



EPISODE 8

Dr. Laura Padilla-Walker: Changing the How, When, and Why of Teaching Kids About Sexuality

[Breaking the Silence Podcast by Reach 10](#) with hosts Creed Orme and Crishelle Simons

"Where do babies come from?" Most of our parents dreaded that question! But lucky for us young adults, we can be more prepared than our parents ever were. Talking to our kids (or future kids) doesn't have to be traumatic or awkward if we get educated and practice talking about sexuality now. Dr. Laura Padilla-Walker is a Professor at BYU in Family, Home, and Social Sciences. She's an expert on how to create a culture of openness with your kids about sexuality, and she shares all her best ideas with Creed and Crishelle on this episode. Learn about how to talk, when to talk, and the importance of teaching your children the why behind healthy sexuality.

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Crishelle: [00:00](#)

Welcome listeners! Today we are breaking the silence with Dr. Laura Padilla Walker from BYU. She is a professor there and we are going to be talking about parent-child communication about sexuality. I think this could totally apply for youth and leader relationships as well. Some of those principles, again like those are a little bit different, but I'm really excited about today's episode and welcome Laura, thank you so much for meeting with us.

Laura: [00:33](#) Thank you for having me.

Crishelle: [00:35](#) Yeah. We want to get started just getting to know you a little bit. Tell us a little bit about who you are as well as like your career and your background and the things that you've studied.

Laura: [00:46](#) Okay, well I'm a professor here at BYU in the School of Family Life. My degree is in Developmental Psychology, so I study children and primarily teenagers. So that's exciting. And I'm also an Associate Dean in the College of Family Home and Social Sciences. So that's been really nice to get to know some more faculty and students. I study—primarily I'm a parenting scholar, and I studied parent relationships with their adolescents or their teenagers and I look at this in relation to media use and pro social or positive moral behavior and also now healthy sexuality. So that's my main research interests. I'm a mother of three so I'm sure they will come up in this chat today and I've got an 18 year old, a 15 year old, and a seven year old. Then my husband is an attorney here in the Valley, he works for the state of Utah and in terms of getting to know me I wish I had more free time. I love to read, so I'm a really big reader, not like academic reading, but when I have a break I really like to just read something for fun. I love hiking, exercising, cooking.

Crishelle: [01:59](#) That's fantastic. Thank you so much. And we are so excited to learn from your wisdom and, and to be able to just understand some of the research that you've done and to hear from you.

Laura: [02:10](#) Great!

Creed: [02:10](#) Yes, Laura, it's so exciting to have you here. This is one of the, I feel like going to be a very important podcast for our listeners. I met you some time ago and specifically for your, your lecture on breaking the silence. It's really interesting. We have the same title of this podcast as a lecture that you made a little bit ago at BYU talking about how it's time for parents to be proactive to talk about sexuality with their children. It's not enough anymore to remain silent or wait for wait for kids to come to

them with questions because a lot of times kids won't come with questions, especially if it's not about open communication in the family. So I just want to kind of start off with how you, along with other faculty, BYU, have written this book, a way to teach kids about sex. And I think it's incredible, an incredible book and I hope everybody who desires to learn more about this subject can read from that book. I want it to my whole family for Christmas, even though I don't have the funds for that. But I really want everybody to learn about this message. So let's see. Can you tell us a little bit of some specifics or key points from that book that you would like to share?

Laura: [03:33](#)

Sure. I think, well let me just give you a little background on how the book started. I have some colleagues who wrote a book on healthy sexuality for marriage. So it's called Sexual Wholeness in Marriage. And after they published that book, they approached me as a parenting scholar because they wanted to do a book, similar about healthy sexuality but for parents of teenagers or children. And so we launched that project and wrote this book, and it was a couple of years in the making. It was really exciting though that Deseret book wanted to publish it and was really positive about the need for this and in today's day and age they were really enthusiastic about that. And then we decided that if we were going to write about this, then we'd better study it. So we since then have started what we call the healthy sexuality project. And are gathering lots of data and starting to publish research. But I think some of the, so I give you that background because it, my portion of this book is really the part that places that in the parenting realm. I'm not a sexuality expert as much as a parenting scholar, but I think a lot of the principles that we talk about apply to any situation that a parent might have. So the three things that I lay out when I talk about this most commonly is that parents need to change how they're talking about sexuality with their kids. They need to change when they're talking about it and they need to add the why or talk about why their children should keep the standards that they have. So maybe today we can talk a little bit more about those three.

Crishelle: [05:03](#) Yeah, that's perfect. In fact, let's just get started there. Yeah. Because I think you led us right into what we wanted to talk about. So let's start with those three questions.

