
Expectations

Topic 3 will also address the concepts of transgender and gender expression. Students will explore the Catholic understanding of the human person and will recognize the inherent dignity that comes from being made in the image and likeness of God. Students will examine Catholic teaching on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and the factors that help all individuals develop a healthy self-concept. For background information related to being made in the image and likeness of God, please consult the section in Appendix D entitled, “Made in the Image and Likeness of God,” for excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Note to the Teacher: Do not suggest or recommend any kind of gender transitioning actions such as hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery. We are professional educators, not counsellors or physicians, and such recommendations are clearly not ours to make.

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The students will:

- analyze aspects of the life stage of adolescence: appearance, moods and stress, and sexual attraction.
- recognize and appreciate the role of family, friends, and God in their lives as they mature.

Note to the Teacher

The foundation for a Christian understanding of sexuality was established in Topics 1 and 2. In this topic, the students are invited to reflect on some aspects of the journey from childhood to adulthood, in particular, changing appearance, moods and stress, and the experience of sexual attraction. As many adults recall, this is not an easy journey, even under ideal circumstances.

Body image, which is related to the issue of a changing appearance, was discussed in some detail in Grade 7, Theme Three, Topic 3, “Stewards of the Body.” If body image and the issue of anorexia are concerns for some of your students, you may want to consult the Grade 7 material (student book, page 89 – 92) and integrate some of the ideas in this topic.

Topic 3 also includes a short section on homosexuality with a brief explanation of Catholic moral teaching on this issue. This topic was introduced in Grade 7 from the perspective of questions young adolescents may have about sexual orientation and of the harmful nature of teasing or insults aimed at a person’s sexuality. For more background information on homosexuality and Church teaching, please consult “Chastity and Homosexuality,” an excerpt from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and “Church Teaching on Sexual Morality” in Appendix D. If questions about same-sex marriage come up in your classroom, you may want to consult “Marriage Matters,” which provides answers to frequent questions regarding same-sex marriage. This document can also be found in Appendix D.

Physical development at puberty was introduced in Grades 5 and 6 and reviewed in Grade 7. In Grade 8, details of the development of the primary and secondary sexual characteristics have not been included in the student edition. If it appears that your students would benefit from another review, you will find four Information Sheets in your teacher guide at the end of this topic that can be copied and given to the students (Adult Female Reproductive System; Female Fertility; Adult Male Reproductive System; Male Fertility). For additional background information on development during puberty, you may find it helpful to consult Section I of the resource material for Theme Three at the end of your teacher guide. Section II of this resource lists the vocabulary that

has been used in previous grades in Theme Three, as well as a glossary of terms. If it seems appropriate for your class, you could make copies of this glossary for the students

At some point during this theme, separate sessions for the girls and boys should be provided. Generally, girls are most comfortable with a female teacher and boys with a male teacher. These sessions will allow them to raise personal concerns, discuss matters of hygiene, and ask questions they may not wish to bring up in front of the whole class. Section III of the Resource Material for Theme 3 offers suggestions for these separate sessions and also provides additional information and guidance concerning sexual feelings and masturbation, subjects that are addressed in this topic.

Important Words

- *human person, human dignity, biological sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, gender role, sexual orientation, self-concept*

▷ **Note:** This topic includes some delicate areas, in particular the discussion of sexual feelings, differences between males and females regarding sexual arousal, sexual fantasies, and pornography. You may want to include these subjects in separate sessions for girls and boys. Girls, in particular, are very protective of themselves at this age and may find these discussions uncomfortable in the presence of the whole class.

Important Words

- *homosexuality*

- In addition to the two sessions suggested here, a third session is suggested for The Human Person, Gender Identity and Gender Expression. Material from the first two suggested sessions will be referenced, so it is advisable to present The Human Person, Gender Identity and Gender Expression only after the content on pages 72–82 of the Student Book has been discussed.

Materials/Preparation

- ▷ This topic is lengthy, and you may want to divide it into two sessions, the first for the introduction, A Changing Appearance, and Moods and Stress (pages 72 – 76) and the second session for Sexual Attraction and Feelings, and Developing Perspective: Homosexuality (pages 77 – 82)
- For additional information, you may want to consult the units on pornography, same-sex attractions, and bullying in the Supplementary Resources to support Grade 8 Family Life Education, available at www.carfleo.org.
- A day or two before presenting this topic, ask the students to respond in writing to these two questions:
 - 1) What do you enjoy the most about being 13 or 14 years old?
 - 2) What do you think is the worst thing about being 13 or 14 years old?

Encourage them to give short answers, and ask them not to put their names on their papers. To ensure the students' privacy, collect them, read them yourself, and organize the results. It is likely that some responses will be similar. For example, if six students identified "having more freedom" as

- Gender expression, therefore, may create stereotypes. What is a stereotype? (A stereotype is a general belief about a group of people that may reduce human persons to a single aspect of their identity. They are often untrue and may be harmful because they may lead to unfair judgement, prejudice, and discrimination. They may block our ability to see someone as the unique and dignified individual that they are.)
- What are some examples of stereotypes about gender roles and gender expression that exist in society? (girls like pink and boys like blue; girls play with dolls and boys play with trucks, etc.)
- God calls us to respect the dignity of the whole person, made in the image and likeness of God in both ourselves and others. We must be careful not to stereotype, judge, and attach labels to others. Attaching a label to the person implies that everything about them comes down to that one thing. People are much more than just their gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, or biological sex. It is the full range of characteristics that every unique self has that makes up a person's identity, as we have already talked about above. We have also already talked about the idea that adolescence is a time of adjusting to our changing appearance, moods, stress, and the beginnings of our experience of sexual attraction and feelings. Adolescents are also learning what their identity is; who they are as a whole person with all the characteristics that make them unique. This is part of their self-concept.
- How do we develop a healthy and positive self-concept? (We accept and celebrate our whole person in body, mind, and spirit when we know, accept, and celebrate all the pieces of our identity; when we know that we have a special dignity; and when we understand that we are each created in God's image, and are unique and deeply loved and cherished by God. We understand that we are part of God's plan and that God created us and has a purpose for us.)
- How do we support others in developing a healthy and positive self-concept? (We recognize that everyone has strengths and abilities and everyone has weaknesses and challenges. We don't stereotype, judge, label, bully, or reduce human persons to one single aspect of their identity. We see beyond appearance to the inner person and we see all their characteristics, not just one. We respect the whole person in body, mind, and spirit.)

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We Respond

Have the student complete BLM #16A as a celebration of their personhood and unique identities. Have them include it in the package with their letter.

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▷ Invite the students to write a letter to themselves to be opened in five years when they will be 18 or 19 and coming to the end of adolescence. In other words, they are writing to the people they hope to be and describing the efforts they have made during adolescence. Some areas they could include in the letter are what they have done

- to be more comfortable with their appearance
- to develop effective ways to handle moods and stress
- to grow in self-discipline in all areas of their lives
- to grow in respect for God’s gift of sexuality.

You could suggest that they put the letter away in a safe place and open it in five years.

We Explore (related activities)

- **Appearance and Advertising** — Give the students copies of Appearance and Advertising, BLM #16, and ask them to complete it at home and bring it back to school for a class discussion. During their discussion, encourage them to focus on the techniques that are used in advertising related to appearance (before and after photos; personal testimonies; facts and figures; appeals to personal vanity; and exploitation of people’s insecurities about their appearance). (**Curriculum Connection:** Language, Media Literacy. See Appendix B, pages 285 – 286.)