



By Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

Questions from Readers

Question:

My 10-year-old daughter saw a movie at a sleepover that she probably shouldn't have watched, and asked me a question about oral sex when she came home. I explained that such behavior was done by grownups when they were married, and that she had plenty of time to learn about sex when she was older. She seemed satisfied by my answer, but I'm not sure if I said the right thing.

Answer:

I suspect you made a mistake, as you did not really answer your daughter's question. You need not go into graphic detail, but you should answer her concern so that she is left knowledgeable rather than curious. Go back and speak with her again.

These situations are tough for parents. You want to be responsive to your daughter's concerns, as you'd rather have her speaking with you rather than with peers or others. At the same time, most parents don't want to give too much information for fear of stimulating a premature interest in sexual behavior.

By the way, I'm also concerned about the types of movies your daughter watches at sleepovers. I advise parents to clearly communicate their family rules regarding movies and other situations before a child attends any sleepover. I hope you have had some contact with the parents regarding supervision at the sleepover.

Question:

My husband committed suicide when my daughter was very young. Whenever she has asked about her Daddy, I've said that her father had an accident and is in heaven.

It is well known to our family that my husband killed himself, and I'm worried that someday my daughter is going to discover the truth. She is 11-years-old and very religious, and seems very curious about her dad. She knows that suicide is a mortal sin that causes people not to go to heaven.

Answer:

Your daughter is old enough to know the truth. Here's the way I would try to explain suicide to an 11-year-old girl.

There are different kinds of illnesses, some that affect the body while others affect the mind. Your dad had a kind of sickness that caused him to feel very sad and depressed and to act in ways that were not like him.

When your dad was very sick with this mental illness, he killed himself on purpose.

I know your daddy loved you and the rest of the family very much, and he never would have done this except for the serious problems he had. I believe that God understands people who have all kinds of illnesses, and that your daddy is in heaven in spite of the fact that he took his own life.

Your daughter may have more questions as she gets older. I would be direct and honest with her. Since it's likely that your child will find out about this matter from other family members, isn't it better that you have this discussion with her soon?

Question:

My girlfriend's 4-year-old son swears a lot. One day he looked at her and said, "F – you." What can be done about this? I was told to gently smack him in the mouth with the back of my hand, but I don't know if I should. It's an everyday thing with him.

Answer:

You shouldn't be hitting your girlfriend's son under any circumstances. Instead, your girlfriend should make it clear to her son about what words are okay and others that are not acceptable. When he swears or talks back to her, she should use a simple timeout procedure involving having him sit in a chair for about five minutes until he is quiet. If she is consistent, and positively rewards his appropriate behavior, this behavior should go away in the next few weeks.

By the way, where is your girlfriend's son learning such inappropriate behavior? Maybe you should pay some attention to that issue!

Gregory Ramey, Ph.D., is a child psychologist and vice president for outpatient services at The Children's Medical Center of Dayton. For more of his columns, visit www.childrensdayton.org/ramey. Send comments to Dr. Ramey at rameyg@childrensdayton.org.