

Identity Matters!

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President

Ever wonder what occupies the minds of your teenagers more than just about anything else? It's the quest to figure out who they are *and* who they will be for the rest of their lives. Developmental experts call this primary task of adolescence "identity formation." It's this quest for identity that leads so many of them to regularly reinvent and curate themselves visually and descriptively on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. To complicate matters, they've been hammered long before their teenage years by a non-stop flow of compelling messages fed to them by a culture that's more than happy to write their identity script, telling them what to think, what to say, how to live, and who to be.

If our primary calling as parents is to point our kids to Christ, praying that He would embrace them so hard that they would find their identity solely in their embrace of Him, then what can we do to help our kids find their way through youth culture's confusing identity mess? Here are some suggestions to get you started.

First, look in the mirror to evaluate the identity you've chosen. Our example speaks louder than anything else to our kids. In his book *The Reason For God*, Tim Keller reminds us that "every person must find some way to 'justify their existence,' and to stave off the universal fear that they're a 'bum.'" Ultimately, our identity can and must be found in Christ and Christ alone. We must be sure that with Augustine we are able to say, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest (identity) in Thee!"

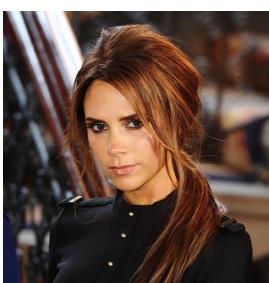
Second, continually check in on the identity-shaping world of your kids. For the Christian parent, culture-watching is an active and on-going responsibility. The responsibility falls on us to stay on top of the nuances of our kids' youth culture, particularly the messengers and messages that are shaping their identity. But it's not just something we do. It's something we do with a purpose. Theologian John Stott calls this "dual listening." He says that we "stand between the Word and the world with consequent obligation to listen to both. We listen to the Word in order to discover ever more of the riches of Christ. And we listen to the world in order to discover which of Christ's riches are needed most and how to present them in their best light."

Third, confront the lies. Several times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus issues "You have heard it said. . . but I tell you" statements. Each and every time, Jesus is issuing a corrective to conventional, widely-held, cultural wisdom that his hearers had not only heard, but had allowed to become a part of their very lives. A hallmark of our parenting is continually assuming the same "you have heard it said. . . but Jesus tells you" posture on identity matters.

Look for, find, and expose our world's identity lies. . . in the culture, in yourself, and in your kids. *

**YOUTH CULTURE
HOT QUOTE**

"I find it embarrassing when you don't look like yourself, when you've had tons of retouching. I don't want to be made to look like I'm 25. I'm 39. I don't have any issues with my age."



**Victoria Beckham,
speaking about fashion
shoots and how she
looks in pictures,
The New York Times,
August 25, 2013**

Favorite Fast Food Restaurants of Millennials

source -
Concentric Marketing
White Papers:
*Everything you thought
you knew about Millennials
might not be true,
published August 1, 2013*



- 1. Subway**
- 2. Chick-fil-A**
- 3. Chipotle**
- 4. McDonald's**
- 5. Taco Bell**
- 6. Wendy's**
- 7. Five Guys**
- 8. Dominos**
- 9. Papa John's**
- 10. Burger King**



QUICK STATS

Teenagers care 20% more than the average shopper about brands.

(NPD Market Research Group)

1 in 8 teens is abusing Adderall (used to treat ADHD) in an effort to lose weight.

(The Partnership at Drugfree.org)

Almost a quarter of married homeowners ages 18-34 bought a home together before they were married.

(Coldwell Banker Real Estate Survey)

FROM THE NEWS:

PORNOGRAPHY and SEXUAL TRAFFICKING

Because today's emerging generations tend to be more socially aware than previous generations, one of the deterrents to pornography use is to show them how the pornography industry fuels sexual trafficking.

Researchers at the Johns Hopkins Protection Project have identified several links between pornography and sexual trafficking. First, many of the actors are forced or coerced into performing for the camera. Second, there is a link with forced participation in prostitution. For example, underaged girls have been forced into commercialized sex as well as being photographed or video recorded. Finally, there is a forced exposure to pornography. The forced watching of pornography repeatedly breaks youthful victims down, desensitizing them to what they see while showing them what's expected of them when they themselves perform. Help your kids say no to pornography by helping them see the connection between porn and the injustice of sexual trafficking.

TRENDS:

KIDS AND SMARTPHONES

Have you seen those YouTube videos of babies and toddlers trying to manipulate magazine pages as if they are tablet and smartphone screens? It's not surprising that the youngest digital natives have difficulty differentiating smart screens from paper pages, and they wind up swiping the pages with their fingers to no avail. One reason for this is that we are putting smartphones in the hands of our youngest kids. We need to start thinking about how smartphone use is affecting our children. Nineteen percent of our elementary school-aged children are now using smartphones. One of the most prevalent dangers is that smartphones give kids access to the Internet. Sadly, many kids are engaging with smartphones without parental supervision, making it possible for them to seek out or accidentally be exposed to dangerous Internet content. We suggest that you think twice before putting a smartphone in the hands of your unsupervised young children.