Laura: [05:13](#) Okay, great. So, so changing how you talk about it. I think the biggest, well the first thing I'd like to talk to parents about is that the first and most important thing is that you have a good quality relationship with your child. I think anything you try to do with your child, especially when you're wanting to talk about something that's a little more sensitive, is going to be a lot more successful if you have a good relationship. There's some interesting research, lots of interesting research that suggests that if you have a good relationship then mistakes you make as a parent aren't going to have much of an impact on your child. Which is great news for us because I'm a parent, I make a lot of mistakes, but unfortunately, if you don't have a good relationship, then when you make mistakes, they do have a larger impact. So I tell parents to start there. So first assess, do I have a good—it doesn't have to be a perfect relationship, but do I have a pretty good relationship with my child? If not, then that's a place to start. Just spending time with them being positive you know, praising them for things that they do well so you can improve the relationship once you have a pretty good relationship. The biggest thing about changing how we talk is that we need to create what we call a culture of openness. So helping your children know that they can ask you anything about sexuality or really anything at all and you're the person that will answer them. Because right now, teenagers are getting most of their information from the media and from their friends. And I know as a parent myself, that's not where I want my children to get their information. So I've told my children, for example, you can ask me absolutely anything about sexuality and I will answer or find the answer. If I, sometimes I don't know the answer. And so I don't want them going to look for the answer, and so I look for it and talk to them. And if they know that you're willing to talk and then they're more likely to come to you. Now that doesn't mean you shouldn't also initiate a conversation.

But that's the first thing. So changing, changing how, and creating that culture of openness.

Crishelle: [07:02](#)

I really love that. I think that that is such a profound thing, not just around sexuality, but like in all things as a parent. I know one day when I'm a parent 'cause I'm not yet. I, I really want to have that where like I am a safe source. I am someone that you can just come to and talk about anything and all the things. But especially with sexuality. Do you have any recommendations of how to get the awkwardness out of that? Because sometimes I think when sexuality is brought up, it's like "Ah!" and getting the awkwardness out so that it can be more natural and normal.

Laura: [07:39](#)

So there's a couple of ways. First the best way is to just start talking to children about it when they're young, because they will have questions, they'll have questions about their wonderful bodies and all of the great things that they do. And one of the things that parents more commonly do is they respond with embarrassment right away from a young age. Or they, you know, they call body parts by the wrong names or they respond with shame. Things that lead to children feeling shameful about their bodies. So if you have young children, I would say start from a very young age. They're very curious. And so I did a much better job with my youngest who's seven than my oldest, who's 18. And so when Ben was young, my youngest, he just started asking questions and I would just answer. And we're really open about our bodies. We're really open about sexuality. It doesn't mean we can't teach that it's a sacred thing, but it doesn't have to be a secret thing. So being really open from a young age and letting them know that they can ask you about where babies came from, you're going to give them an honest answer that's developmentally appropriate of course. And not teach them shame about their own bodies. So that's the first start. If your kids are young, if you have teenagers and you're thinking, Oh shoot, I haven't done this. It's never too late to do a better job about being open with your kids. One of the things you can start with is just letting them know, you know, I don't feel like I've done the best job with this and I feel like this is really important

topic and I'd like to be more open and more of a resource. I feel like in the past maybe I've responded in a negative way and I really want to change that. It doesn't mean it's going to be easy. It can be awkward for teenagers, even if you have talked about it a lot. One of the things that's helpful is to talk with them in a setting where they don't have to make direct eye contact with you all the time. So the car is a great place. They can't run away. You've got them there, but they don't have to look at you. They can talk about sexuality without feeling, you know, so on the spot.

Crishelle: [09:28](#) I really love that because I feel like the conversation and boss, my mom and my mom's heart, she really did a great job given everything. And I felt like it was always in the kitchen and I was always like running away. Like my sister was really good at staying with it and being open and curious and I was like, Nope, I don't want to know. And I would run away. And it was so easy for me to escape and it also made me feel so uncomfortable sitting at the table because I was like, that's where we eat.

Laura: [09:56](#) It just feels too formal.

