

**FACILITATOR
GUIDE
SAMPLER**

DIA LOG UES

— ON —
SEXUALITY

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DIALOGUES ON SEXUALITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT DIALOGUES ON	4
PREPARING TO FACILITATE	5
HOW IT WORKS	6
COMMUNITY COVENANT	8
WEEK 1	10
A Man's World	
WEEK 2	16
I Kissed Niceness Goodbye	
WEEK 3	22
Sex and Marriage	
WEEK 4	28
Pink Capes and Zip-Up Boots	
WEEK 5	34
What Does It Mean to Be Transgender?	
WEEK 6	40
Are All Welcome?	
WEEK 7	46
Building an Ethic of Sexual Wholeness	

ABOUT DIALOGUES ON

It's not news to anyone that we are living in a time of conflict, division, and disagreement. In politics, in religion, in education, in relationships and communities and churches, we are becoming people who can't seem to find our way out of the "us vs. them" pit of divisiveness. It doesn't matter who you think is "us" and who is "them." We all feel stuck.

And yet we know it doesn't have to be like this. In the face of cracking communities and strained family dynamics, the church is uniquely equipped to bring healing, hope, and wholeness to a hurting world. Ours is a faith built on hope, on the belief that we are all created in the image of God, on the assurance that no person or situation is beyond redemption. We believe faith is not only believing in God, but also doing the work of God in the world. We are the shining city on a hill, and the world needs our light now more than ever.

One small group resource isn't going to change everything, but it can be a catalyst for new models of relational repair and social action. It can give participants a set of tools they can use to have bridge-building conversations rather than explosive arguments. It can serve as a model of peacemaking for a community struggling with strife. In other words, it can help the church be the church.

That's the purpose of Dialogues On. Each course takes a small group through a topic using a book and video as the central resources, then adding a carefully created facilitator guide to help the group engage with the topic and each other in deeper, more intentional ways.

Dialogues On uses a two-pronged approach to equip groups for meaningful conversation:

1. Thoughtful, provocative essays from a variety of voices give participants a common starting point for discussion. No matter where someone sits on a controversial topic, they can benefit from getting more information to help them add nuance to their beliefs and recognize the complexities of a given subject.
2. A collection of simple but effective skills serves as a tool kit participants take with them into the world. It doesn't matter how much we know or how deep our convictions are if we are lousy conversation partners. But when we know how to listen, how to ask questions, how to empathize and tell stories and find common ground, we become people who can navigate difficult conversations without tearing up relationships.

In this course, your small group will discuss various issues related to sexuality. You'll read essays on the ways patriarchal systems hurt women and men in the church. You'll hear from a transgender woman who shares insights and information about a group of people you might not know much about. You'll consider how your faith community can be truly inclusive and welcoming to LGBTQ people. Each week, your group will spend time sharing perspectives on what you've read. You'll have time to explore your ideas as a group, and time to process your ideas with a partner. You'll work together to create an action plan that fits your context.

Then you'll take all of that with you, into your jobs and homes and holiday dinners, and offer an alternative to conflict and division. You'll offer dialogues.

PREPARING TO FACILITATE

Whether you've been facilitating small groups for a long time or this is your first go, we've got your back. Facilitating well is more than just handing out pencils and making sure there are enough chairs. It's creating an environment where participants feel like they can be honest, that their ideas have value, and that they are part of a group that cares about their well-being. That environment starts with you.

This is particularly true when a group is talking about difficult topics and the point of the lesson is to bring up disagreement. As a Dialogues On facilitator, your primary role is to put some structure around the group's time together, giving them a kind of map they can use as they venture into some rocky terrain. This guide will walk you step-by-step through each lesson—we'll show you how on the next page. But creating an environment of honesty, trust, and safety involves having your own reliable framework to keep you oriented as a facilitator. Here's what we suggest:

