

The parent's part / Department of Public Health, North Dakota.

Contributors

North Dakota. Department of Public Health.

Publication/Creation

[Bismarck] : North Dakota Dept. of Public Health, [between 1920 and 1929?]

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
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The PARENT'S PART



Issued by the
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
North Dakota

The Parent's Part

You were shocked to hear that the number of deaths resulting from the influenza epidemic in 1918 was greater than the total losses among the American troops during the war. Is it any less a shock to know that the Army lost more days of service on account of venereal diseases than from any other disease? One hundred and ninety-seven thousand such cases were reported in the army camps during the 15 months ending November, 1918. This meant a loss of approximately two and one-half million training days. Is it any wonder that the Surgeon General of the Army stated that if it were possible to rid his men either of all wounds or of all venereal diseases he would rather rid them of the venereal cases?

But venereal disease is not, primarily, a military problem or a war-time epidemic. Estimates show that one man contracted the disease after entering the service to every five before entering it. This means that the source of disease is in civilian communities—your communities. The draft, with its examination of the nation's men, resulted in digging underneath the sod of everyday life and showing that out of sight in your town, in your state, there is going on yearly an untold waste of manhood, womanhood and childhood by the ravages of these diseases.

Being highly contagious, they have entered homes and marriage relations. Women and children, not knowing the cause, have suffered from them for generations. Innocent young wives, previously healthy, have been mutilated by necessary surgical operations, some have been made invalids, many have remained childless and others have lost life itself. Babies have been born dead or defective, others have become blind a few hours after birth.

This is in addition to the thousands of men who, thinking they were cured by patent medicines, have been visited years later by sterility, paralysis and insanity.

PREVENTABLE DISEASES

Nor is this terrible waste of health and life inevitable. Syphilis and gonorrhea must be classed as preventable contagious diseases. We know and can identify through the microscope the germs which cause them. We know and can locate many of the personal carriers. Exposure to them can be practically minimized to the vanishing point if we eliminate the entirely unnecessary and harmful contacts of irregular sexual intercourse. After the suc-



Comparative Prevalence of Venereal Diseases and Other Important Communicable Diseases in the U. S. Army

Venereal Diseases 102.3

Other communicable diseases 29.4

Pneumonia, scarlet fever, typhoid and paratyphoid. (Measles not included.)

The figures above represent the annual rate per 1,000 for all troops in the United States, based on the reports from Sept. 21, 1917, to May 31, 1918. These figures are accurate for purposes of comparison only. Prepared from reports to Surgeon General of the Army.

Comparison of the Number of Cases of Venereal Disease Contracted Before and After Enlistment

After enlistment 1

Before enlistment 5

The number of cases before enlistment includes all uncured cases, old and new, as compared with the new cases contracted after enlistment. The great contrast, however, is mainly due to the better protection given to soldiers than is given most men and boys in civil life.

The above estimate is based on reports from Camps Sherman, Lee, Upton, Meade, Custer, Kearney and the Western Department from October 25, 1917, to May 10, 1918. (See Venereal Disease Control in the Army. W. F. Snow, M. D., and W. A. Sawyer, M. D., Majors M. R. C., U. S. Army. Journal American Medical Ass'n., August 10, 1918, p. 456.)

cess of the army camps in prevention by suppression of prostitution, education, recreation and early treatment, we have an exact method of attack upon them.

Public health authorities throughout the country are now organizing to carry on the fight against this health menace. Practically all of the methods found successful in the army will be utilized. A far-reaching and important part of the program, however, will be prevention by education.

SHALL YOU TEACH YOUR CHILD?

Medical officers found that the men in the army camps revealed a surprising ignorance and mis-information on the whole subject of sex and sex diseases. Thousands had acted on the mistaken belief that sex relations are necessary to health, only to find their health impaired by a serious venereal infection. Large numbers thought that gonorrhea, especially disastrous in its effect upon innocent women, is "no worse than a bad cold." A list of the superstitions and untruths that these men believed forms a terrible indictment against the instruction offered in our homes. And the diseases these men brought into the army to handicap their usefulness in war were, according to their own admissions, largely the products of the attempt to keep children in a blessed state of ignorance and innocence regarding sex.

