

**TOUCHY**  
SUBJECTS

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT **SEX, TECH, AND  
SOCIAL MEDIA** IN A TOUCHSCREEN WORLD

© 2014 by Craig Gross and David Dean

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the authors.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

ISBN: 978-1-4002-0532-5

Printed in the United States of America

[www.craiggross.com](http://www.craiggross.com)  
[www.davidpdean.com](http://www.davidpdean.com)

Cover and interior Design by: Ashton Owens  
Editor: Adam Palmer

# TOUCHY SUBJECTS

**CRIAG GROSS**  
*with* **DAVID DEAN**

**This Introductory Part Is Important—Please Don't Skip It**

We live in a touchscreen world. The more technology develops, the more integrated it becomes into our culture, the more it tends to involve some sort of screen. And, increasingly, that screen itself is becoming the way we interact with our tech.

So now the word touch is getting broader in its definition. We carry little computers in our pockets that we operate through touch. We use social media to share touching stories or reach out and touch base with someone virtually. And technology is opening all kinds of windows for a different kind of touch: sex.

These are all, in their unique way, touchy subjects.

And so the question becomes: how can we as parents guide our kids through responsible interactions with these touchy subjects? How can we teach them to use sex, technology, and social media in the best ways possible so that they can mature into responsible, emotionally healthy adults?

What's your approach, or do you even have one?

Maybe your son or daughter is young and you don't know when you should even broach a subject like sex or social media.

Maybe you're too nervous or embarrassed to bring up some of these touchy subjects in the first place.

Maybe you don't even realize how important these topics are.

Maybe you want to talk to your kids but just don't know what to say.

We wrote this book for you.

Who are we? We aren't medical doctors or academics with "Ph.D." written after our names. We're just a couple of dads who love our kids and who want to make sure they get the truth about touchy subjects.

As for me, I'm Craig Gross, and in 2002 I started a website started XXXchurch.com to help people overcome pornography addictions, whether they used it or made it. Over the course of that time, I've been called a "sexpert," I've been called "the porn pastor," and I've been called a number of other things that I'd rather not put in print.

I also helped to create iParent.TV in order to provide a way for parents to stay on top of the turbulent and trend-driven world of technology so they can know what their kids are into, what they'll want to be into, and what sorts of restrictions they might want to put in place for touchy subjects.

I've traveled across the world talking to people—including many parents—about the relationship between sex, pornography, and technology. And while most parents are fine talking with me about this stuff, I've noticed that a lot of them are not comfortable talking truthfully with their kids about it. Whether it's from

awkwardness or embarrassment or just plain not knowing what to say, most parents I talk to get uneasy when it comes to this topic.

Our different organizations are flooded with questions daily, and many, come from parents wondering exactly what to do when it comes to their kids and touchy subjects. They have tough questions, like:

- At what age do kids become curious about sex?
- My child said they saw porn at the neighbor's house. What do I do?
- My kid has gay friends; what should I say about that?
- I walked in on my son masturbating to porn, but my husband says this is normal. Is it?
- Should I expect my child to treat sex better than I did?
- I'm in the dark about popular apps; can you help me?
- What should I do about social media?
- I saw some inappropriate text messages on my child's phone; how should I confront them?

These are complicated questions that require answers, so my friend and colleague David Dean and I decided to take questions like these, along with other common questions about touchy subjects, and answer them through this book.

Whenever David wants to chime in, he'll do it after his initials so you can easily know what he has to say. Like this, for example:

**DD:** *Hi. I'm David.*

David is here because, as a full-time clean comedian, he's also traveled quite a bit and been able to use his humor to talk to parents and families about all kinds of touchy subjects in a frank but lighthearted way. Plus, while my kids are still relatively young (an 11-year-old boy and a 8-year-old girl at the time of this writing), David is a good decade older than me and has already lived through both his kids' adolescent trials and tribulations.