- ↳ **START SIMPLE:** We recommend kicking off this small group experience with a dinner or other casual time to get to know each other, hand out the participant books, and create your community covenant (see page 8). This is a chance for people to talk a bit about what they hope to discover through this process and to work together to set expectations and ground rules. Participants should leave this event with their books and their first assignment: Read Chapter 1.
- ↳ **CLEAR THE ROAD, DON'T DRIVE THE CAR:** You don't have to teach this group. You don't have to steer them in a particular direction. Your role is to lay out each stage of the lesson, giving the group a goal to aim for and clear directions for getting there.
- ↳ **STAY FLEXIBLE:** You'll need to read the room as you work through the lesson, paying attention to times when the group seems ready to move on and times when they want to keep diving into whatever they're doing. If you need to skip some parts of the lesson one week, do it. If you find the group needs more time for their dialogues, give it to them.
- ↳ **DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW:** You are probably not an expert on the topics covered in this course. You're likely not an expert on group dynamics. And that's just fine. As the facilitator, you don't need to have answers to every question or have strong opinions about the topic. You can stay open to learning and having your mind changed, just like the rest of the group.
- ↳ **KNOW WHEN TO STEP BACK AND WHEN TO STEP IN:** This resource is built on the belief that we can disagree with one another without being disagreeable. Your group will undoubtedly experience moments of tension and even conflict as you discuss the topics each week. As the facilitator, resist the urge to jump in and solve the problem. Allow space for all voices to be heard. When you do feel like you need to step in, use your community covenant as a guide for resolving conflict well.

This small group process will ask you and your group to be a little uncomfortable at times, to take some risks, and to try some new practices. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to nurture the connections you're creating.

HOW IT WORKS

This small group resource is made up of three components that work together to create an engaging experience of discovery for facilitators and participants:

THE BOOK: Each participant needs a copy of the book, *Dialogues on Sexuality*. They'll read one chapter each week to prepare for your time as a group and come to the group ready to talk about what they read.

THE DVD: The documentary-style video component of Dialogues On brings life to the topic of the week, putting what can be abstract facts and figures into a human context.

THE FACILITATOR GUIDE: This resource was created to make it as easy as possible for you to guide your small group with minimal prep.

Each week's session follows this format:

PREPARE

The opening section of each week's guide is a general overview of the topic you'll be discussing. You'll also find some ways to talk about the topic with your group that can help them unpack the bigger picture behind the chapter they've read.

Each week you'll also have a dialogue technique for the group to practice together. These techniques are fairly simple, but they're surprisingly effective. They help people avoid running headlong into conflict and instead force more careful, thoughtful interactions, the kind that can build empathy and understanding—even between people who disagree.

Finally, you'll find a Bible passage that you can use any way you like. It can be a brief reading to help ground you in Scripture as you get started. It can be something you use during the reflection time later in the session. You can use it as a prompt for reflection during the week. Whatever you think will be most helpful for your group will work.

SET UP

In general, you need a room with seating that can be moved around a bit, enough space for smaller discussion groups to find a place to sit, and a wall or whiteboard you can use for group projects. You'll need a DVD player and monitor to watch the video each week. You'll also want some kind of timer or clock to help you manage the time.

We'll also give you a supply list to let you know what you'll need for the various activities each week. The activities were created with groups of fewer than fifteen people in mind, so if you have more than that, consider breaking into two smaller groups during the Welcome Activity and the Create project.

GATHER (10–15 MINUTES)

Each session starts with some time to settle in.

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Kick things off with a group activity that helps bring some focus to the week's topic. Sometimes it will be as simple as writing down some thoughts on sticky notes and posting them on the

wall. Other weeks it might be a group brainstorming process or a team challenge. When you've finished, you'll spend a few minutes talking about the activity and setting up a framework for the rest of your time together.

WATCH

You'll spend five to seven minutes each week watching a video related to the week's chapter. This video component creates one more access point for participants to dive into the complicated issues that are part of this topic.

CONNECT (25–30 MINUTES)

This set of activities forms the core of each session.

DIALOGUE (8–10 MINUTES)

Before you dive into talking about the week's topic, the group will break into smaller groups of three or four people to have some heart-opening conversations based on personal stories and experiences. You'll give your groups a prompt to work with and introduce them to the dialogue technique to use as each person responds to the prompt.

Even if time is tight, don't skip this part of the session. It's a critical component of the dialogue process and lays an essential foundation for the conversations to come. When we have the chance to hear someone's story—to understand the lens through which they view a topic—we are far more open to what they have to say, even when we disagree with them.

RESPOND (5–10 MINUTES)

After sharing stories and practicing a dialogue technique, the group will discuss a short list of questions about the week's chapter and video. This is when the full group will dive into a discussion of the topic for the week. It's a time for participants to be honest about their questions, their concerns, and their uncertainties about the subject and to talk about them in a respectful community of friends.

