The Body Is a Temple

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The body is a sacred temple given to us for a divine purpose.

Our Bodies Have a Divine Nature and Purpose

No other people on earth understand the sacred nature and purpose of our physical bodies as do Latter-day Saints. We are eternal beings, spirit children of our Heavenly Father. We were sent to earth according to our Father’s great plan to gain physical bodies and to prove our willingness to be obedient to his commandments. We shouted for joy when we learned of God’s plan for us. We knew that by gaining physical bodies to house our spirits, we would have the opportunity to become more like our Father.

God created us in his own image to allow us to enjoy life to the fullest. He gave us the divine capacity and power to help create life and provide physical bodies for others of his spirit children. Each part of the body was designed by God to have specific functions and should not be misused, especially those parts and functions associated with the sacred power of procreation.

As part of the test of mortality, our bodies have desires, appetites, and passions which we must learn to discipline and control. When these desires are kept within the bounds the Lord has set, they enhance and enrich life. If they are undisciplined, they can destroy both our bodies and spirits. Consequently, the Lord has given us very specific instructions about modesty and chastity.

The Lord expects us to be modest, chaste, and pure

We live in a world that promotes many views and practices that are not in keeping with Latter-day Saint standards and values. From childhood we notice that others often do not believe in or follow the standards we have been taught. Often individuals within our own neighborhoods and communities have been raised with moral standards different from our own. Throughout the world, the media bombards us with examples of immodesty and immorality totally at variance with Latter-day Saint standards.
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Latter-day Saints in any culture should be governed by gospel principles and not by a tradition that is in conflict with these principles. As people join the Church, they may learn new standards of modesty. As members of the Church, we do not have to adopt the world’s standards. We have the Lord’s standard to guide us.

The Lord expects us to keep our bodies pure. Paul gave the following counsel to early Saints who lived in a corrupt city, notorious for its perversions: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

We have been similarly counseled: “Man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple” (D&C 93:35). Each of us should keep her body as pure and sacred as God intended it to be. The Lord is clear in his feelings about our purity: “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women” (Jacob 2:28). One of the Ten Commandments condemns adultery or “anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6; see also Exodus 20:14). Mormon described chastity and virtue as “precious above all things” (Moroni 9:9).

In a message on morality, President Spencer W. Kimball cautioned: “The Savior said that the very elect would be deceived by Lucifer if it were possible. He will use his logic to confuse and his rationalizations to destroy. He will shade meanings, open doors an inch at a time, and lead from purest white through all the shades of gray to the darkest black... Immorality does not begin in adultery or perversion. It begins with little indiscretions like sex thoughts, sex discussions, passionate kissing, petting and such, growing with every exercise. The small indiscretion seems powerless compared to the sturdy body, the strong mind, and the sweet spirit of youth who give way to the first temptation. But soon the strong has become weak, the master the slave, spiritual growth curtailed. But if the first unrighteous act is never given root, the tree will grow to beautiful maturity and the youthful life will grow toward God, our Father.”

President Kimball continued by outlining various sins against the body:

“The early apostles and prophets mention numerous sins that were reprehensible to them. Many of them were sexual sins—adultery, being without natural affection, lustfulness, infidelity, incontinence, filthy communications, impurity,
inordinate affection, fornication. They included all sexual relations outside marriage—petting, sex perversion, masturbation, and preoccupation with sex in one’s thoughts and talking. Included are every hidden and secret sin and all unholy and impure thoughts and practices. One of the worst of these is incest. The dictionary defines incest as ‘sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that they are forbidden by law to marry.’ The spirituality of one’s life may be severely, and sometimes irreparably, damaged by such an ugly sin.”

He further emphasized: “That the Church’s stand on morality may be understood, we declare firmly and unalterably, it is not an outworn garment, faded, old-fashioned, and threadbare. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and his covenants and doctrines are immutable; and when the sun grows cold and the stars no longer shine, the law of chastity will still be basic in God’s world and in the Lord’s Church. Old values are upheld by the Church not because they are old, but rather because through the ages they have proved right. It will always be the rule” (“President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” Ensign, Nov. 1980, pp. 94–96).

