

As families participate and experience the magical transitions that come with puberty, it might be helpful (and fun) to read these words from Barbara Kingsolver (*Small Wonders*).

When you, my dear, were about two and a half, I carefully and honestly answered all the questions you'd started asking about reproductive organs. For several months thereafter, every time we met someone new, the unsuspecting adult would tousle your adorable blond head and you'd look up earnestly and ask, "Do you have a penis or a vagina?"

If you are ever tempted to think my presence is an embarrassment to you, please recall that I stood by you during the "penis or vagina" months. . . I wasn't sure I'd live through them or have any social life left afterward. I gave you a crash course in what we call "polite company" and harbored some doubts about whether honesty had really been the best policy.

What I see now, though, is that honesty was. Manners arrive in time; most girls (and boys) are gifted enough at social savvy to learn the degree of polite evasion that will protect their safety and other people's dignity. But before anything else, you've got to be able to get the facts. Penis or vagina? I couldn't possibly tell you it wasn't to be discussed or didn't matter. It matters. Barbie or Ken, Adam or Eve, pilot or stewardess, knuckle sandwich or mea culpa, scissors, paper, rock, War and Peace. It's a very reasonable starting point. So begins the longest, scariest, sexiest, funniest, smartest, most extraordinary conversation we know. Cross your fingers, ready, set. Go.