

the volunteer's
**BACK POCKET
GUIDE TO**
sex

**GUIDING TEENAGERS ON ISSUES FROM
PORNOGRAPHY TO PURITY**

BY CRAIG GROSS AND CRIS CLAPP LOGAN



The Volunteer's Back Pocket Guide to Sex

Guiding Teenagers on Issues From Pornography to Purity

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INTRODUCTION

More likely than not, the youth group you volunteer with today looks a whole lot different from the youth group of 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Girls show up wearing tiny miniskirts and clearly visible lacy bras. Guys joke about oral sex with no hint of embarrassment. Many teenagers are hooking up with their friends, their friends' friends, and even their friends' friends' friends (sometimes even at youth group events).

Our teenagers live in a culture where swinging, S&M, and sexting are the norm. Throughout popular media—whether TV shows, video games, or movies—sex has been reduced to skin on skin. For many teenagers, sex has become a purely physical act, fully divorced from spirituality, love, and commitment. Sex, pornography, and “hooking up” are all met with the same response: “It’s no big deal.”

Most teenagers today don’t know where to turn to learn about sex, and many feel confused, fearful, and alone as a result. Those who are struggling with sexual addiction or unhealthy patterns don’t know how to find freedom and healing from the choices they’ve made, and they are afraid the church will label them as perverts if they come clean with their true struggles.

Youth group leaders often ask: “Where are the parents in all of this?!?” Unfortunately, many parents fail to set a Christ-like example. Other parents are simply too terrified or overwhelmed to talk with their teenagers about sex. They think their teenagers are strong enough or good enough to stay “pure,” and if they aren’t, these parents don’t want to know about it. Some parents write off their child’s behavior as “kids being kids.” In fact, one 15-year-old girl told me (Cris) that her non-Christian parents

practically mocked her when she told them of her decision to keep sex until marriage.

The good news is that this means you—the youth worker—are on the front lines of the battle to shape, challenge, and encourage students toward sexual wholeness and purity.

Talking about these topics isn't easy, but this book aims to help. Over the coming pages, we will provide you with practical, down-and-dirty information to help you talk with students on the topics of pornography, sexuality, masturbation, purity, and more. Although we are approaching this from a Christian perspective, this book doesn't focus on Bible teaching. Instead, we try to use God's truth as the backdrop for our approach to this discussion.

As you go through this book and begin to engage in conversations with your students, remember to:

- Listen to where your students are coming from.
- Initiate conversations about sex, healthy sexuality, and sexual struggles.
- Use everyday opportunities to reinforce God's values and goals for sexual health.
- Be sensitive; don't shame or embarrass.
- Be honest about your own story and what God has taught you about sexual purity. Remember, teenagers value authenticity, and your stories can provide powerful fodder for conversations and lessons learned.
- Be informed, frank, and accurate in your response. If you don't know an answer to a question, don't make one up.

- Pray for your students in this area.
- Attend to your own spiritual health through prayer, Christian community, and the study of God's Word—it's hard to lead well when you're running on spiritual fumes.

CHAPTER

I

SEX ABUSE PREVENTION: RULES AND REGULATIONS

We admit, this chapter isn't very fun, but sex abuse prevention is critically important for every youth leader and volunteer to be educated about, both to protect your students and to protect yourself. That's why it's essential to examine these foundational guidelines before going further into our discussion on sex.

UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE

Before you can address child sexual abuse, you must understand the issue. Let's start with a definition: Child sexual abuse includes any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, where one exerts power over the other. Forcing, coercing, or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act, including sexual contact, exposure to pornography, engaging in sexual behavior, or communications online or over a mobile device (such as sexting) all qualify as crimes punishable by law.¹

You may think: “This would *never* happen in my church!” Sadly, research indicates that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually victimized before adulthood.² This means it’s highly likely that you know a child that has experienced some form of sexual abuse. It’s also very likely that you know an abuser. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse look and act like responsible, normal, caring, and thoughtful people, just like you and me. Up to 30-40 percent of child sexual abuse victims are abused by a family member, and 50 percent are abused by someone outside the family whom they know and trust.³

Those who sexually abuse children often have multiple victims, so if you suspect that someone is a perpetrator of child sexual abuse, it’s critical that you take action. Jesus himself said this: *“If you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).*

IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS

If your church or youth group doesn’t have a child sex abuse prevention curriculum or class, talk to your youth leader about getting one in place. This can help protect you, your students, and the church you care about and serve. Ask people from any congregation that has experienced child sexual abuse, and they will tell you that they wish they had done more to prevent the abuse from occurring in their community.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communicating about child sexual abuse is also vital to fighting and addressing victimization. For the most part, kids often keep their abuse a secret. They feel ashamed, confused, and afraid.

Some of the kids I (Cris) have worked with fear rejection or ridicule if they tell someone, and they aren't always sure whether what they have experienced was wrong or bad. Sometimes, a kid has made a mistake (such as communicating online in a flirtatious manner or agreeing to meet up with an adult for sex), and they think the victimization is their fault. A sexual perpetrator will often use threats and manipulation to keep a teenager quiet.