You can decide the best way to introduce these questions. You can print them out and hand a copy to each small group, you can read them aloud one at a time, or you can write them on a whiteboard before you gather and work through them as a full group. No matter how you present the questions, they are intended to draw out a variety of responses from participants. They don't have to be conflictual, but this is where you might find group members disagreeing with each other. And that's okay. This is where robust conversations can lead to real breakthroughs as participants practice their dialogue techniques and remember the context they discovered in the dialogue part of the session.

CREATE (10 MINUTES)

You'll finish up the Connect time with a group project—sometimes this will take place in the small breakout groups; sometimes it will involve the full group. This is a natural place to condense your time a bit if you need to, but keep in mind that this part of the session helps participants interact with one another and process everything they've been talking about in a different way. Through art, visual expressions of ideas, and other hands-on experiences, the group will create a physical reminder of what they've discussed and discovered. If you can, leave these on display in your space to help you connect one week's conversation to the next.

WEEK 3: SEX AND MARRIAGE

PREPARE

THIS WEEK

If you're thinking that the people in your group might be a little hesitant to talk about their sex lives, you're probably correct. But fear not! While the chapter takes an in-depth look at the sexual baggage couples bring to marriage, your dialogue this week will focus on the systemic issues involved in this topic, allowing group members to decide for themselves how much of their own stories they want to share.

The church has been in the marriage business a long time—marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church and is considered a sacred rite and holy bond in nearly every branch of the Protestant Church. And yet for many people, the church doesn't have much to do with marriage outside of hosting weddings and maybe throwing in some premarital counseling on the front end and the occasional couples' group on the other. When marriages are struggling, couples might seek counseling from their pastor, but it's still fairly taboo to talk about the challenges of marriage—especially those related to sex—in the broader community. The big question your group will explore this week is this: How can the church build realistic expectations for the role of sex in a marriage and offer the kind of support couples need to work through the challenges sex brings to a relationship?

This week's dialogue technique is **pause or pass**. In any difficult conversation, it's important to let people off the hook of participation, at least to some degree. We all have different levels of comfort with conflict, and for some people, taking a break to collect their thoughts or cool their heels helps them stay engaged over the long haul. That makes it a helpful skill to have in the conversation tool kit. Unlike the other dialogue techniques in this course, it's not essential—and obviously not desirable—for everyone in the group to practice this technique at the same time. But it is important to lay it out as an option, especially on a topic that might move into personal territory. When someone chooses to pass, the rest of the group can show care and respect by just moving on to the next person. If they pause, be sure to check in with them later in the conversation to see if they are ready to share their thoughts.

BIBLE PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION

“One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

—Mark 12:28-31

SET UP

WELCOME ACTIVITY

- ↳ Index cards, one for each person
- ↳ Pens or pencils

CREATE

This week's activity is adapted from a teaching tool called Circles of Sexuality. If you have time, read up a bit on this resource prior to this session.

- ↳ Five large pieces of butcher paper or poster board. Label them “Sensuality,” “Intimacy,” “Sexual Identity,” “Behavior and Reproduction,” and “Sexualization.”
- ↳ Sticky notes
- ↳ Pens

TIP

Consider reading this passage early in your time together and asking the group to keep it in mind as they explore today's topic. Revisit the passage at the end of class, and invite the group to talk a bit about how it might relate to their conversations.



GATHER

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Arrange the seating in a circle. Once everyone has arrived, hand out index cards and pens or pencils. Ask group members to consider this question: If you were going to explain sex to a teenager using a flavor of ice cream as a metaphor, what flavor would you choose? For example, someone might choose rocky road because it looks like it's just one flavor—chocolate—but it's actually made up of a whole bunch of interesting ingredients. Encourage the group to think creatively and have fun with this activity.

- ↳ Have everyone write their response to the question, including their rationale for their choice, on their index card. Let them know their response will stay anonymous.
- ↳ Gather the cards and redistribute them.
- ↳ Ask each person to read their card to the group, and give the group a little time to react or respond to each description as they like before moving on to the next person.

This activity is designed to lighten the mood a bit and help the group get used to talking about sex. When you've read all the cards, ask the group to reflect on the activity. How did aiming this metaphor at a teenager influence the answer you gave? Would you give a different answer to your best friend? To your partner? In what ways might this activity change if you weren't a church group?

WATCH

The author of this week's chapter, Dr. Tina Schermer Sellers, joins others in offering more thoughts on the ways in which the church's silence combines with messages of shame to create a complicated relationship between sex and marriage.

