

What does sex have to do with character?

One of our goals for this blog is to explore a range of opinions and issues on topics in character and ethics. Today's guest blogger is Our friend, Dr. Thomas Lickona, of the Center for the 4th & 5th Rs at the State University of New York, Cortland.

Here's Dr. Lickona's thoughts on educating for character in the sexual domain:

How we live our sexual lives, as character educator Kevin Ryan points out, is intrinsically a moral matter. Sex involves and affects others. It can bring new life into the world. It has strong personal and social consequences. Our sexuality is therefore an area of our lives that calls for the presence of virtues. Ethical sexuality—disciplining our sexual desires and acting with genuine respect for self and others—must therefore be an important goal of character education.

Four decades after the sexual revolution, it's painfully clear we suffer from a plague of problems stemming from the breakdown of sexual morality. These include:

- a hyper-sexualized media culture and the sexual corruption of children
- teen pregnancies—still at levels far exceeding what they were a half-century ago
- unmarried births and father absence—the strongest predictor of nearly every childhood pathology
- a million+ abortions each year, a third performed on teens
- 15 million new cases of STDs each year
- a cluster of emotional and behavioral problems associated with uncommitted sex, including higher rates

- of depression and suicide among sexually active youth
- a huge and growing pornography industry, with Internet porn sites increasingly visited by youth
- the widespread sexual abuse of children
- serial co-habitation as the norm for unmarried adults
- the heightened risk of divorce associated with premarital cohabitation.

Surveying this moral landscape, the essayist William Schickel observes, “Chastity [the virtue of sexual self-control], like honesty, is a civic as well as a personal virtue. When a society loses chastity, it begins to destroy itself.”

Here are some wise words (from an out-of-print pamphlet) that we can use as parents and teachers to help our kids develop good character in this crucial area of their lives:

Love is patient; love is kind. Love wants what is best for another person. Love will never cross the line between what’s right and wrong. It’s wrong to put one another in danger of having to deal with hard choices, choices that could change your lives forever.

Having sex before marriage may feel right for the moment. But the possible costs of an unexpected pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted disease—as well as the deep hurts that can come from a broken relationship—outweigh the feelings of the moment. The feelings are temporary; their consequences are long-lasting.

All good things are worth waiting for. Waiting until marriage to have sex is a mature decision to control your desires. If you are getting to know someone—or are in a relationship—remember: If it’s love, love waits.