Crishelle: [09:57](#) Yeah

Laura: [09:58](#) Well hopefully you get to the point where you can talk about sexuality at the table, at the kitchen, in the bathroom in the bedroom, it doesn't matter. Right? Because it's something that you're really open about. But that's not where most people are yet. Right. So the car or another thing research finds, especially that's helpful for boys, but I think girls could benefit as well is when you're doing some physical activity. So let's say you're out throwing the football or you're going for a walk or something where they don't feel as much of the pressure of let's sit down and just, you know, look straight on and ask you some personal questions that can be a little bit more challenging. The other thing I find is really helpful is that children, well, teenagers only have about a five to 10 minute attention span for this topic. Children even less. And so I think parents have often felt like they have to have one big conversation, which this is

kind of getting to the second one of change when you talk about it. And that one big conversation might be a two hour conversation. Well your kids probably only listened to about five minutes of that. And so what I find is much more effective in that culture of openness is many smaller conversations so they don't feel lectured or they don't feel stressed about it. A lot of the times it might be comments or it could be asking them what they think about something they saw on television or something they heard at school, but it can just be a brief comment and then, you know, you're going to talk about something again the next day. It doesn't have to be a onetime let's dress up in our Sunday best and sit at the table together and have our birds and the bees, you know, sexuality talk.

Crishelle: [11:30](#)

Right, right.

Creed: [11:31](#)

Yeah. I think a lot of parents just believe that that was the way to do it, right. Just one big conversation and that was it. But when we're in different times, for sure where it has to be this culture of openness and proactivity. When would you say it's important to start talking about these subjects? So from your book, I understand and that we need to start talking about anatomy early on, you know, very clear like so that we can get comfortable saying penis, vagina, all the body parts with our children so that hey get comfortable too to hear those words and to refer to themselves in those ways. So what are the different stages and age stages of when to start talking about this type of topic with sexuality and this type of topic?

Laura: [12:17](#)

So in our book we have a chart that gives some recommendations. But I'll just sort of an overview. It really varies a lot by child, so I hesitate to give really clear feedback this way because parents know their children best and usually they're ready for more information than you're ready to give them. But what I generally say is don't answer more than the question that they asked. Ok so, and sometimes before you answer, even ask them a question to make sure you understand what they're asking. You know there's a funny video I show my parenting class where there's a little girl and she asks her mom what a Virgin is and the mom launches

into this really long talk about reproduction and it turned out that the girl was just looking at a bottle of Virgin olive oil. So in that case then the parent could have just asked a question, what do you mean? And the discussion wouldn't have had to go in the direction that it went, but just trying to make sure you understand your child's question and then answering, you know, I'm going to answer my seven year old quite differently than I would my 15 year old when she asked where do babies come from? Right. Hopefully my 15 year old isn't still asking that but I think because I was open about sexuality, open about bodies, my youngest asked things from a really young age, and you know, my husband teases me sometimes how much Ben knows about how babies are born and he's totally comfortable with it because we've talked about it in a way that he felt ready for. Of course, I didn't give him the same amount of detail that I gave an older child. So you know your children best. I would make it a matter of thought and prayer about what the right thing is to say are, but just being willing to be open without necessarily going well beyond their question, just let them know the next time they have more questions they can ask you again.

Crishelle: [13:58](#)

That's so beautiful. I really love that clarifying question of like figuring out what it is they're actually asking. Because sometimes I think we're like, Oh, it's time and like, we get so nervous that we'd been word vomit all over. When it's really, we just want to help them understand and if we don't understand what they're even asking, how can we help them understand?

Laura: [14:17](#)

Yeah. And for teenagers it's okay to say, "you know what, I don't know because I haven't heard that term." You know, it's, there's a lot of things out there today, but I'm much more comfortable Googling it myself than having my 18 year old son go and Google it. So thank you for coming to me and asking me what that is. Let me go do some research and I'll let, I'll get back to you and make sure you get back to them. Right. So that they know that they can come and talk to and you're going to give them that developmentally appropriate information. I can think of one time where my daughter asked me what something was. And you know,

sometimes they just hit you in a moment where you just don't feel like launching into something like that. I think she was asking me about sexual assault and rape and I said, "Oh, I just, I don't know if I want to talk about this right now." And she said, "mom, you told us we could ask you anything." And I said, "you're right. Okay, let's talk about it." So sometimes you don't feel like launching into it, but if they've asked you, that's kind of a gift. If your child, 'cause they don't usually come to you. If they do come to you then you want to make that space to let them know this is open for you to talk and it's really hard, but you need to try not to overreact as part of the culture of openness is sometimes I've had to go back to my children and say, I'm so sorry. I totally overreacted. When you talk to me about that, let's try it again. And it's okay to make mistakes, but if you have that good relationship, you can just go back and say, you know what? I didn't do that well and I want to try again. And children are very forgiving.