Complicating the matter further, teenagers can also have strong feelings for their adult perpetrators. In my work with Internet-initiated abuse, victimized girls often describe the adults who abuse them as their "best friends." These individuals work hard to gain trust and affection from their victims. Perpetrators will always affirm their victims and promise romance, adventure, independence, and freedom—essentially saying all of the powerful words that adolescent ears long to hear.

When working with students, watch for teachable moments and opportunities to talk with them about healthy sexuality. Explain what caring, loving sexual relationships look like. Ask them clear and direct questions, and provide them opportunities to share any experiences they have had. One man, now in his 40s (let's call him "Brian"), once shared with me (Cris) about the years of abuse he suffered at the hands of a church staff member. Brian's parents knew the staff member and trusted him completely. On occasion, Brian's parents seemed to notice something was wrong, but they never asked their son clearly enough to evoke a response. There were many times when Brian wanted to tell his parents about the abuse, but his mouth just froze and he was terrified that he had done something wrong. Brian later said, "If they had just asked one time whether anything that man had done with me made me feel uncomfortable, the floodgates would have opened up." The perpetrator was eventually caught and convicted, but not before the damage was done: Authorities later

discovered that this “trusted community member” had abused more than 30 boys, ages 9 to 15.

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

To minimize the opportunity for child sexual abuse, you should implement a few guidelines. As a general rule, you should eliminate one-on-one time with any minor of the opposite sex. In fact, it’s wise to avoid being alone in a private space with any minor you work with, regardless of their gender. This means that whether we are counseling a teenager or just hanging out, we do so in a public area whenever possible. We can talk about matters of the heart at the local Starbucks® just as well as if we were sitting alone in a car.

Also limit the frequency and channels of communication you use with teenagers. Remember, these students may not have the emotional maturity that you do. Spending hours chatting online or texting back and forth can set a confusing precedent. You may also want to consider whether you are online “friends” with the kids you work with and whether they can see your full profile settings. As youth group volunteers and workers, we walk a fine line between friend and mentor. Even though you might be friends with your students, you are still an adult authority figure, and that means you should relate to them in an age-appropriate fashion.

PHYSICAL TOUCH

As a leader and as an adult, you should also be cautious with your use of physical touch. Appropriate physical touch (such as a side hug after an emotional conversation, a shoulder pat to welcome a student that you haven’t seen in a while, or a high-

five after a youth group competition) can be a powerful, helpful reinforcement for a teenager, but you should always consider a teenager's personal story and past when deciding if any physical touch is appropriate. With students of the opposite sex, keep the hugs "open-face-sandwich-style," if at all, and remember that all forms of physical touch should occur in a visible, public place. Be above reproach—for your sake and theirs.

RECOGNIZE THAT KIDS ARE CONFUSED AND VULNERABLE

Be delicate with teenagers' emotions. Teenagers are vulnerable, with hormones raging and emotions on overdrive. It's easy for teenagers to get the wrong idea from your attempts at friendship. It's natural for the girls and guys in the youth group to have crushes on adult youth group leaders. Focus on group engagement and activities, and encourage your students toward community with one another. If you discover an upset student of the opposite sex at your retreat campground, enlist another student or leader to help you engage with them until you can locate their youth group leader.

IF YOU DO LEARN OF ABUSE

If a student discloses to you that they have been sexually abused, don't overreact. Your reaction will set a powerful precedent for ongoing communication and will impact whether the student continues to open up about it. If you react with suspicion, anger, or disbelief, a student may change the story, feel guilty, or withdraw.

Don't ask leading questions—ask open-ended questions like "What happened next?" Remind them that it's not their fault and it's not right if they have ever been touched sexually or had

sexual relationships with a family member or an adult. Thank the student for telling you and let them know you are on their side.

You can't solve this type of problem on your own—you will need to work as a team, getting your youth leader and a professional involved. Legally, you are required to report any reasonable suspicion of child sexual abuse, but also remember that any time we report child abuse, there is a significant risk of exposure to the child's family. By working as a team, you are more likely to best protect the interests of the child and follow the legal requirements and best protocol available.

WHEN THE ABUSER IS ANOTHER TEENAGER

Child sexual abuse isn't always between an adult and a child; kids can also be the perpetrators. You may encounter teenagers trying to hook up on a youth group retreat, sending or receiving "sext" messages, or viewing or sharing pornography in the back of a church bus. Anytime a minor is exposed to sexual content or is pressured to perform sexually by another minor, child-initiated sexual abuse is at play. Set clear guidelines for what is and what isn't appropriate behavior. Also, try to have a leader present with your students at all times. In my experience as a youth group leader, I (Cris) will sometimes even tag along with guys and girls that pair off during youth group activities to try to limit the opportunities for bad behavior—usually much to the chagrin of the young lovers.

Make sure you've established a protocol for addressing sexual situations among the students. This is especially important on overnight retreats. And be sure to clearly communicate these standards and rules to parents, so there will be no surprises if a situation does arise.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Finally, consider hosting a sex abuse prevention, pornography awareness, or online safety night for parents. This will help them better understand your church's policies, along with what you as a leader are confronted with as you work with teenagers.

RESOURCES:

- Sex abuse prevention resources and training: **Darkness to Light**: d2l.org
- For Internet safety resources and training: **Enough Is Enough's Internet Safety 101**: internetsafety101.org
- Pornography awareness and resources: **XXXChurch.com**: xxxchurch.com