**DD:** *Yes, I have. My wife, whom I call "Saint Betsy," and I have been married since 1988, and we have a 23-year-old son and a 20-year-old daughter. As they've grown up, we have had no problem in our family bringing up these issues of sex and technology and, as it's gotten more prevalent in recent years, social media: what to do, what not to do, where it goes, and when. And we started at an early age.*

*Sadly, in the rest of the world, our family is in the minority. Instead, a lot of parents treat these touchy subjects like hot potatoes. But guess what: whether you want to acknowledge it or not, these are issues you must address. Fortunately I've found, especially as someone who tells jokes for a living, that bringing humor and levity to the conversation makes it all the easier.*

David and I met several years ago through speaking at different youth events. He was the comedy guy and I was the speaker/drama guy, and over the course of interacting with one another over several of these events, we struck up a friendship. Especially since I have younger kids while David has older kids; he's gone through some more things in his house than I've gone through, so I treasure his wisdom in those areas.

Working with XXXchurch.com has opened a lot of doors for me, especially when it comes to learning about the many different sides of human sexuality. I've worked with both pastors and porn stars. I've had conversations with everyone from the common man whose pornography addiction has spun out of control to the pornography actress whose substance abuse keeps her in front of the cameras.

As XXXchurch has grown, we've seen the need to educate parents on things beyond pornography and sex, on the types of touchy subjects that we've already mentioned here. The need has grown and the more I've interacted with others, the more experiences and insights I've gained that will be valuable when I have these conversations about touchy subjects with my kids.

Notice I used the word "conversations" just now. Plural. That was on purpose. Because talking about this stuff is not a one-time, get-it-all-out-on-the-table type of talk. This should be an ongoing conversation in your family, one you will pick up with your child

again and again as they grow and mature. Think of it as a series of conversations that get progressively deeper.

David and I wrote this book as a couple of normal, average parents to help you have those ongoing conversations, in many parts, over the years. We've done it—so can you.

Because of the different stages of life we inhabit, as well as the different regions of the country (I'm in Los Angeles; David is in Indiana), we'll have slightly different answers to the questions we discuss, and this book is in no way intended to be comprehensive about all these different touchy subjects—there's just too much ground to cover. But we'll go over the basics and give you plenty of ideas to equip you as you begin to have these conversations with your kids.

Both David and I are involved in church-like activities, but this book is not about religion. It is about what we've seen with our own eyes, in our respective fields, and the conversation that must be active in your family. You have to get involved and stay involved, because, more than likely, your kids are already talking about some of this stuff with their friends. This book is meant to encourage you as you involve yourself in the conversation and guide your kids toward healthy thinking instead of forcing them to figure it out alongside their peers.

You don't even have to read this book all in one sitting. In fact, it's best if you don't. Read it as you need it—a question here,

a question there; one principle now, another six months from now. As your children grow older, they'll continue to need advice. Think of this book as a resource or a type of manual. It's here to help you, not to embarrass you.

You may also notice we've split this book into two parts. The first features 28 bedrock principles that we feel strongly about. These are the foundations you need to understand before you initiate these conversation with your kids. We believe these principles provide the best approach to these (quite literal) touchy subjects. Read these first. Seriously, before you read any of the questions—or our answers to them—read these principles first.

The second part is made up of the types of questions parents have sent to XXXchurch.com and iParent.TV. Our answers may surprise you, and you may not always agree with everything we say, but I hope you'll at least hear us out and trust that we're coming from a place of honesty, with a sincere desire to help both you and your kids.

You can do this. You have to do this. You owe it to your kids to talk with them about these very important subject, just like you owe it to them to share your thoughts on religion, personal responsibility, finances, drugs and alcohol, or anything else you hold near and dear. If you feel embarrassed or awkward, you're just going to have to get over yourself and do it.

Do it for them.

Read on.