Creed: [15:43](#)

Yeah. I love that honesty that can come from parents. I think it shows that, Oh I, my parents aren't perfect and they're willing to to own up to it. Therefore, I can own up to my imperfections and I can still be a good person and still be okay and we can still, you know, accomplish things. I think that's just a beautiful way of, of parenting. And I love how you said that it's a gift. When our kids come to us with questions? I think sometimes parents can be like, what the heck? Like, what did you dabble into to learn about this information? This is too early. I think it's so important to just realize, you know, we're sexual beings, they're going to have these questions. We were the same way when we were kids, but just maybe didn't have the same openness with our parents. But that is, that is truly a gift. To have kids who talked to you about things and to react in a good way is very important.

Laura: [16:37](#)

Right? And even if it's something that hard for you to hear, if your child comes and says, you know, mom, I've been viewing pornography or I, I think I may have same gender attraction or whatever the statement is, the first thing that should come out of our mouths is, thank you so much for talking to me. I'm so glad that you came to me because really aren't

we? I mean really, even if it was something that was hard to hear, It's something that we want to hear as parents and aren't, aren't we glad that they're coming to us instead of someone else and put our arms around them, let them know that we're here for them to work through whatever struggle they might be having. And then, you know, it's going to build up that relationship with, with us and relationship with you know, with their heavenly father and other things that are important going forward in this, in this process. 'Cause we're all gonna make mistakes and our kids are definitely gonna make mistakes. And so helping them to understand that they can, you know, move past those mistakes and get better and improve is really important.

Crishelle: [17:35](#) Yeah, I love that. And, and moving to like the most important part, and you mentioned this earlier, is the why. Like why do we talk to our kids? How do we explain the why to our kids that is the most important part of that, like threefold.

Laura: [17:51](#) Yeah. So we have to be open. We have to have, you know, change the when, meaning we have to have a lot more conversations more often. And then the why is—I just think this generation and probably your generation, but maybe not as much mine needs more explanation for principles and values than maybe in the past, I feel like it's not enough just to say you should wait until you're married to have sex or it's important to be modest or we don't date until we're 16. They, and I think everyone can benefit from trying to understand the why, but really giving our children the reason and the principles behind why we believe what we believe. President Uchtdorf in, in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has given a talk, several talks on the importance of explaining why, even behind our religious beliefs, but also behind why, you know, why we have the values that we do, and talking to kids, letting them ask questions. So for example, something like modesty is a great example. I think that it's something we value, but we often conceptualize it in a way that's confusing to young people and they don't always understand why it's something that we care about. And so then they don't, they don't internalize that value because they don't understand. Or dating until

you're 16 can feel pretty arbitrary. Why 16? Why did you pick that? So talking about healthy sexuality and how it goes beyond just the physical aspects of sexuality, but emotional and spiritual aspects and why it's important to do these things can really help them to have their own belief about what's important.

Crishelle: [19:27](#)

I think that's so cool. And coming from like an intrinsic motivation viewpoint. That's lot of like the research that I've done and even that I used in my practices as a rec therapist was how do I help people be intrinsically motivated? A lot of that comes from helping them to have autonomy and the more that you help them understand why, the more they can own, Oh yeah, that's a why I believe in and therefore have autonomy moving forward, which I think is so powerful. Rather than just being like, Oh, I dress this way because my mom told me to dress this way. And I see myself kind of like having that like on swimsuits that I choose to wear and those kinds of things where I'm still like, Oh, like my mom would hate this one. I'm like, no, but like why? Why am I choosing, why am I choosing to pick the swimsuit? And I know that's kind of a silly example, but I think that's so beautiful because that will help them to have more of that intrinsic motivation hopefully to make healthy choices for them in the long run rather than being externally motivated by like, Oh, mom's watching, Right. Dad's watching.

Laura: [20:30](#)

Absolutely. Research finds that, especially with teenagers that if the values are self-generated or at least they feel like they're self-generated, then they're much more likely to stick to them. And part of the way that you can help with that process is to work with joint decision making and conversation and try to avoid control. I'll try to avoid lecturing. This is really hard when it comes to sexuality because parents just want to, they feel like, well sometimes they feel like they have knowledge that they want to share, but as soon as it crosses the line into controlling lecturing, the kids are no longer listening. So really trying to ask a lot of questions. I mean, even let your kids teach lessons about anatomy or sexuality or modesty or chastity. Probably be surprised at how much they know, you know, ask them what they think about things and really make it a

conversation. A mutual conversation. Research has found that mutual communication about sexuality is better than parent dominated or child dominated. So really trying to build that autonomy and feeling of self generation by having the child weigh in and if they disagree with you, that's fine. Just walking through that. And why do you think, you know, why do you think that it's okay to date when you're 13? You know, let's keep talking about that and think about that a little bit more.