CONNECT

DIALOGUES

Gather in small groups of three or four. If you can, make sure couples are split up. Get your small groups talking with an opening question.

DISCUSSION PROMPT

What assumptions did you have about sex as a young person that turned out to be unrealistic or even problematic later in life?

DIALOGUE TECHNIQUE OF THE WEEK: PAUSE OR PASS

For the next eight to ten minutes, have each person share their response to the discussion prompt with their group. Before they begin, tell the groups about this week's dialogue technique. Encourage them to at least practice using one of these options in their dialogue, coming back to the people who pause to see if they want to respond to the prompt. If you've got introverts in your group, they might be more inclined to pass just because they don't feel like talking. Invite them to use the pass technique only if they are hesitant to share sensitive information. And remind them that they don't have to talk about how these assumptions have played out in their own sex lives.

QUESTION FOR THE GROUPS

What benefits are there to taking a pause in a difficult conversation?

RESPOND

Now that groups have had a chance to listen to each other well, it's time for them to respond to what they read in this week's chapter and saw in this week's video. Ask participants to discuss the following questions in their small groups:

- ↳ What messages are men and boys in our church hearing about sex, both inside and outside the church? What about women and girls? How might these messages be affecting the couples in our church right now?
- ↳ In what contexts do we talk about sex in our church? Is it enough? Too much? Are we talking to the right people at the right time?
- ↳ How do we talk about marriage in our church? What expectations do we put on married couples? What support do we offer them?
- ↳ What parts of today's chapter or video resonated with you? Where did you find yourself disagreeing with what you read or heard?
- ↳ (Optional) We read the passage from Mark 12:28-31 that says: "One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'" How does this passage affect the way you think about sex and marriage? How does our conversation on sex and marriage influence the way you hear this passage?

TIP

Each person has about two minutes to tell their story, so use the timer to keep things moving. If things are moving along more quickly because of the pause/pass option, follow up with an additional prompt: Have you had to explain sex to someone? If so, what did you say? Give a quick update every few minutes to let groups know when it's time for the next person to speak.

CREATE

CIRCLES OF SEXUALITY

This activity is adapted from a commonly used resource called Circles of Sexuality, created by Dennis M. Dailey of the University of Kansas. Your group will use it to expand their understanding of sex and sexuality and to consider what it might look like to bring this broader conversation into other parts of your faith community.

- ↳ Hang five large sheets of butcher paper or five poster boards on a wall. Label them “Sensuality,” “Intimacy,” “Sexual Identity,” “Behavior and Reproduction,” and “Sexualization.” Explain that sexuality is about much more than sexual activity or sexual feelings. It includes everything from gender identity to attraction, emotional intimacy, and love.
- ↳ Explain that each sheet of paper/poster board represents a component of sexuality:
 - ↳ Sensuality is the awareness of, enjoyment of, and comfort with our own bodies and the bodies of others.
 - ↳ Intimacy is the ability and desire to experience emotional closeness with another person.
 - ↳ Sexual Identity is the understanding of our gender and orientation.
 - ↳ Behavior and Reproduction refers to our attitudes and actions related to procreation, caring for our reproductive organs, and the health consequences of sexual activity.
 - ↳ Sexualization is using sexuality to control or manipulate other people.
- ↳ When you’ve finished with these basic explanations, ask the group to start brainstorming words, phrases, and examples of each component and write these on their respective posters. After a few minutes of conversation, hand out sticky notes and pens. Ask people to write down other examples on the sticky notes and place them on the appropriate poster.
- ↳ When everyone has finished, take a few minutes to talk about some of the examples you came up with. How could this broader understanding of sexuality help individuals in your church? Couples? How might it help us think about the fact that God created us as sexual beings? What are some ways your church could use this information to nurture a healthy understanding of sexuality in the people in your faith community?

REFLECT

Finish your time by reflecting on today's dialogue process together.

- ↳ What did you discover about yourself or someone else in your small group?
- ↳ When were you most engaged?
- ↳ When did you feel challenged?
- ↳ What are you struggling with?
- ↳ What's changed for you?
- ↳ What do we want to do in response to the conversations we've had today?

WRITE AND CONSIDER

Encourage participants to write down the five components of sexuality and spend time this week thinking about how these show up in their lives as individuals and in their intimate relationships.

PRAY

ADAPTED FROM THE PRAYERS FOR MARRIAGE, FROM *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*

God of love: Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and forever.

Amen.