Much was done in the army to correct the mistaken ideas of these men. But to be most effective this information must begin much earlier. The most important preventive against later vice and venereal disease is the proper education of the children with regard to sex. Your part as parents in this campaign, then, is to

instruct your own boy and girl. You cannot exempt yourself from this responsibility.

Do you think that while the neighbor's children may need some such information, your own children will never have any such need? It is no longer possible for you to choose whether your child will learn about sex or not. The only question you have to decide is whether he or she will learn from you or from someone else. If there ever was any justification for the hope that a boy or girl could grow up entirely innocent of all knowledge of sex matters, that hope is forever gone. For better or for worse, the prudery and the silence connected with love, passion, temptation, marriage and vice are being replaced by an abundance of discussion and interpretation in literature, drama, especially in the "movies." From these sources—or from the much worse and unreliable gossip of companions, advertisements of quack doctors and patent medicines—your boy and girl will receive their sex information unless you yourself offer them something better and truer.

You would, furthermore, by your very silence and evasion of the subject, be giving the wrong kind of sex education. You would be indicating unmistakably to your child that sex is something nasty or vulgar and not to be discussed with you. You are cutting off his confidence on this most important problem and condemning him to secret and unreliable channels.

It is not natural for your children to be uninterested in the vivid drama of the renewal of life they see about them. Only an abnormally dull child fails to be curious about such things. If your child remains silent about these matters or fails to ask any questions, in nine cases out of ten it is getting information from other people. If you have refused to answer your child's natural questions about these matters, you can be assured that these same questions are asked and answered from sources of which you would be ashamed.

EVIDENCE OF THE NEED OF INFORMATION

Do you think that only the children with abnormal surroundings—the children that are seen in juvenile courts, jails and detention homes—are in need of sex instruction? Testimony taken from men coming from homes above the average and selected by our educational system as intelligent enough for a college education, show the same need convincingly. An inquiry was made among approximately 1,000 such college men in representative institutions of the east, middle west and west. The replies were manifestly sincere. While students may be no better morally than men outside college, they are not below the average. Fur-

thermore, there is evidence to show that the replies understate rather than overstate the prevalence of sexual practices. In other words, conditions are probably as bad as, if not worse than, the conditions indicated in their statements. The conclusions from this study are as follows:

(1) A large majority of boys get their first permanent impressions about sex from improper sources before the age of twelve. The average age is nine and one-half years. Many testify to the unfortunate effect of these early impressions received from older boys and undesirable sources. One man writes: "The effect was decidedly bad. It gave me a sense of bewilderment and a wrong idea of the workings of nature." Another says: "The effect was decidedly harmful. What I learned was so different from my ideas of human reproduction that I had formed from the myths told me by my parents that I lost my respect for them." Many of these men expressed bitterness against their parents for having failed to give them clean, helpful information.

(2) The ideas received from improper sources have often led to some form of sexual practice, most often between the ages of twelve and fifteen years.

(3) Instruction in the past, when given at all, generally has been about four to six years too late. When it has been given by parent or teacher it has been helpful even though crude and meager. One young man writes: "It served as a starting point to keep me in the right direction." Another says: "It had a good influence. Instead of picking up distorted knowledge, I got the facts from someone I could believe." And another: "It gave me a deep sense of responsibility for the protection of womankind."

Although no such extensive study has been made regarding the influence on young girls of mis-education, such information as has been gathered shows that more harm results through ignorance than most fathers and mothers would be willing to believe. There is evidence that if the girl grows up and leaves a well-protected home in complete ignorance of the normal facts of sex life—of sexual relations, prostitution and venereal diseases—she is more in danger of serious shock upon learning these facts than if they were presented gradually and naturally in the confidences between mother and daughter.