Creed: [21:40](#) Yeah. I love well reading from your book as we've been discussing, there's so many topics and people can get more detail from the book, for example, modesty it's, there's much more to it than just clothing, right? It's about, it's a lifestyle of being modest in our thought patterns our behavior and as well as how we present ourselves. So going a little bit more into specifics, how would you, or what would you suggest for parents and especially young adults, because we're about to have our kids here in the next few years, how would you start addressing pornography with your child, with a child?

Laura: [22:21](#) Pornography or modesty?

Creed: [22:24](#) Going into pornography now.

Laura: [22:26](#) Oh, okay. I think I would address it with the same principles. A lot of parents ask me really specific questions about the two most common I get are about pornography and masturbation. And what I generally tell them is the same principles we just talked about changing how changing when and changing why apply to all of the topics that you would talk with your child about. So when it comes to talking about pornography, I think a couple of the highlights of what we talked about are, you know, not overreacting. There's some great literature out there and the President Oaks has even talked about how there's a big difference between the occasional use, even frequent use and addiction to pornography. So I think sometimes when we send the message that if you've looked at it once you're addicted, that can be really problematic for the repentance process and for people trying to change their

behavior. So trying not to overreact. In fact, starting even before that, being really proactive about pornography really talking about it in a way that promotes openness so that if your children do come across it, they'll know that they can come and talk to you and that they don't have to be secretive about it. The church actually has a really great video on pornography. Use that for children that I, I'm really impressed by where they talk a lot about why it's something that's attractive and raises curiosity, but also why it's something that gets in the way of healthy sexuality. And I think one of the things I really like about the video is that it avoids shaming. And we really want to avoid shaming around sexuality at all costs because what we find is that there's a lot of young people who get to marriage and have been abstinent, but they're very unhealthy when it comes to sexuality because there's so much shame steeped in it. And sometimes the only conversation they've ever had about sexuality is about pornography because parents are pretty good about talking about pornography, but they don't talk about healthy sexuality. So I think maybe pornography is serious and it is something that we want to be careful about, but it shouldn't be the only thing that we're talking about. And when we do talk about it we want to make sure, and I would say this is true with our spouses, with our children, that we're talking about it in a way that the other person would feel comfortable coming to us if they had viewed it so that we could help them instead of feeling like they had to hide.

Creed: [24:52](#)

I think it's so important to have that healthy sexuality backdrop that you proactively create with your child, right? You're talking about all aspects of sexuality, not just, not just the bad parts and not just the pornography that creates healthy sexuality.

Crishelle: [25:08](#)

Yeah. What would you like, could you help us understand what your holistic view of healthy sexual holiday is? Like, what would you define that as? Especially in like in a child? Like how do we help them understand that?

Laura:

[25:21](#)

Well, in my, in my colleague's book that I alluded to, the healthy sexuality and marriage, they lay out a model that is really helpful for me as a parent. When I think about talking to my kids. So there's three aspects of sexuality. The first is the physical or behavioral aspect. And that's the part that we tend to focus on most. You know, don't view pornography, don't masturbate, control your behaviors. That's where we spend a lot of time. But there's two other parts that are really important. The emotional part: So this is where sexuality is about a relationship. And so a lot of times when I'm talking to my kids about masturbation or about pornography, I talk about the why behind why it's damaging is because it's influencing that future relationship because sexuality was given to us as a means to build that relationship and to build unity. So focusing on you know, it's not about a selfish behavior. It's about what you can share with someone else. So that's the emotional part. That gives me some language when I talk to my kids. And then the spiritual part or the meaning making of sexuality is what it means in your life. The, you know, what, why the, you know, if you're a religious person, why heavenly father gave us these feelings, what his goals for sexuality are, what the purpose you know, and the progression in the ways that that you can make meaning out of sexuality. So focusing on all three of those areas rather than just one is, is one way that we think about sexual wholeness or healthy sexuality. I think another way to think about it for kids is, again, not just focusing on one aspect, like creed said, not just focusing on the negative consequences of sexuality, but also talking about how it's a healthy, normal, wonderful part of development, but that we just have to learn to keep it within boundaries before marriage and after marriage. You know, marriage is not a chastity finish line, you can't get married and then suddenly there's no limits anymore on what you do sexually. So helping children to understand sexuality more holistically and that there's lots of different topics you can discuss that are related that give them a more a fuller understanding of their sexuality.