**LATEST RESEARCH:
SPORTS CONCUSSIONS**

With school back in session and the fall school sports season in full swing, it's important to take a minute to think about a health issue related to kids and sports. As parents, we need to be diligent about

ensuring the physical safety of our kids and their bodies as it relates to concussions. God made the brain to be a complex organ. In recent years experts have been sounding the alarm about the short and long-term damage that concussions can do to the brain. A recent study in the journal *Pediatrics* suggests that the effects of a concussion may last longer than previously thought, a reality we should consider when we are pondering when to get our kids back

on the field. Some concussions take months, rather than a few weeks, to heal. It takes longer if the athlete has had a prior concussion. In a day and age when we value athletics and on-field achievement perhaps too much, think about the long-term effects that today's decisions might have on your kids.

**SEXUAL INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE**

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

**Preparing
for Difficult
Conversations**

by Jason Soucinek

The new school year is upon us and that means budding romances, new relationships, and all the pressures a typical teenager will face with regards to their sexuality. Here are four thoughts to consider as you prepare to have difficult conversations around each of these and how best to communicate your values surrounding your son or daughter's choice to live with sexual integrity.

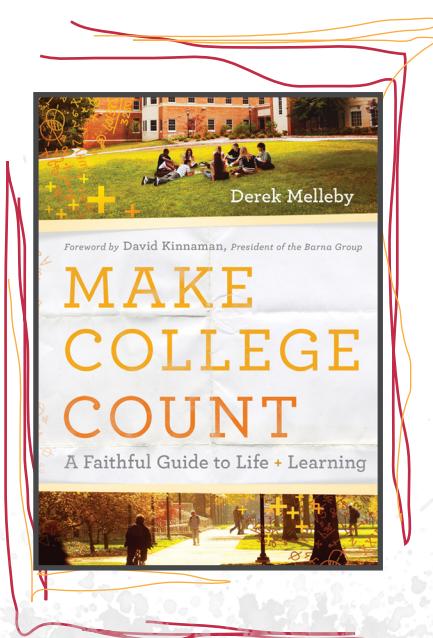
#1 - Communicate your value and communicate it often. I can't emphasize how important it is that your teenager knows what is important to you as a parent and why. Your voice has power...believe in it! If you want your teenager to wait to have sex, then tell them directly and give them a reason. Become the authority.

#2 – Listen and listen some more. Ask questions, check-in, and hear their thoughts. Also, take advantage of those opportunities where you get to overhear their friends sharing or even what you see on your teenager's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts (sometimes those are the most telling) and follow up.

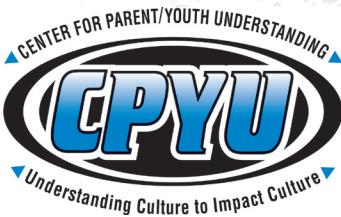
#3 – Respond out of love, not anger. If you end up hearing or being told something you don't approve of, remember that taking time to breathe, reflect, and seek discernment might give you (and them) the best opportunity to respond. Creating a safe place for your teenager to respond is important and can change what and how they share in the future.

#4 – Own your stuff. Sometimes the decisions your son or daughter makes can bring up your own past mistakes. Be sure you've forgiven yourself before you work through the mistakes your teenager might make.

Want more information about your kids and their world? Visit us on the web at WWW.CPYU.ORG or scan the code below with a smartphone to subscribe to our free weekly e-Update!



Available in the
CPYU Resource Center at
www.cpyuresourcecenter.org.



FROM THE WORD

When your life is focused on pointing your kids to a life of embracing the way and will of Jesus Christ, you can very easily find yourself discouraged by the powerful effect so many of our cultural messages have to lead and shape kids in an opposing direction. "Come on God! Do something!" we plead. What's a parent to do? Of course, we need to remain diligent in teaching and modeling the truth. But the posture we choose to assume is just as important. A lesson on that posture can be found in the life of an ancient prophet.

The Old Testament book of Habakkuk records a dialogue between the prophet Habakkuk and God. As he looked around at the world, Habakkuk found himself discouraged and dismayed by the advancement of evil. . . similar to what we see in our world today. This led Habakkuk to question God and his ways. He wondered how a good and righteous God could and would allow evil to advance and go unpunished. Perhaps you find yourself in a similar situation today as you struggle to comprehend God's ways.

"YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD, I WILL BE JOYFUL IN GOD MY SAVIOR."

HABAKKUK 3:18

At the end of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet realizes that God has called him to trust in God's will, way, and providence regardless of his circumstances. He resolves to remain faithful to his trustworthy God, even if his life is filled with confusion, suffering, and loss. How beautiful it is for us when we can stand with Habakkuk in the midst of parenting turmoil and heartache and say, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights." (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

HELPFUL RESOURCE

Help your college-bound teenager discover the way to true success at college—and beyond. There's more to college than classes, credits, and a nonstop social life. It's more than getting a degree to improve your job prospects. College is a time where you develop into the person you will be for the rest of your life. Written by Derek Melleby, the Director of CPYU's College Transition Initiative, *Make College Count: A Faithful Guide to Life and Learning* will help your teen make the most of their time in college. It encourages them to ask the big questions, like "Why am I going to college?", "What kind of person do I want to be?", "How do I want my life to influence others?", "With whom will I surround myself?", and "What do I believe?"

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