Public health officers, who are constantly coming in touch with the victims of vice and disease, substantiate this testimony as to the imperative need for sex instruction of boys and girls. Some of the cases coming into their venereal clinics are mere children whose acts in contracting the disease can be ascribed only to their

pitiabie ignorance—for which their elders, not they, are responsible.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Sex education includes the study of the whole process of reproduction and the nurture of children, the meaning of marriage, prostitution, venereal diseases, illegitimacy, and the hygiene of sound recreation. These cannot be taught at any one time or place. The co-operation of the homes, the churches, the schools, the press, clubs and societies in your community is necessary.

But you as parent must always be the most important and effective advisor of your children in sex matters. Your home is the natural place for satisfying their early curiosity, directing their adolescent energy and building up habits of self-control. Indeed all that other agencies can do to give children accurate knowledge and a wholesome point of view will be nullified if you fail to do your part.

YOUR PREPARATION

The first and principal requirement of you as parent in teaching your children the facts of sex is that you be truthful. The principal defect of mothers and fathers in the past has been that they have not told the plain truth, that they have practiced deceit of one kind or another and lost forever the confidence of their children. To keep the line of communication open between you and your children through all their youthful struggles is the best guarantee that they will be properly informed. But you destroy this easy approach if you fail to be honest with them when they come to you.

In the second place it is necessary that you have the right attitude yourself on the subject of the relation of the sexes. If you think of sex as something vulgar and nasty you will be very likely to pass on this dangerous viewpoint to torment another generation. From the very first the child should be made to feel the sacredness of parenthood. He would naturally think of it in this way if you do not interpose a foolish embarrassment or taboo. To know about sex truly is to realize that it is intimately connected with the mental, physical and moral welfare of the individual and the race, and that it is a subject full of purity, nobleness and health. Do not pass on to your daughter the prudery and repressed feelings which will result in needless worry and misunderstanding for her years later when she marries. This frankness in the home will not prevent you from teaching your child that it is perfectly proper to discuss with you many things about which it is improper to speak to others.

In the third place it may be necessary to prepare yourself by

reading some reliable book or pamphlets on the subject. Do not underestimate your own ability, however. The average adult knows enough facts to satisfy the child's curiosity in every essential way. It is not necessary to know the facts of biology as an expert or to have a medical knowledge of venereal diseases. The simple truths you know are what the child needs. Do not mystify the child by using words he cannot understand. Plain, simple language should be used here as in everything else you explain to him. The mystery of the process of the renewal of life itself is sufficient to give the subject dignity without additional use of allegorical words. Some books on this subject are not reliable and parents should be careful about the ones they choose. In general it may be said that the pamphlets now being issued by the State boards of health are more satisfactory than most books. Many of the best libraries, however, are now issuing circulars giving the titles of the most reliable books on the sex problem.

INSTRUCTION OF THE CHILD BEFORE PUBERTY

Your task in the instruction of the child before he reaches the age of puberty is a comparatively simple but very important one. Puberty is the period when bodily sexual development is especially noticeable. It begins with girls at about eleven to thirteen years of age, and in boys at about thirteen to fifteen years. Before this time your chief problem is answering questions.

As early as six or seven the child seems transformed into a human question mark. Here is the beginning of sex education. His curiosity at this period about the origin of life is nothing special or morbid. It is a part of his general curiosity about all things that move and change and grow. Leaving his question unanswered does not satisfy his curiosity. Answering the question does satisfy that curiosity—at least for the time being. Granted that the less children think about sex the better, the essential fact to be borne in mind is that curiosity and interest are aroused by those things that the child does not know about, not those that he knows about.

All the questions will not be asked at once nor should all possible questions be answered at once. Neither is it likely that the child will absorb all the information at one time. It is often the experience of parents that children ask about some of the essential facts a number of times before they remember them. The questions are a sign of healthy attitude.

It may be necessary to postpone an answer to a question about which you need more information, but if this is done in the same frank way you would postpone any other subject, you will not lose your child's confidence.

If a child asks no questions at all, because he has the idea that it is in some way improper to mention such matters, or has had his curiosity satisfied from other sources, you should make an opening for the discussion of the necessary aspects of the subject. Every bit of information about the normal side of sex that is given your child during this period before puberty is so much gain. Later, during adolescence, when your boy or girl is undergoing new personal experiences and acquiring new sensitiveness, it is much harder to give this information.

