

BBFA PEP Summary

A Parent's Guide to Sexual Ages and Stages

Sean Hogan-Downey

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

The first Parent Education Program of the 2007-2008 school year was *A Parent's Guide to Sexual Ages and Stages* presented by Sean Hogan-Downey, LMSW, LMFT on Tuesday, September 11, 2007. Ms. Hogan-Downey delivered a lively, often humorous address to a standing-room-only crowd at the Doyle Center in Bloomfield Hills [and to a smaller group at Eton Academy in Birmingham that evening]. At the outset, she emphasized the importance of understanding our children's normal sexual development and talking with them openly about sexual matters in a positive fashion.

Ms. Hogan-Downey began with a summary of the normal sexual stages for children of various ages. She noted that the period from ages 7 to 10 is the ideal time for parents to begin explaining the mechanics of sex and their own values and expectations regarding sexual behavior. She recommended that mothers conduct "the talk" (ideally, an ongoing conversation) with their daughters and that fathers do so with their sons. Ms. Hogan-Downey also encouraged the audience to use their children's increasing insistence on privacy as an occasion to teach them about keeping their own sexuality private and setting appropriate sexual boundaries.

Turning to children aged 11 to 13, Ms. Hogan-Downey discussed how both boys and girls face dramatic changes in puberty. The parent's role at this stage, she explained, is to help children learn to control their sexual urges and to integrate their developing sexuality into their own identities. Hygiene and open discussion of menstruation and seminal emissions are also important at this stage.

With regard to teenagers, Ms. Hogan-Downey talked about the prevalence of sexual experimentation and the associated rise in sexually transmitted diseases. She urged parents to make themselves as approachable as possible by openly discussing sex as a general matter, asking their children about what types of behaviors are common among their friends, and making themselves available to talk. Ms. Hogan-Downey recommended that parents overcome their own embarrassment to deliver a strong message about their own values and expectations. She noted that studies confirm that teenagers want to hear from their parents on these matters even if they feign disinterest. Ms. Hogan-Downey encouraged all parents to let their teens know that they are always willing to listen.

Throughout her presentation Ms Hogan-Downey returned to the disconnect between parents' responsibility to teach children that sexuality belongs within a loving relationship and the message from popular culture that sex is merely a recreational activity. The best cure for the problem, she noted, is for parents to be clear with their children about what they consider to be acceptable (and unacceptable) sexual behavior. That message, Ms. Hogan-Downey concluded, bears constant repetition.

Ms. Hogan-Downey supplied a bibliography of recommended books on family sex education, including *How to Talk to Your Child About Sex* by Linda and Richard Eyre and *Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex...But Were Afraid They'd Ask* by Justin Richardson, M.D.

The remaining recommended books can be found on the BBFA web site.