

YOUTH CULTURE HOT QUOTE

“The most important thing for kids would basically be have fun and enjoy it. Travel ball has become a business and not as much fun for kids these days. They think their kids are getting scouted when they’re 8, 9 or 10 years old. You should just enjoy the game at this point in your life. Why is there any pressure to play well when you’re 8, 9 or 10? It doesn’t matter if you hit five homers or strike out five times in a game. The Milwaukee Brewers are not watching your travel ball game right now and saying, Johnny is a first-round pick and we’re taking him this year.”

Milwaukee Brewers outfielder and reigning National League MVP, Christian Yelich, thinking back on his childhood and athletic development, *New York Times*, January 28, 2019.



Teens and Bad Decisions

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



Almost every morning, I log onto my Google News Feed and check out the stories that come up with the key words “Teen,” “Teenager,” “Adolescent,” and “Adolescence.” Sadly, the news that pops up is usually less than positive. The more negative headlines fall into one of two categories. First, there are the research reports giving us sobering numbers on social problems like substance abuse, addiction, and sexually transmitted diseases. Second, there are the news stories reporting on individual teens who have engaged in some sort of dangerous or criminal behavior. These include things like bullying, trafficking, sexting, and suicide.

Each of these stories (while admittedly complex in details of causation) began and continued with a series of bad decisions. These realities got me thinking about a current cultural trend that requires a response. And, they reminded me that those of us who are parents and youth workers are uniquely positioned to train kids in how to make good Godly decisions, rather than decisions that are foolish, immoral, and at times criminal.

The cultural trend is what I call “too much time spent living life in the moment.” This is “Carpe Diem!” and “YOLO” taken to an extreme. While followers of Jesus are called to make the most of every moment, we are also called to live responsible lives of obedience to God’s will and God’s way. We are not called to live without regard for past lessons or future consequences.

This cultural emphasis on eating, drinking, and being merry. . . for tomorrow we die, is magnified when you understand where kids are at developmentally. They’re already prone to this kind of in-the-moment living because of the impulsive nature of the adolescent experience. Yes, it’s that not-so-old frontal lobe again! The part of the brain that’s responsible for decision-making and impulse control isn’t fully formed until about the age of 25.

This creates a situation where when kids face decisions they tend to default to what they *do* ask vs. what they *should* ask. It goes like this. . . “What will this get me now?” vs. “How will this effect me for the rest of my life?” They default to feelings and emotions (being “authentic” to one’s self) vs. rationally thinking through the decision and its consequences. They tend to seek out sensations rather than wisdom. And they tend to default to immediate vs. delayed gratification.

Think for a minute about kids and sexting. Asking for and/or sending a nude photo of one’s self happens in a pressure-filled moment. Kids cave in the midst of the moment. . . and then wind up living for a long, long time with regret when photos go viral or law enforcement has to get involved.

I’ve come to understand that whether we are young or old, the key to making good decisions involves engaging three decision-making principles. These are worthwhile principles to teach to the kids you know and love.

The Principle of the Past: Don’t make a decision until you think back. Have you made a decision like this before? If so, how did it turn out? Do you know people (parents, youth workers, other adults) who have made a decision like this in the past? If so, how did it turn out and what can you learn from that? Does the Bible contain any principles or examples from biblical history that can be employed in the decision-making process? Francis Bacon once said that “Histories make men wise.” We must consult and learn from history.

The Principle of the Pause: Don’t act too quickly. Seek advice and counsel. Ponder whether your decision will put you on the wide road that leads to destruction or the narrow road that leads to life. I often tell my own kids this: “Every time you make a decision, you are choosing sides.”

The Principle of the Prospects: Recognize that every single decision you make puts you on a road that will bring with it all kinds of twists and turns. What will the consequences of this decision be?★

TOP 10...

Most Digitally Downloaded Songs

Billboard Issue Date
Feb. 23, 2019
Source:
Billboard/Nielsen

1. *Shallow* by Lady Gaga & Bradley Cooper
2. *Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I'm Bored* by Ariana Grande
3. *Without Me* by Halsey
4. *Sunflower* by Post Malone & Swae Lee
5. *The Joke* by Brandi Carlile
6. *You Say* by Lauren Daigle
7. *Who Do You Love* by The Chainsmokers feat. 5 Seconds of Summer
8. *Happier* by Marshmello & Bastille
9. *Wow* by Post Malone
10. *Tequila* by Dan + Shay



QUICK STATS

3 out of 4 high school seniors are unable to achieve proficiency in writing.

(Chronicle of Higher Education)

More than 1 in 3 first-year college students around the world, including here in the United States, struggle with a mental health disorder.