You may have the problem of giving correct sex information after you have already deceived your children with the fable about the stork, or turned them away without satisfying their innocent inquiries. Your only possible course in such case is to inform the child that the stork story is a fable similar to many other childhood myths which one believes for a while and then is disillusioned. After that, proceed to establish confidence by telling the truth.

During the years before puberty, when the opportunities offer, you should warn your boy and girl against handling the sex organs except for the purpose of cleansing them. In the case of your boy you should see that the sex organ is kept free from irritating substances beneath the foreskin. Circumcision may be necessary to decrease the irritation and assist him in keeping clean.

It is impossible to give an accurate schedule of just what all children should know at certain ages. The environment of both boys and girls varies so widely that no general rule applies. The safest guide to the time of giving sex information before puberty is your children's questions themselves.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Certain questions arise in the minds of nearly all boys and girls in some form or other before the age of adolescence. These questions may come at intervals of weeks, months, or even years. Samples of such questions and satisfactory answers are given here.

1. "Where did the baby come from?" or "Where did the puppies come from?"

"Babies grow inside their mothers' bodies, just as little birds in a nest. The birds hatch from the eggs and when their wings grow they leave the nest. After the baby has grown for many weeks in the mother's body it comes out of the body and we say it is born."

2. "How is the baby born?"

"All girls and women have a passageway in their bodies which enlarges enough to let the baby come out when it is strong

enough. This passageway opens at the lower part of the body. We should never touch that part of the body except to keep it clean, or we might harm it." (This question offers a starting point to warn girls against masturbation or self-abuse. Boys should have the question answered satisfactorily, but the warning against self-abuse might better be related to the explanation of the male sex glands and the value of their secretions in promoting vigor. This explanation is given simply and clearly in pamphlets for boys published by State boards of health.)

3. "Does it hurt to have the baby born? Why does the doctor come when the baby is born?"

"Yes, it hurts the mother, but she is so happy to have a baby all her own that she forgets the pain soon. The doctor comes to take care that the baby is born safely." (Do not emphasize the suffering of childbirth in talking to a child.)

4. "Can I tell Jack how a baby is born? He told me the doctor brings the baby in a satchel."

"No, some parents don't tell their children anything about this, and they don't want anyone else to tell them. Never talk to anyone about these things without asking me." (This advice may be futile. But it is far better for the truths to be spread among children than the untruths so usually communicated.)

5. "What does it mean to be half Shepherd and half St. Bernard?"

"The dog is half Shepherd and half St. Bernard because one of his parents was a Shepherd dog and the other was a St. Bernard. All little dogs must have a father and mother. Birds have a father and a mother too, just as babies must have a father and mother."

(This explanation may often satisfy a child completely. He may, however, ask more about the father part in reproduction. Although this is the most delicate subject of all to treat frankly, it is necessary to be sufficiently definite to allay curiosity, and it is the great opportunity to arouse in the boy and girl a fundamental respect for reproduction and to fortify them against vulgar talk and improper use of the sex organs. This explanation may be continued, illustrating with plants and animals, somewhat as follows.)

"The seed is inside the mother flower, but it doesn't grow into a new flower until the pollen dust has mixed with it. Every life begins with the mixing of the seeds. Every grown-up animal and every grown-up man and woman have tiny bits of life or seeds inside their bodies which have to come together before new life can start. A part of their bodies is fitted by Nature for this

purpose. Sometimes, as in the case of a fish, the seeds come together in the outside water. But in dogs and birds and people, they mix in the mothers' bodies, where they can be much better taken care of."

ADOLESCENCE

As your child approaches adolescence, which begins at the time of puberty, questions become less frequent. If confidence has been firmly established it is likely that much valuable information will have been imparted by answering questions in a simple, natural way. But it will probably be necessary for you to give information voluntarily about the important sex changes taking place.