Creed:

[27:24](#)

Thank you for addressing that. Yeah, that book, once again is Sexual Wholeness in Marriage. Right. And that's the one you're referring to and

refer to those three dimensions of sexuality in your, A Better Way to Teach Kids About Sex book as well. So how would you address specific topics like masturbation and same sex attraction with children? I think those are pretty interesting topics that parents might be a little bit afraid to talk about.

Laura: [27:50](#)

Right. Yeah. So same-sex attraction and masturbation, again, I'll go back to those same three principles because I think for parents sometimes they get caught up in what exactly they're going to say. And what we found in our research is it matters much less what you actually say than how you say it. So if you say it in a warm, open way, helping the child to understand that there's nothing wrong with them and then they're not shamed, it's going to be much more effective than worrying about every, every word that you say. But when thinking about sensitive topics that, that parents are nervous about talking about, again, I would just encourage you to be really open about these topics with your children. If your child comes to you saying, I think I have same sex attraction or I've been masturbating again, that first response, I would always want it to be, you know, embracing them, letting them know how much you love them. Thank you for talking about this. We go through, actually in both of those chapters in our book, we actually do have a sample, some sample scripts of things that you could say to your child. When talking about masturbation, and again, this is very common, little kids self touch. The vast majority of teenagers, girls, it's about 40 to 50%, but closer to 80 to a hundred percent of young men will masturbate. So if this is something that is occurring, even though parents don't want to, don't want to face that. So if they're talking to you about it, that's great. And that's the first step to helping them proactively think of ways that they can start making better choices. So for example asking them, you know, what makes you want to masturbate? Or when do you find that you're doing that? Is it because you're feeling sad? Is it because you're bored? One of the questions I would definitely ask is, are you viewing pornography while you're masturbating? Because that's much more of a problem than just pornography or masturbation alone, but the pairing of

them. So I actually, with my kids, there's no science behind this whatsoever, but I use the, I talk about the three P's of, of I guess self touching and masturbation. The first is a P for public. So with young kids, this is not a behavior that we do in public. This is something we don't touch our private parts of our bodies outside of you know, in public because it makes people uncomfortable. And this is sacred and you know, so that's the first one. The second is a pairing P for pairing. So are you pairing masturbation with something else? So are you watching pornography while you're masturbating? That's the second one. And then the third that we talk about is patterns. So do you have a pattern of consistent masturbation or where are you at? And then we can then we can talk with our children about which one of these three do we need to work on the most? So which one are you struggling with the most? If you're doing pornography with masturbation, then let's start there. Or that's something we want to try to at least move in the direction of avoiding that pairing. If they're not doing pornography, but they're masturbating every day or multiple times a day or once a week, wherever they're at, if they, let's work on that and let's see if we can get to to less frequently or again, it has to be their own goal, but then helping them to do whatever they need. What are some things you can do? Because it always starts with our thoughts. What are some things you can do to not get to that point if you're bored? Let's think of things to keep yourself busy. You need to, physical exercise is a great thing for young people that helps them to use their body in a way different from, from just using it in a sexual way. So vigorous physical activity is really good, but having, proactively, they've got a bunch of ideas in their head. When I start to go down this path, I know what I can do just to help me control myself. And if that, well, when they do slip up and make mistakes, it's, they're not a bad person. They don't need to feel shame. They just need to keep moving forward. I know Elder Holland, one of the other leaders in our church has a quote I love and I don't have it exactly, but he basically says points out the importance of the atonement and how we get credit just for trying. And that's what we want is we want young people to know that they just need to be moving in the right direction and trying, and

we're all gonna make mistakes. And, you know, sorry, I feel like I'm talking a lot. But one thing that that really helps me and really helps some other parents when thinking about masturbation, sometimes we have to work on our own views of healthy sexuality and sometimes the idea of masturbation feels yucky to parents and so I, I asked them to think about a different type of transgression. So what about, let's say that you have a short fuse and you lose your temper a lot. So if I came to you and I said I lose my temper all the time, I'm yelling at my kids three or four times a day, would you, would you expect me to not yell at them for a year or six months or even a month? Or would if I tried my best and went a whole week without yelling, wouldn't that be amazing? And wouldn't we all be really excited about that? And if I did, and when I did yell at them, I would get on my knees and say that I was sorry and say apologize to my kids and I would move forward. So sometimes when we take a different transgression that is a little bit more socially acceptable and compare that to when we think about a sexual transgression, it kind of helps us to step back and think this is the same thing. It's just a different, you know, don't judge me because I sin differently than you do. It's just a different type of, of something that we might be working on. And so trying to be patient and take a growth perspective where we're thinking about where we want to be growing and moving in the positive direction can be really helpful for our children.

