

Adolescents do not always realize there are layers of intimacy in relationships. As well as becoming aware that intimacy is both emotional and physical, students need to know there are degrees of sexual intimacy. Students need to recognize that the call to chastity extends beyond merely avoiding intercourse outside of marriage. Rather, as the virtue of chastity deepens in us, it opens us to discover ever more profoundly the meaning and joy of mature love. In other words, virtue is a beautiful “feedback loop.” The more we grow in chastity, the more we are able to grasp and experience the profound meaning, joy, and peace of God’s plan for human sexuality. The more we experience this joy unlike the fleeting infatuation, the more we desire to never do anything that would undermine this new found joy. This is an important dimension of the drive and motivation to pursue the virtue of chastity.

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Of special importance in this topic is an understanding of the meaning of intimacy in personal relationships. Because the word *intimacy* is so often used in our society to mean physical sexual intimacy (with or without any significant personal intimacy), it may be difficult for students to grasp the notion that we are all — single, married, young, old — made for deeply loving and intimate relationships, however love works itself out in our lives. The process of learning how to be intimate begins in the family and continues throughout the life-stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

The mutual attraction of men and women is an integral part of our nature and is obviously significant for the relationship of marriage. Physical sexual intimacy is a vivid expression and celebration of the oneness that exists between a man and a woman in marriage. But there are many other ways of experiencing intimacy, both within marriage and within other relationships. There is, for example, the oneness of the spirit that people find in deeply loving friendships, the well-established intimacy of siblings who have grown up together, and the permanent bonds that exist between parents and children.

▷ Chastity, the virtue that is highlighted at the end of this topic, is part of the cardinal virtue of temperance and guides our desire for sexual pleasure according to God’s will. Chastity requires mature integration of the human need and capacity for intimacy, its expression within relationships, and the experience of sexual feelings. Young adolescents are at the beginning of this process. Together with their families, you have an important role to play in creating an environment that encourages your students to be open and generous in their response to God’s plan for the gift of sexuality. For more background information on chastity and young people, you may want to consult “Intimacy and Sexuality” in Appendix D.

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### Important Words

- *intimacy, chastity, celibacy*

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### Materials/Preparation

- This topic would be enhanced by a visiting speaker, perhaps a priest or sister connected to your local parish, who could talk to the students about his or her vocation and the choice of celibacy. Another possibility would be a married person or couple involved in the marriage preparation program of your local parish or diocese. You will want to acquaint the speaker with the content of this topic before the visit.

we think someone is a close friend or someone to love too soon, we can get hurt when circumstances change and the relationship does not last, or when we discover they were not as committed to the relationship as we were.)

- This is an important understanding of sexuality from our Catholic perspective: “Sexuality is not something that we have, but something that we are. It is one of God’s gifts of creation and involves the whole person: body and spirit.” What point is being made? (We can’t separate our sexuality from who we are as a person. It is not just the action of a body but something that affects our mind and spirit. What we do with this gift from God and how we use it shapes who we are and affects our life on many levels. We can’t change that fact even if we hear others denying it. Because it is one of God’s gifts of creation, we must understand sexual intimacy in the life-giving way God intended — in marriage.)

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- Why is such an action a mistake that can often result in harm? (This is not an action that builds intimacy in the way God intended. It is not an action that brings two people closer together or shows the body being treated with dignity and respect. Sometimes the person sending the pictures is hoping these things will happen but very often what happens instead is that the pictures become publicly broadcast over the Internet and social media. The sender often ends up very hurt and humiliated and sometimes is made fun of by their peers. In some cases young people have been black-mailed by Internet predators who pretended to be another young person just to trick someone into sending sexually intimate pictures. But even if these more extreme scenarios do not happen, “sexting” and viewing pornography cause sexual arousal and doing so has no connection to love or relationship. Lust is the disordered desire for sexual pleasure — disordered because it is isolated from the unitive and procreative significance of sexual pleasure. That is, when the body is isolated from the whole person it is being treated like an object, called objectification. We could also speak of it as dehumanizing. Lust is oriented towards an object; love is oriented towards a person. In allowing an individual to become an object for one’s personal use, one also allows selfishness to weaken one’s capacity to love. Such images distort the meaning and purpose of sexuality by portraying people as things to be used for sexual pleasure. Viewing such images is harmful at a time when young people are forming their ideas and values.)
- As young people learn to understand the gift of sexuality and begin to enter into romantic relationships, it can be confusing to understand which intimate physical behaviours are chaste and which are not. A good general guideline is to use the See, Judge, Act, Evaluate Decision-Making Process to determine if the degree of intimacy in an action supports the virtue of chastity. When judging the action, ask oneself the following questions:
  - Is this act something I would be comfortable and even proud to have my parents, teachers, priests, and others in the general public know about?
  - Is this an action which Scripture and Church teaching support?
  - Am I trying to use the action to force intimacy into the relationship that does not yet exist?
  - Is the act something that causes me to treat my own body or the body of another with disrespect or as an object, rather than as a sacred gift?
  - If I take this action might I feel embarrassed, hurt, regretful, or humiliated afterwards? Might another person feel these things as a result of the action?

### **Health and Physical Education expectations D1.4 and D3.3**

in the early stages of new relationships. They recognize that closeness and trust take time to grow and cannot be forced. Intimacy is a gift two people offer each other. A gift cannot be demanded, but is freely given and accepted.

### **Love and Sexuality**

So far we have talked about friendship, intimacy and love. But we have also been talking about sexuality, because sexuality has a lot to do with love and intimacy. Some people describe sexuality as a language of love, a force that draws people out of themselves toward others. It is also a fundamental aspect of an individual's personality or identity. Sexuality — maleness and femaleness — is not something that we have, but something that we are. It is one of God's gifts of creation and involves the whole person: body and spirit. . . .

### **Looking Toward the Future**

We hope this letter will encourage all of you to talk to each other, to your teachers, and especially to your parents about the issues it raises. No one can live your life or make your decisions for you. But with the freedom to make your own choices comes the responsibility to seek what is good and true and to consider whether your decisions are in harmony with the Christian way of life. . . . The message we are offering you on sexuality and intimacy is the teaching of Christ. We have too much respect for you to offer anything else. . . .

Each one of you is a unique person of great value. . . .

### **You are always in our prayers.**

The Bishops of Ontario Easter

April 3, 1994

### **Health and Physical Education expectation D3.3**