Your boy and girl should understand that the new sensations and impulses that come to them at this time are indications that their bodies are being prepared for the duties and responsibilities of motherhood and fatherhood.

Your boy should understand that seminal emissions at night generally begin at about fifteen or sixteen, that they are normal and that no attention need be paid to them unless the occurrence is oftener than two or three times a month. He should also understand that the external sex glands manufacture a secretion which is absorbed by the blood, thus contributing greatly to the vigor of manhood. Boys should not be frightened by exaggerated statements regarding the effect of self-abuse, but they should understand that such a habit interferes with the development of the manly qualities they are all ambitious to possess. The prevalent idea that it is healthy to exercise the sex organs should be corrected. The common sense and idealism of a life of continence before marriage can be emphasized at this time.

It is highly important that girls, before their bodies show signs of change, should be told about menstruation. Make your daughter understand that this is a normal function; that she will have no pain and practically no discomfort if her body is healthy, her muscles firm and well developed, her blood and digestion as they should be. During early adolescence, if it has not been done before, explain to her the reproductive system and the method of reproduction. It is in such explanations that the girl learns once and for all the danger of illegitimacy connected with irregular sexual intercourse.

Pamphlets for boys and girls may be obtained from the most progressive boards of health; safe books for them may be obtained at the best libraries.

As your boy associates more and more with his companions and men outside the home, he has a right to some definite knowledge of venereal diseases. When the girl enters industrial or

business life or is subjected to the dangers of questionable companions, she should also be told of the seriousness of these diseases. The description of them as one of many contagious germ diseases, is a convincing way of handling the matter with normal boys and girls. Girls should be guarded against the exaggerations which would lead them to believe that all men have exposed themselves to these dangerous diseases.

INDIRECT TRAINING

During middle adolescence (from sixteen to nineteen years of age) guidance becomes indirect. Direct instruction should not be repeatedly given; keep the youth's mind off the sex question. For your boy at this critical time the love of games and physical activities is able to produce interests and enthusiasms which diminish the temptations to wrongful sex activity. You should overlook no opportunity to encourage such natural athletic interests. You should encourage the eating of wholesome food and keeping the bowels in good working order. You should see to it that your boy has an abundance of exercise and fresh air, and from eight and one-half to ten hours' sleep, depending on his age. You must insist upon habits of frequent bathing and general cleanliness. Although girls are not so universally enthusiastic for physical perfection at this period you should encourage as much as possible their physical development and participation in outdoor sports.

Your boy should also be encouraged in the development of interests in life—in the making of things, in the multitude of projects which keep him busy. With both boys and girls this is the time of opportunity to develop through literature high ideals of romantic love and earnest enthusiasms for unselfish endeavor. It is a time when the youth is interested in his future career, in reforming projects, in high adventure and a time when he forms deep friendships. Participation in unselfish activities is a great safety-valve at this period.

In normal boy-and-girl life the developing sex life appears in an attraction for friends of the opposite sex. The manifestations known as "puppy love" must be guided and directed, but it can never be successfully repressed. Boys and girls should be encouraged to mingle socially at frequent intervals at times and places at which adults can be present. The practice of familiarities between the sexes, known commonly as spooning, presents a problem for you. It is positively useless merely to say "Don't do it." The real harm and unfairness of such things should be pointed out clearly.

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION

State Boards of Health and the United States Public Health Service have prepared pamphlets which present the facts of sex and describe accurately the venereal diseases and their effects, explaining the Government's campaign against these diseases. These pamphlets, together with lists of books endorsed by experts, are available upon application to either of the above agencies. If you are a member of a parents' organization, you can obtain pamphlets in quantity to pass on to other members. Although Public Health officers, policemen and teachers have their important work to do in this campaign, there is no work more fundamental or more important than the parent's part in guiding and instructing his or her own children.

Write for the following pamphlets according to your need:

- Set A. For the general public.
- Set B. For boys and young men.
- Set C. For parents of children.
- Set D. For girls and young women.
- Set E. For educators.

U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE,
Room 360, Federal Building,
Bismarck, N. D.