Crishelle: [33:23](#)

I love that so much and I love just the, that view of it I think helps pair that with the why even of just like, instead of like getting so mad at the behavior, like recognizing like the need and helping your children to self-regulate in a way that leads to the outcome that they really want in the long run. I think that that's so beautiful. I am curious. We've talked a lot about the parent child relationship, which is so important. So valuable what about a youth leader relationship? What kind of conversation should should leaders be having with their youth and how can we talk about pornography and sexuality and masturbation, all of these things with our youth in a different and healthier way?

Laura:

[34:08](#)

So I find this one to be a little bit trickier because parents vary in the ways that they want to approach sexuality. And as a leader I think it's important to try and respect that even if even if parents aren't as open as I would like them to be, I don't feel like it's my place to decide how they should teach their children about sexuality. So when I do teach youth about sexuality, I usually start broad with chastity, which is a great place to start because most of them don't even know what that is. And they can't really define what the law of chastity is and what the heart of the law is and what virtue is and why it's important. So you can do a lot even at that level. I think talking about modesty, pornography, all the same principles would apply in terms of avoiding shaming, avoiding object lessons. So it's pretty common. We have a lot of funny stories. My students have a lot of funny stories about the object lessons they were given about sexuality. And what we recommend in the book is just to toss out the object lessons, just to speak to young people plainly instead of using what we consider to be oftentimes some fairly damaging object lessons, which are really just an attempt for the adult to not have to talk about something that's uncomfortable to them. So as a leader I would tread a little, a little bit lighter, but as a leader or a Bishop, I think the avoiding shame part is very much still a principle that should apply. And if a child doesn't have a parent figure that is willing to talk, I guess I'd rather them talk to me than the parent. But I still think we, I mean I, I'd rather than talk to me than no one. I would definitely rather them talk to the parent, but I just think you have to be careful about how you answer when you don't know how that family wants to discuss sexuality.

Crishelle:

[35:56](#)

Yeah, I really appreciate that because it's not the leader's responsibility. Like that's not their stewardship. And like, I, I hope that we can create a safe space where like, we can get rid of "now girls, I know that pornography is not your issue." That whole conversation. Like, let's get rid of that forever and let's just talk about, let's talk about chastity and let's talk about healthy relationships and virtue in a way that is building and universal and based on true principles.

- Creed: [36:28](#) Yeah, I agree. Both young men and young women, I feel like need to receive the same time types of teaching. For example, women more heavily get a modesty chat and men don't get the modesty chat ever. I don't remember a modesty chat ever growing up for myself.
- Crishelle: [36:45](#) We had it like every week.
- Creed: [36:49](#) So I think taking this perspective of sexual wholeness for everybody both genders are dealing with very similar issues, maybe just in a slightly different way or something. So it's very important to talk about all these topics in a non-shaming way with both genders, right?
- Laura: [37:06](#) Absolutely. The research just doesn't find that there is as much of a gender difference as what we think there is. So I did for the talk that you alluded to earlier, Creed, the Cutler lecture. I gathered some data on BYU students and I think like 70 or 80% of parents had talked to their boys about pornography but not their girls. And so again, even even though you know, girls do use pornography and struggle with it, another issue that comes about when not talking to girls is that they, the only thing they might hear about it is how horrible and wrong it is. And then, you know, when they have a spouse who's struggling with it or their children, they don't have a healthy view of how to talk about it either. Or, you know, I just had a chat with my youngest son today about modesty because if you, if you think about modesty, not just about how you dress, but how you represent yourself. So Dr. Leavitt one of my wonderful colleagues is the one who wrote the chapter on modesty in our book. And it's just probably one of my favorite chapters because I think a lot of times we say to young women, you know, you need to, you don't want to be tempting the boys. You don't want to dress in a way that's gonna make them uncomfortable. And we really make clear that it is not young woman's responsibility to control young men. And young men are not uncontrollable creatures. You know, that we give them this perception that they can't control their behavior. But instead thinking of modesty as a holistic, you know, you wouldn't go around saying, I am the smartest student in my class. I got the highest grade and I am so awesome. You

know, very few people would do that. But yet, if we use our bodies to, to show off or brag, that's not being modest. So helping our, you know, my young son said something today about him self being the best reader in the class or something like that. And so I talked about how great that is that he was a strong reader. But you know, that's something you can share with your close family or accomplishments. But we don't want to be bragging about that kind of stuff and showing, you know, we can have those conversations with our young men and our young women in ways that are healthy and non-shaming and just help them to think about things in a little bit more holistic way.

