. They may be self-conscious about their penis or breast size, about being later than their friends in starting menstruation or growing pubic hair. Boys may worry about having an erection unexpectedly, and girls worry they will have their period unexpectedly. They typically ask questions such as: What is french kissing? What is masturbation? Is it bad? Does a girl ever have a wet dream? Does sexual intercourse hurt?

It is during this period that young teens begin to experiment with and experience their new-found sexual feelings. Often they will test out these new feelings with their opposite-sex parent. A young girl's sweet and "kittenish" behaviour towards her dad, and a boy's playful wrestling with his mother, for example, can be expressions of newly developing sexual urges

seeking a safe target. It is important for parents to understand that this is part of their youngsters' normal development, and that it is their responsibility to set and maintain proper physical boundaries with their children. How parents respond now to their opposite-sex children with love, respect, and safe physical touch will help their children establish healthy and mature love relationships later in life.

Between ages thirteen and sixteen teenagers are most concerned with achieving independence, as well as learning to understand the connection between responsibility and privilege (and, conversely, irresponsibility and parental control). During this time there is a heightened focus on the self, and a heightened concern with physical appearance. Peer relationships are primary, and with it a concern with sexual activity patterns—the dos and don'ts of dating.

The focus on discussion for parents with their teens should include responsibility and moral behaviour, as well as problem solving relationship difficulties. Notice in the relationship model side-bar that the movement from acquaintance to marriage ideally parallels the movement

from attraction to intercourse. Teens often wish to know answers to questions such as: How far should you go on a date? What's wrong with pornography? What is it? Why is sex before marriage wrong if you love each other?

Sex education begins in infancy. If parents have learned to be comfortable using correct sexual terms, they will have established a climate of openness in which their children's questions about sex can surface. If they have been able to maintain a relationship of openness, trust, love, and respect as their children develop toward adulthood, their children's sexual identity and knowledge will be built on a strong foundation of good information and good experiences of themselves as sexual beings created by God.

### Model of a Healthy, Romantic Relationship

#### ACQUAINTANCE

(Developing Emotional Closeness)

#### ATTRACTION

(Developing Sexual Closeness)

#### Uncommitted Romantic Relationship

Playfulness in group context  
Teasing  
Flirtation  
No personal conversation

and

Experiencing closeness through touch of non-private parts of the body



Getting to know person  
Sharing personal feelings

and

Kissing, holding, caressing "exposed" areas of the body (e.g. face, arms)

#### Committed Romantic Relationship

Being committed to each other  
Preparing for a life together

and

Beginning to experience closeness through touch of private parts of the body

Continuing to develop emotional intimacy and commitment



MARRIAGE

INTERCOURSE

## 40 Years — a Celebration!

*This year we celebrate God's faithfulness to Salem during the past 40 years.*

*We are planning to make the 2003 fall issue of the Salem Digest part of our 40-year celebration. To that end, we invite anyone who has in some way experienced help through one of Salem's programs or its counselling staff to write to us.*

*If you would like to tell friends and supporters of Salem how Salem has touched your life, please let us know of your experience.*

*Write us at 1 Young St., Hamilton, On, L8N 1T8, e-mail: [therapy@Salem.on.ca](mailto:therapy@Salem.on.ca) or fax us at (905)528-3562.*

*Submissions will be printed anonymously at your request.*

**Salem Christian Mental Health Association — 40 years of service**

*Judy Cook (here with youngest grandchild, Eden) is Clinical*



*Director and Family Therapist at Salem Christian Counseling Service in Hamilton.*



# A Guide For Parents

compiled by *Betty Brouwer*

Children need accurate, yet age appropriate information to grow and respect God's desire for healthy sexuality and to stay safe in society.

There are numerous books available on the topic of sex education, and healthy sexuality. You can use books as a starting point to discuss sexuality in an age appropriate manner with your child.

Remember that what is more important is the message you as parents give about the topic of sexuality than the specific book you choose to read to your child. Books should be used to enhance dialogue that occurs between parents and their children within their day-to-day life and to capitalize on teachable moments as they happen.

Here are some books I came across while browsing through the public library and the Christian bookstore.

Krasny Brown, Laurie and Marc Brown, *What's the Big Secret? Talking about sex with girls and boys*, Little, Brown and Company, New York; 1997. 32 pages.

From the creators of the Arthur series comes this delightful fun book that kids will enjoy both looking at and reading. The book begins by exploring what makes boys and girls different. Is it their names, clothes, feelings, toys? It then proceeds to a discussion in a simple and straightforward manner of sexual organs, sexual intercourse and the development and growth of a baby.

Although it is not a Christian book per se, it serves as a good starting point for talking to your children about sexuality.

It is geared for preschool to young elementary school children. Parents can easily choose to focus on certain

sections of the book at a time.

There is a Christian series designed primarily by Stan and Brenna Jones entitled *God's Design for Sex*. Initially Stan & Brenna Jones wrote, *How and When to Tell your Kids about Sex: A lifelong approach to shaping your child's sexual character* (NavPress 1993).

Acting on numerous requests from parents they developed a series of books that could be read with children.

*God's Design for Sex:*  
Book 1: Jones, Stan and Brenna, *The Story of Me*. Ages 3-5. This simple book recounts the story of how a family's son came to be part of their family. The book seeks to imitate a dialogue between parents and child and thus the format used is of the child asking a question followed by a parental response. The pictures are soft and the story gentle, making it suitable for this age group.

Book 2: Nystrom, Carolyn, *Before I Was Born*. Ages 5-8.

Nystrom does a good job at placing sexuality within the context of God's creation, emphasizing the creational goodness of our bodies. The book explores the changes that occur in a male and female body, and explains sexual intercourse in a tactful and straightforward manner. The author also discusses the development of a baby and the miracle of birth resulting in the creation of a unique child of God.

Book 3: Jones, Stan and Brenna, *What's the Big Deal? Why does God care about sex?* Ages 8-11.

Each chapter is designed to be a dialogues between parents and child(ren). The child starts by

asking a few questions and the parent(s) proceed with a fairly lengthy reply. This didactic presentation can make the book a bit difficult to read with the child. However, it could easily be used as a resource by parents, as each chapter deals with a different topic.

Book 4: Jones, Stan and Brenna, *Facing the Facts: The truth about sex and you*. Ages 11-14.

A series for the Christian Family, Concordia Publishing House:  
Book 1: Greene, Carol, *Why boys and Girls are Different*. Ages 3-5.  
Book 2: Hummel, Ruth, *Where do Babies Come From?* Ages 6-8.  
Book 3: Graver, Jane, *How are You Changing?* Ages 8-11.  
Book 4: Bimler, Rich, *Sex and the New You*. Ages 11-14.  
Book 5: Ameiss, Bill, *Love, Sex, and God*. Ages 14 and up.  
Book 6: Buth, Lenore, *How to Talk Confidently with your Child about Sex*.  
Book 7: Sonnenberg, Roger, *Human Sexuality: A Christian perspective*. Adult.

Jacobson, Matt and Lisa, *The Amazing Beginning of You*, Zonderkidz, 2002.

This book explores the development of a baby using a combination of real photos, illustrations and corresponding text.

Murkoff, Heidi, *What to Expect When Mommy's Having a Baby*, Harper Festival, a division of Harper Collins Publishers, 2000.

*Betty Brouwer is a child and family therapist with Salem. She works with children, adolescents and their parents. She is also registered as an art therapist.*

