

Parents need to talk openly and honestly about sexuality, says Chastity Project educator

For most teens, talking about sexuality can get uncomfortable.

And while that's true for Catholic teens Amelie Schoenberger and Lily Zittlau, they're also convinced that chastity is necessary for healthy relationships even in the face of teenage expectations, social media pressures and easy access to the Internet and pornography.

"There's so much pressure on relationships and on people with social media to be a certain way. That's what social media teaches us," said Schoenberger, 14. "Everything (in the culture) nowadays gives you the wrong impression on relationships and what they should be like."



Jason Evert of The Chastity Project Chris Berthelot, Grandin Media

Jason Evert, an acclaimed author, speaker and co-founder of The Chastity Project, says that chastity isn't the same thing as abstinence – not having sex.

Instead, chastity is using your sexuality according to God's plan for your life, whether you're single or married, even in the face of tremendous pressures.

"It's not about fixing our kids, it's about healing our own relationships and

our own ideas of sexuality that might be in need of redemption,” said Evert, the featured speaker at the upcoming Catholic Family Life Conference at Lac St. Anne June 29-July 2.

Evert has been leading seminars across Alberta to teach parents and children about the value of chastity and how modern culture has sexuality all wrong.

“The problem isn’t that the world glorifies sexuality, the problem is the world fails to see its glory, fails to see God’s plan for human sexuality,” said Evert, father of seven children.

For parents, talking about chastity, especially with young people, has become more and more important as teens access Internet pornography at increasingly earlier ages, Evert said.

Social media also sets unrealistic expectations – especially for girls – of appearance and relationships.

“Becoming computer literate and learning how to protect their families from the dangers of the internet is one of the biggest challenges for parents,” said Evert. “Being a parent in 2018 is nothing like it was a couple decades ago.”

Parents also need to talk to their teens openly and honestly about sexuality, even if it’s uncomfortable for them – or their kids.

“Sometimes it gets kind of awkward, because they’re your parents,” said Zittlau, 14. “But it’s nice to know they’re looking out for you.”

Zittlau adds it helps to have a close circle of friends with similar beliefs. She and Amelie Schoenberger are members of a youth group at Holy Family Parish in St. Albert.

“Of course we feel the pressure,” said Zittlau. “But I don’t think it’s to the extreme that other girls have it, because we have our friend group.”

Evert said the most important step parents can take is to become examples of chastity in their own lives.

“If I want my kids to practise virtue, I better be willing to practise it myself. If I want to tell kids not to look at pornography, well I got to live up with that myself as well,” he said.

“You become a much more powerful witness to a message if you’re living it yourself.”