

Mum of Mid Teen Daughter: Doing Relationship, Issue, Relationship in the Minefields

My daughter, Sophie, is seventeen. She is a bright, intelligent girl, enjoying her first year at Sixth Form College.

In her Art A Level, Sophie recently did some work on the “male gaze”. The idea of the “male gaze” is that through media and culture women are objectified and valued primarily for their physical appearance. Sophie had taken some photos of herself for the project. She tried to hide them, because she knew we wouldn’t be comfortable with pictures that potentially sexualise her. How far does one go in the name of Art?

My husband and I didn’t over-react when we found the images. We know this doesn’t help the dialogue with our daughter. I do hope, however, to have a conversation with her soon about male gaze theory, especially compared with other perspectives on male-female relationships – like the one in the bible.

One of Sophie’s close friends, Cathy, has called herself Jack for several years now. There are clear issues in Cathy’s family, especially with regard to her estranged father. Sophie is fiercely protective of her transgender friend though, arguing that she could be one of the 10% who don’t recover from gender dysphoria as they move into adulthood.

Even though Sophie knows we don’t agree with her friend’s choice to transition, my husband and I wanted to show we accepted Cathy. When we discovered that she was a dog lover, we asked if she’d like to dog-sit one day when the family was out. Cathy and the dog had a great time together, and we let her know how much we appreciated her helping us out. We will probably never talk to Cathy about transitioning, or much else,

for that matter, but at least Sophie knows that we have treated her friend well.

Sophie has had a boyfriend for over two years, now. While I have never asked, she has made a point, more than once, of assuring me that she is not sexually active. No doubt pregnancy would be one of several deterrents, but I believe my explanation years ago of sex being an excellent, meaningful God-given gift within the boundaries of marriage, while detrimental in other contexts, remains influential and has been taken to heart.

It's possible Sophie will have flown the nest in a year or so and we don't know what the future holds for her. We're now just making the most of these last few precious months. For example, I have been inviting Sophie out to lunch now and then, maybe doing a bit of shopping with her afterwards. I hope she finds it a welcoming space to express herself. We talk primarily about whatever is important to her. She seems to appreciate this one-on-one time with her mother.

We hope, as she moves into adulthood, Sophie will retain the values her parents tried to encourage in her from childhood. In the meantime, we celebrate what we can agree on, and where we are unable to agree at this time, we hold things lightly and keep the conversation going for another day.