(Journal of Abnormal Psychology)



FROM THE NEWS:

MARIJUANA AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Since marijuana is being legalized in a growing number of states here in the U.S., we need to familiarize ourselves with the dangers and risks associated with the recreational use of the drug, and we must exert prevention efforts with our kids. First and foremost, parents need to realize that the marijuana kids are abusing today is multiple times more potent than the marijuana of their own teen years. In many ways, we are talking about an entirely different drug. THC is the psychoactive component of marijuana. New research has found that young adults who have had exposure to THC during their adolescence have alterations in the structure of neurons and gene expression within those cells contained in the brain's prefrontal cortex. This is the region of the brain that God has created to serve us in decision-making, impulse control, and other cognitive functions. The message to pass on to our teens is clear: What you choose to do during your teenage years will impact you for life.

TRENDS: DANGEROUS SELFIES

The advent of smartphones and social media has changed so many things, including the way we take photos. Now, teens tend to take selfies more than any other kind of photo.

And sometimes the quest for that perfect selfie can lead to dangerous and precarious poses. For example, a new trend among teens that's big when kids have adult-less getaways to vacation destinations for things like senior week is posing on hotel balconies. But this obsession leads to things like taking selfies while leaning precariously over balcony railings, flashing onlookers below, or posing with drinks in hand. Combine teenage impulsivity with alcohol and the desire to be cool and fit in, and kids will do some outrageous things. In today's world, the pressure increases when a teen also desires to develop a large social media following. Parents, we need to point our kids to the transforming truths of the Gospel so that they will be able to discern right from wrong, while making God-honoring counter-cultural choices.



LATEST RESEARCH:

INCREASE IN SUICIDE RATE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting that since 1999, the suicide rate here in the United States has climbed

33%. More than 47,000 Americans took their own lives in 2017. The reality is that in today's world, Americans are more than twice as likely to die by their own hands and of their own will, than by someone else's. Experts point to many causes, including risk factors like rising rates of alcohol and substance abuse. Isolation also increases the risk. And, with half of Americans saying they sometimes or always feel alone, isolation is on the rise. Research says that increasing smartphone use has contributed to suicidal thoughts in teens. Regardless of the reasons and contributing risk factors, we must

recognize that way too many are choosing the darkness of self-inflicted death as the solution to what's an even darker life. Preach the Gospel of the light of the world to yourself and to your kids. This is our one true source of hope.



SEXUAL INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

Sex Education

by Walt Mueller



Parents, whose teaching your children about God's good gift of sex and sexuality? Who is leading them to understand the place and purpose for God's good gift of sex? New research on birth order and who teaches kids about sex and sexuality indicates that younger children are less likely than older children to hear about sex and sexuality from their parents. Researchers also found that parents are less likely to teach their sons about sex and sexuality than their daughters. And, the researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that across all birth order categories, men reported lower parental involvement in sex education than women.

Parents, these findings should serve as a reminder of your calling to serve on the frontline of the nurture of your children and teens, including teaching them biblical standards for sex and sexuality. Your kids will get an education on sex and sexuality. The question is who will be doing the teaching. Parents, God has called you.

New Podcast

Youth Culture Matters is a long-format podcast from CPYU co-hosted by Walt Mueller and Jason Soucinek.



Listen at
www.cpyu.org/podcast.

Be sure to check out Episode 78 for an interview with Brandon Day about the brokenness of our youth sports system.

FROM THE WORD

Our teenagers' lives are marked by a convergence of realities that often result in sinful behavior. They are fallen and depraved beings, they are at a developmental stage where impulsivity is strong, they believe they can make good decisions, and they are immersed in a peer culture that oftentimes exerts a powerful negative influence. When they fail, we can easily be lured into believing that if their outward behavior suddenly conforms to Godly standards, everything is alright on the inside. As a result, we sometimes fall into the trap of putting a premium on outward behavior, rather than on inward heart change.

“THESE PEOPLE HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEARTS ARE FAR FROM ME.”

MATTHEW 15:8

Jesus reminds us that we should shoot for the heart, not the behavior. When speaking about the Pharisees he said, “These people honor me with their lips (outward behavioral conformity), but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:8). While it might be easier on us if we demand and receive behavioral conformity from our kids, the reality that bears long-term fruit for the Kingdom of God is the obedience that flows not from fear, but from a changed heart. In other words, everything that *looks* alright might not be alright. We must tend to the hearts of our children through teaching them God’s Word, by praying regularly for God to transform their hearts, by involving them in worship, and by engaging them in missions and service. Our goal should be to raise Godly children who honor Christ with their lips *and* their lives as the obedient outflow of hearts that have been transformed and given new life.

HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

In just a few years, Facebook has gone from nothing to a major feature of modern life. There are over 500 million users, half of whom use it on any given day.

There is much that is good about this... social networking brings many benefits.. but what about the dangers? Image, identity, idolatry and self-promotion are just some of the challenges that social networking can present. In *Will you be my Facebook friend? Social Media and the Gospel*, Dr. Tim Chester looks at these issues pastorally and biblically, in his usual clear and candid manner. He asks pertinent questions to help us tackle them head on.



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