Crishelle: [39:09](#) I think that's awesome. I think that that would even help people have better competition in their lives, healthier competition. So I just think like looking at our behaviors as not necessarily the end but rather like fruit of who we are on the inside I think is so powerful.

Laura: [39:28](#) Well, and mothers tend to talk to daughters about sexuality. That's the dyad that talks the most about sexuality. But I actually worry a little bit more about young men in that regard because you know, mothers will often, most mothers about about 75% will have a conversation about you know menstruation or having their period, which I can't believe it's only 75% but, but at least it's 75%. But young men rarely get to talk about wet dreams or masturbation or other things. You know, they, they need to know what's happening to their bodies as well. And then similarly, young women need to know about young men's bodies and young men need to know about young women's bodies. So again, being, understanding that our bodies are sacred, but still talking about how the body functions and understanding that so that later when they are married, they have an understanding of how each other's bodies work. And I just think that's an important, we have that gender divide on how we talk about sexuality, but we really if anything we need to tailor it to different children, but I'm not sure we need to be as different for different genders.

- Creed: [40:30](#) This is wonderful. I love this discussion that we're having. It just makes me feel like everything in life is supposed to be talked about and discussed. And it's not like we need to hide certain things away or cocoon our children. Right. It's more about just being proactive and opening up discussion. Is there anything in particular that you would say to young adults listening to this podcast who will be parents here in the future? Anything that they always come to you about wondering about? Anything specific like that?
- Laura: [41:07](#) No, I was just, I think young adults, this is the generation that's going to change this. I think this is the generation that is going to break the silence because I'm, I find that they really are motivated to do so. And so I just finished my parenting class where we spend a fair amount of time talking about sexuality and one of my students said that the more educated they would come, the more they realized how much they don't know. And so I think I would just tell young adults to becoming educated about this topic. And just practicing becoming healthy where you're at now because a lot of us don't have healthy ideas of sexuality ourselves. And even though that's not a required prerequisite to teaching healthy sexuality, it really helps. So if you know that your parents maybe didn't do as good a job as they could have or because of media or culture or other things, you have some shame around sexuality or uncomfortable with it, then I would say take this time now to work on your own healthy sexuality. It will really help you in your marriage. But then also as you become a parent, you'll be more prepared to talk with your children in a healthy way. But I really want to empower this generation because I feel like this is the generation that is going to really make some strides forward because they have to, right? Because they need to, and I think everybody recognizes the need for it, but if your own parents didn't give you a model for that, it's really hard to move forward without education. So just keep learning about it and practicing.
- Crishelle: [42:35](#) Yeah. I love that. I think it's even, I mean even if your parents did give you a perfect all of that, like we need the education, we need the knowledge. And I I love, I love that student's comment too. I feel like the

more that I know, the more I'm like, wow, I really have no idea. And, and it's, it's humbling and it's empowering at the same time.

Laura: [42:55](#) But I guess I also would say don't get too bogged down with feeling like you have to do it perfectly. I do think like, I love a good parenting book, you know, as much as anyone else. But I think sometimes we feel like if we don't have the exact language or we don't know exactly what to say, then we're just going to mess everything up. I mean I'll just save you the suspense. You are going to mess a lot of things up!

Crishelle: [43:16](#) Spoiler alert.

Laura: [43:17](#) Especially when it comes to sexuality. I mean I study this and I still mess it up all the time with my kids. So just being willing to dive in and do the best that you can and admit your mistakes. And keep working at it. I think that's really the best that we can do. And yes, get education so you're more informed, but don't let that sort of petrify you into, I can't move on this until I have every ounce of information that I could get. You know, just dive in there and do the best that you can with some sound principles and I think that will really benefit this next generation.

Creed: [43:51](#) Wonderful. Use the Atonement to improve upon mistakes. Keep trying. That's all you need to do. Try the best you can. Focus on the relationship with your children and be proactive I think are the bottom lines. Yeah. Right.

Laura: [44:04](#) Sounds nice to me.

Crishelle: [44:06](#) Thank you so much for meeting with us.

Laura: [44:08](#) Great to chat with you. Thanks for doing this, which is really important.

Creed: [44:11](#) Yeah. Yeah. And thank you. Yeah. Once again, this is Dr. Laura Padilla Walker and she has a book, A Better Way to Teach Kids About Sex, along with other Brigham Young University faculty members we've talked a lot about today, Sexual Wholeness In Marriage, which is also another book

by BYU faculty, and those will be included in the show notes. Yeah, thank you so much for coming and discussing these things with us, Laura.

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