

by the choices we make. Our choices and actions don't just bring about consequences outside of us, they form in us profound and lasting spiritual traits, for good or ill." (see *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 71).

As students become aware that they make decisions about how they will use their gift of sexuality, they require assistance to understand that only by using it with the dignity and purpose God intended are they able to wholly flourish as human persons, develop relationships which are in true communion with one another, and fully answer their true vocation to love. Throughout this Theme, the moral decision-making model "See, Judge, Act, Evaluate" will be suggested as a structure for students to use to guide them in the moral decision-making process. The students learned and practised the model in Grades 6 and 7. A template and review of the model is provided in Appendix F for teacher reference.

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If you decide to use a question box, it is important to remind the students that you are depending on their maturity when they use it. Let them know that you expect them to show their respect for sexuality by the language they use. You could also mention that there may not be time to answer all the questions.

Questions can be answered at the end of each topic. You will have to use your judgement about which ones to answer publicly.

- *In general, a question that goes much beyond the material presented in this theme should not be answered publicly.*

If you have a concern about a question and know who wrote it, you may want to speak to the student privately. (You will, of course, need to be mindful of the need to be careful about private communication with students.)

- *If a student discloses a situation involving sexual abuse, you must report this immediately to Children's Aid and inform your principal.*

Teachers of this age group have found that some students raise issues that go considerably beyond the topics presented at this grade level. Sometimes, these questions are the result of a situation in the family; at other times, the questions arise from something the student has heard or read and doesn't understand. You will find some guidelines and suggestions regarding such questions following this caution note.

## **Student Questions: Guidelines and Suggestions**

### **Family Situations**

Most of the examples of student questions reported by teachers are related to family situations: an older sister has had an abortion; an older brother has told the family that he is gay; a student was conceived through IVF; or a student's mother never married. These topics may be raised without a specific question, but the underlying motivation appears to be a need for some response.

Often, students are expressing a concern about something that affects their families and therefore affects them. They raise the topic in an attempt to get some perspective and reassurance. This is particularly true if the issue has resulted in family discord.

Most often, the best way to handle these personal situations is to let the student know that you care about his or her concern but not to extend the discussion of what are private family matters. Here are some suggested responses:

- Sibling identifies as transgender — “Every person is created and loved by God. All of us have talents, gifts, strengths, and challenges. Always let your sibling know that you love them and support him/her as a whole person.”
- sister’s abortion — “That’s very sad. That must be difficult for you. I’ll say a prayer for your sister and your family.”
- brother’s homosexuality — “It was probably difficult for him to tell your family. Be sure to let him know that you love him and that he is important to you.”
- IVF baby — “You look like a fine girl (boy) to me, and I know that God loves you very much.”
- mother never married — “It must be hard sometimes for your mom to be on her own. I hope you try to be a big help to her.”

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In talking about these concerns, students may also want some kind of moral evaluation from you. You might explain that it is not our place to judge others. But we know that we were created out of love and we need to follow God’s plan for us if we are to be truly life-giving and loving people.

### Information Questions

Some student questions do not involve personal situations but are asked out of curiosity, confusion, or, at times, the desire to provoke a reaction. The general guideline for questions that go much beyond the material presented in Theme Three at this grade level is that they should not be answered publicly, particularly if they involve sensitive issues.

Depending on the topic, however, you may want to give the student a short, factual answer. Some examples of short, factual answers are:

- What does *gay/lesbian* (homosexual) mean? It is a word used to describe people who are sexually attracted only (or mostly) to people of the same sex.
- What is a sexual transmitted infection? It is a type of infection that is passed from one infected person to another person through sexual activity.
- What is IVF? IVF stands for *in vitro fertilization* and is a process by which an egg cell is fertilized by a sperm outside of the uterus.
- What is pornography? Pornography is materials like movies, photographs, or images on a website that show nudity and sexual activity and are designed to arouse people sexually.

**Caution:** Student questions that should *not* be answered include those that focus on specific details of intimate sexual relationships or those that involve the personal sexual history of teachers, students, or their families. This clear boundary between what is private and personal, and the shared life of the classroom should be established early in the program.

In addition to the Information Questions on page 138, the following are further examples of short, factual answers you may give the students:

- What does gender identity mean? (A person's sense of self, with respect to being male or female.)
- What does transgender mean? (A transgender person is a person whose gender identity, outward appearance, gender expression, and/or anatomy are not consistent with the conventional definitions or expectations of male and female.)
- What is transsexual? (A person who experiences intense personal and emotional discomfort with his or her assigned birth gender and may undergo treatment to transition gender.)
- What is two-spirited? (A term used by First Nations people to refer to a person having both the feminine and masculine spirits. It includes sexual or gender identity, sexual orientation, social roles, and a broad range of identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.)
- What is intersex? (A term used to describe a person whose sex chromosomes, genitalia, and/or secondary sex characteristics (e.g., facial hair, breasts) are determined to be neither exclusively male nor female.)

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### Note to the Teacher

In a Catholic vision of the human person, gender identity is rooted in our creation as a union of body and soul in the image of God.

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In addition to those questions asked in the We Discover section of the Teacher's Guide (pages 141–142), you might also ask students:

- God gave us free will. What does that mean? (It is a gift from God whereby God allows us to use our intelligence to know and choose the good. We shape our lives through free will. All human persons have free will. Freedom is the gift given to us that we might participate in our own ongoing interior creation, that we might freely cooperate in completing the image of God in us.)
- Does having free will mean we can do anything we want? (No. Freedom is not a means of self-satisfaction. We can make good choices or poor ones. We need to take responsibility for our choices. We want to make choices that please God and are in accordance with God's will for us. This is how we grow as the fully human persons God intended us to be, and how we live our relationships in a way that makes us happy and peaceful inside, and brings us closer to God.)
- One of the decisions that people make in life is how they will use their gift of sexuality. In making these decisions it is important to remember why God gave us the gift of sexual attraction. As part of God's original design, sexual attraction helps us to love as God loves insofar as it leads us to give our selves to others. Eventually, many will give their whole self (body and soul) within the sacrament of marriage, but this is not the whole purpose of sexual attraction. Every person is called to love, to use their entire being, body and soul, in the service of others. Even when we understand this, however, figuring how to respond to the urges of our developing sexuality can be a challenge. When it is, you will have to seriously consider the morality of your actions. These decisions are an example of what we call "moral decisions." In Grades 6 and 7 you used a decision-making model that helps us make moral decisions in a way that follows God's plan. What are the steps we follow when making a moral decision? (See, Judge, Act, and Evaluate)

As we move through Theme Three, we will work with the See, Judge, Act, Evaluate model to help us make decisions involving our gift of our sexuality in a way that respects its purpose in God's design, and ensures we treat ourselves and others with dignity and respect.

#### **Health and Physical Education expectation D1.4**