—Craig and David

March 2014

**- Part 1 -**

**28 FOUNDATIONAL**  
*principles for talking about*  
**TOUCHY SUBJECTS**

**the earlier,  
the better.**

Talking about touchy subjects isn't like getting a driver's license—there's not a certain year requirement your child has to pass before you can say something to them about sex, social media, the perils of technology, or porn. There is no golden age, no perfect number of years your child must surpass in order to get their "I Now Know About Touchy Subjects" card.

You know your kids; you know your house. Feel it out. If you live on an isolated farm with no internet, no media, and no outside influences, then maybe you can wait until your kids are little older about these types of things.

But probably not.

Hopefully you're already having normal, regular conversations with your kids—about their lives, what books they like to read, what movies they like to watch, who their friends are... all those sorts of things that come with parenting. You should already be in their world and have an understanding of their maturity level. You should already have an idea what they can handle and what they can't.

As soon as you perceive they're ready to handle the basic information about the kinds of touchy subjects we're addressing in this book, you need to step up and start the conversation. Don't let the outside world beat you to the punch on this and potentially warp or distort the proper view of sex, technology, or even adulthood for your kids. They only get one chance to hear about anything for the

first time—make sure you're the one giving them that input.

*DD: As a comedian, I've been given a lot of opportunities to travel and speak to different groups of people about a lot of different topics, and of course, many of those topics are these touchy subjects. I've talked to men and to women. To married couples and parents. To college students, teenagers, and even middle-schoolers.*

*Let me just tell you: talking about sex can be awkward within any of those groups. But it's especially awkward among the middle-schoolers. I mention one thing about something like sex, and I get responses like, "Ooh, gross!"*

*"Sick!"*

*"Yucky!"*

*This is normal behavior. But even though your average middle-schooler might outwardly say something is gross, they're probably still intrigued at the genetic level. Kids are naturally curious about the world. They may not be interested in learning anything at school, but they are fascinated in learning about the world around them and how it works.*

*They want to know what's up.*

*My son was no different—except he wanted to know before he hit middle school. He was a very inquisitive eight-year-old, so when he started asking questions at even that early age, my wife*

*and I knew the timing was perfect to initiate these more difficult conversations.*

*He wasn't too young to wonder why we were even bringing these topics up; he was at that perfectly curious age, like all kids, full of wonder and amazement. Their minds are sponges, ready to soak up any and all information.*

# use everyday opportunities to talk.

This is actually just a good rule of thumb for parenting in general, but especially for talking about touchy subjects: incorporate what's going on around you in everyday life. Be aware of opportunities that present themselves to you or your kids, whether they're more subtle, like the announcement of a friend or relative's pregnancy (or your own!), or they smack you in the face, like stumbling into the middle of a gay pride parade (this actually happened to me and my kids—more on this story later). When it comes to having these conversations, you won't always have to revert to a textbook or manual—there are opportunities around you that you can talk about and relate with and to your kids.

Just keep your eyes open. You'll know when the time is right.

***DD:** Nature fits this principle really well. Being outside watching animals interact presents many opportunities to either start a conversation about sex or continue one.*

*At my house, we're big birdwatchers—we basically have an all-you-can-eat-buffet's worth of birdfeeders in our backyard in order to attract birds. We get a lot of cardinals, and we often see male and female cardinals coming to our birdfeeder in pairs to eat. Sometimes they even feed each other.*

*While our kids were still young, when we would see this kind of opportunity in nature, Saint Betsy and I would use it as one of many ways to discuss things like mating or marriage,*

*pointing out the way these two cardinals would act as partners and care for each other. Then we'd help them connect the dots to see how that's the way we're supposed to mate.*

*I live in rural Indiana, and one thing we have out here is a lot of farmland. When you live on a farm, you get plenty of opportunities to get firsthand lessons from the animal kingdom on mating, sex, and reproduction. I personally didn't live the farm life growing up, but a lot of my friends did, and they found that just doing their chores was practically like an entire college-level semester in reproductive biology!*

*Looking for everyday opportunities like these is a great way to become more and more comfortable in having conversations with your kids. The opportunities are out there—you just have to watch for them.*

**too much too  
soon.**