



Helping Parents Talk About Music

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Do you know what your kids are listening to each day?

Young people love their music, and now they carry it around with them 24/7 in a nice little mobile device that fits neatly in their pocket. Sure, when we were kids we liked music too. We had boom boxes and even Walkmans. But now kids can carry their entire music library around with them, access to an online music store, and the ability to stream custom playlists from the newest online sources... all just a click away.



We would love to help our kids learn to make good media decisions. The question is, how can we do this without coming across as “nagging” or even “preachy”?

The key is to create an atmosphere where honesty and openness is welcomed, and dialogue is encouraged. Make your home a place where your kids feel safe to talk freely about the music they encounter each day. Today’s “poets” share a lot of heart and feelings in their music, and kids often resonate with the messages shared. Whether we like it or not, our kids are inundated with these messages daily. Parents are smart to respond the same way the Apostle Paul did in Acts 17, using the culture to springboard discussion about truth

with a group of people who were immersed in secular culture. Don’t get me wrong here, I’m not saying let your 12-year-old download all of Lil Wayne’s music as long as you talk about it. It’s okay for a parent to say, “Sorry, no.” What I’m encouraging parents to do is have the conversation.

Sadly, many parents just set a weak guideline like “Don’t download anything explicit.” This legalistic morality fails our kids, teaching them to use iTunes’ or YouTube’s rating system to determine what is acceptable and not. Have you ever taken a peek at the songs considered “clean”? Take a gander for yourself—Google some of the lyrics of the non-explicit songs in the top 10 right now.

So how can we have these conversations, equipping our kids to make good media decisions on their own?

These four principles might help you open the doors to dialogue in your home:

1. Understand the power of media.

Our kids typically don't think the lyrics and images affect them. Experts would disagree. The journal PEDIATRICS spells the research out clearly, the lyrics do affect young people. The journal Psychological Science found the same to be true with movies and TV. "The more racy television a kid watches, the more likely it is for him or her to imitate it in real life." We need to teach our kids to turn our eyes from "worthless things" (Psalms 119:37). But

2. Don't dig for dirt.

When you approach music, approach it with an open mind. What is this song really communicating? What are young people truly taking away from this song or music video? Don't become a Pharisee and ban anything secular (like that sinful song, Row, Row, Row Your Boat). Turn your overreaction into interaction about music. But when you do...

3. Make it a dialogue, not a monologue.

No kid wants to hear us pontificate about all our wisdom and experience with music and entertainment media. Ask questions. Asking questions transforms our lecturing into listening. And more importantly, asking questions puts the burden of thinking on them. Ask them to explain what they hear from the song and what they think it means. Ask them how they think most young people their age will respond to that message.

4. Give age-appropriate trust.

If your 12-year-old daughter wants to download a song, have her print out the lyrics so you can look at them together and you decide. If your 15-year-old wants to download it, maybe you don't require her to bring the lyrics to you, but ask her about the lyrics, ask her what she recommends and then you make the final decision. If your 17-year-old, however, wants to download it, talk about the song, tell her to make the choice and then tell you what she thinks of her choice a week later. Keep your eye on the calendar, because when your kid turns 18... she can move out and download whatever she wants.

Are you stimulating dialogue in your home?

Are you preparing your kid to make good media decisions on her own?

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