

Provide Godly Perspective About Moral Issues

The "generation gap" between teenagers and parents is evident not just in different tastes in music and clothes. Many of today's young people also have different attitudes from their parents about moral issues such as homosexuality and cohabitation. Meanwhile, cursing has become an accepted form of everyday conversation, and pornography is spreading like wildfire, due to new technology.



Jim Burns, author of *The 10 Building Blocks for a Happy Family*, says one essential building block is healthy morals and values. "The decisions kids make today will often affect them for the rest of their lives," he writes. "Parents have significant powers of influence—through modeling and teaching—over the morals and values their kids carry into adulthood."

In our "anything goes" society, it isn't enough to just preach your beliefs. To instill lasting Christian values in your kids, you should lead by example, remembering that perfection isn't expected (or possible).

Don't be afraid to bring up controversial topics and ask how your kids feel about them. Instead of quickly shooting down their opinions, listen to their reasoning. Pay attention to what your kids' friends and media choices say about moral issues. Then dig up some tough questions and connect Scripture to real-life moral dilemmas. Most importantly, let kids know you aren't the moral decision-makers; God sets his standards for right and wrong in the Bible. And he promises to bless people who strive to follow his commands out of love for him. Use this issue of "The Parent Link" to help you and your kids tackle tough moral issues.

Although the loss of a moral compass is a complex issue, youth-culture expert Walt Mueller says the starting point for turning it around is rather simple. He looks in the mirror every morning and asks himself:

- Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?
- Do you love your neighbor as yourself?
- Are you modeling those priorities to the kids who live under this roof?
- Is that model clear and consistent to the point that they know where you stand on matters of right and wrong?
- When they fail, do you show them the same grace your heavenly Father shows you every minute of every day?
- Are you praying for your children?
- Are you involved enough in their lives to know where they are struggling and where they are succeeding morally?
- Do you affirm them, compliment them, and tell them you're proud when they make good choices?
- Are you willing to speak up and lovingly challenge those assumptions and ideas they adopt that are contrary to God's standards for their lives?

Pulse

Hot-button issues are dividing many 21st-century families. Here's a snapshot into what is morally okay with today's teenagers:



- Young people say they have the most conflicts with older adults over life-style issues, including their views on family. (Pew Research Center)
- A majority (59%) of 18- to 29-year-olds think gay or lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry, while support among the older age groups reaches only as high as 40%. (USA Today/Gallup Poll)
- More than two-thirds (69%) of young people approve of living together before marriage. And almost half (49%) of "churched" kids approve of this arrangement. (Gallup Poll)

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Encourage your teenagers to open up about tough moral issues by asking point-blank questions:

1. Do you think God approves of and loves homosexuals? Why or why not? Should gay couples be allowed to marry?
2. If two people are going to get married anyway, is it okay for them to live together first? Why or why not?
3. What effects can porn have on people's sexual attitudes and habits?
4. What does it feel like to "go against the tide" and stand up against immoral behavior? What can help you face that challenge?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will internalize Christian morals and use God's Word as a guide to determine what's right and wrong.
2. Your kids will feel comfortable opening up to you about the day-to-day moral dilemmas they face.
3. God will help you be a strong moral example for your impressionable teenagers.
4. Your teenagers will shine as lights in a dark world and make an impact on others who are searching for truth.

Verse of the month

"Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. Hold firmly to the word of life." (Philippians 2:15-16)

Sin is the root cause of all the immorality and ungodly behavior in our world. But because our perfect God paid the ultimate price for our sins, we have his hope and forgiveness. When we reflect God's light and live by his Word, other people will see that God's truth is the right path.

What's Up With Kids

More Christian kids are becoming "Christian chameleons" these days, according to David R. Smith, content development director at TheSource4YM.com. (Read his entire article by typing "chameleons" into the search engine at www.SimplyYouthMinistry.com.)

Many teenagers reflect the morals of the world rather than Scripture. The sad truth is that the lifestyle of a "churched" or "Christian" teenager is far too similar to the lifestyle of an unchurched or non-Christian teenager these days. The line has become so blurred that distinguishing *who's who* is often hard to do.

Chameleons blend in with the backdrop. Their entire image morphs depending on where they are at any given moment. When Christian teenagers do it, they develop an "image problem," according to David Kinnaman, author of *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*. Studying a group he calls "Mosaics," those born between 1984 and 2002, Kinnaman found that 84% of those young people knew at least one committed Christian, but only 15% of this same group could see a difference in lifestyle between themselves and their self-proclaimed Christian friends. How sad is that?



Kids don't need us to lower the standards that govern their spiritual lives, nor do they need us to share empty platitudes. No, they need a total image makeover. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes that "we are being transformed into his image." With every passing day, we're supposed to look more and more like Jesus. The church—literally "the called-out ones"—was never intended to mirror the world that so desperately needs it. But that's exactly what's happening! Kids' greatest need isn't a new message, just conformity to the old one. Talk with your teenagers about the example they set before their peers. Many of our actions are seen by others, and all of them are tied to consequences, for good or bad.

MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Dashboard is mainly just singer-songwriter Chris Carrabba, who's been making alternative and acoustic albums with and without a backing band for the past decade.

Albums: *Alter the Ending* (2009), *The Places You Have Come to Fear the Most* (2001), *The Swiss Army Romance* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: Carrabba is a Christian, though his lyrics don't address his faith much. Most of his songs are about relationship ups and downs. Carrabba's songs are deeply personal and emotional, so they easily strike a chord with teenagers facing their own relationship troubles.

What Dashboard Confessional Says: "You should never ever talk to kids like they're kids. You talk to them like people. You think they don't know what's going on? ... At least kids get the fact that they don't understand it yet."

Discussion Questions: Do most people take you seriously? Why or why not? What are examples of things that should and shouldn't have age limits? Read aloud 1 Timothy 4:12. How can you set an example "in speech, in life, in love, in faith, in purity"? When you do that, how do expect people will treat you, and why?



Christian Artist

Background: Singer-songwriter Wickham started leading worship in his youth group at age 12. Now 25, he has already released five albums to critical acclaim. Wickham has toured extensively and visits churches across the globe to share his music.

Albums: *Heaven and Earth* (2009), *Cannons* (2007), *Give You My World* (2003)

What Parents Should Know: Though Wickham isn't a "heavy-hitter" in the worship genre, he's making a name for himself with heartfelt albums and thoughtful lyrics. He's deeply passionate about leading people as they worship God.

What Wickham Says: Sitting in a chapel service in junior high, Wickham "realized for the first time that [being] Christian wasn't about following these rules that my parents or the Bible said. It wasn't about...reading a chapter a day or going to church. It was about loving Jesus with your life and knowing him."

Discussion Questions: When does being a Christian seem centered around rules? What is following Jesus really about? Read aloud Psalm 92:1-4. Why is it important to spend time with God every day? Does that come easily to you? Why or why not? What else makes you feel close to God?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *To Save a Life* (releases Jan. 22)

Genre: Drama

Rating: PG-13 (for mature thematic elements involving teen suicide, teen drinking, some drug content, disturbing images and sexuality)

Synopsis: When childhood friends Jake and Roger drift apart in high school, Roger can't take the loneliness and pain, so he kills himself. Jake, wracked with guilt, searches for redemption and answers, even as his world spins out of control. In a youth group, he finds help and a new set of friends.

Discussion Questions: Think about your longest-lasting friendship: What has kept it going? Why do some friends drift apart? Is it okay to let some friendships grow cold? Why or why not? Read aloud John 15:9-17. What's important for a strong friendship? Do you need to reconnect or reconcile with anyone? Explain.