**We Can Help Others to Respect the Divine Nature and Purpose of Their Bodies**

As mothers, grandmothers, teachers, and individual members of Christ’s Church, we can help others to respect the divine nature and purpose of their bodies. As we practice principles of modesty, virtue, and chastity, we influence all around us by our example. Children and youth hold adults with whom they associate—parents, grandparents, neighbors, teachers—as models. The scriptures teach, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Parents and teachers can influence children and youth not only by their righteous examples but by attitude and precept as well. They can help young people to see the great blessings of virtuous living. They can motivate children to think for themselves and help them to understand that they do not have to adopt the world’s standards. Satan is ever present and willing to lead our children and young people astray. Early teaching helps children develop good health and moral habits as well as a positive attitude about their bodies. Early teaching is lasting, and properly taught children are better able to withstand the temptation to accept worldly standards.

Our Church leaders have taught that the home is the best place to teach children. It is a serious mistake for parents to neglect educating their children about the nature and purpose of their
bodies. Parents are commanded to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). From birth on, children need instruction from caring parents about the sacredness of the body. If parents have not taught, or the child has not learned, then this teaching and learning should begin at once. We should start with information that the child knows, for review and foundation, and build from there.

The thirteenth article of faith is a good summary statement to help children understand our moral code. This code teaches honesty and virtue in every aspect of life. Children should be taught to be upright in all areas of their lives. The mother who dresses her young girls modestly is establishing a valuable standard. So is the mother who teaches her child to be honest, seeking after things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report” (Articles of Faith 1:13). Helping a child understand moral principles at his level builds his desire to protect his body and be modest in his actions. As a child matures, parents can help him to understand and value all of the Lord’s commandments as his personal guide.

We should not teach children about their physical bodies just on a single occasion. This teaching is a continuing process. Each child should know that he can go to a parent with the most intimate questions and receive honest answers. A child’s question should never be treated as if it were inappropriate or shameful, but it should be welcomed as an opportunity to teach important, eternal truths associated with our sacred procreative powers.

Whether we have teenage children, serve the Young Women, or live with roommates, we need to create an atmosphere in which the sacred topics of virtue and chastity can be discussed freely but reverently. A respectful and positive attitude toward sexuality and the reproductive parts of the body can help both learner and teacher. We should use simple, gospel-oriented language when discussing sexuality, and we should emphasize the blessings of procreation within the sacred bonds of marriage. It may help us to remember that we are discussing the Lord’s plan for perpetuating life. It is imperative that we understand and teach that improper use of these divine powers results in sin and sadness and affects other people’s lives and happiness.

We all need to prepare ourselves with adequate knowledge, positive feelings and attitudes, and an understanding of the divine nature and purpose of our bodies so that we can effectively teach others.
Conclusion
The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 181). This should be our goal. To be worthy to regain God's presence, we must appreciate the sacredness of our body, master our physical appetites, and uphold the laws of virtue and purity that God has established. As we follow these laws and set goals to do his will, we will gain strength to overcome temptations.

Suggestions for Teachers
1. Discuss how the Latter-day Saint understanding of the purpose of the body differs from the worldly view.
2. Discuss how keeping our desires, appetites, and passions within the bounds the Lord has set can bless and enrich our lives.
3. Discuss the rewards that come to individuals and families when they keep themselves morally clean. Ask: How can we maintain our virtue in a world that promotes immorality?
4. Ask the sisters to share ways in which they have successfully taught their children about the proper use of their bodies. Ask: How can we create an atmosphere in which sacred topics can be discussed freely and reverently? Why is it important that we know what is being taught about sexuality in the public schools? Why is the teaching of biological facts not enough?
5. Show sisters a copy of the Church publication A Parent's Guide (31125), which discusses teaching physical intimacy to children.