

Understanding



Toronto YFC



TODAY'S YOUTH

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Youth Culture Facts:

- Only 23% of teens find sex ed helpful
- By 17, 45% of teens are sexually active
- 38% of teens have not discussed sex with their mothers
- Teens watching less TV but spending more time on internet

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 50 Gervais Drive, Suite 302
 Toronto, ON M3C 1Z3

The Power of Pink

We know that media icons, and pop singers in particular, always get fingered for the bad things in today's world of youth. Concerned with negative messages, parents are always on guard against whatever the pop culture throws their way.

How refreshing then for one of the top recording artists in the world to come forward with some positive pointers for teenage girls. The power of Pink (aka Alecia Moore) has never been more evident than her latest release **I'm Not Dead**.

Pink has never been afraid of tackling real life issues whether it is the impact of divorce on her upbringing or issues of body image and eating disorders. She is one artist who is willing to use her influence to bring songs of hope and strength to a generation of girls caught up in a myriad of mixed messages about what it means to be a female in a media-driven culture.

Her latest hit, *Stupid Girls*, is in heavy rotation on all the music airways. Tired of a girl's value being determined by materialism and make-up, Pink puts her own spin on the types of girls who surrender their self-worth to corporate America (and Canada). With the likes of Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson in her parody cross-hairs, Pink pounds home the mantra that only stupid girls believe that possessions enhance the person.

In a recent Toronto visit, Pink says, "*Stupid is a harsh word, but I don't think girls should have to dumb themselves down to be cute. Force guys to deal with your mind and it's going to be*

about respect, not attention."

With disordered eating as the third most common chronic illness among teen girls, we need to be concerned about the role media plays in the development of such problems. In

1998, 47 percent of girls and 24 per cent of boys in grades 6 to 10 said they were on a diet or wanted to lose weight. Disturbingly, 20 percent of deaths from anorexia involve adolescent girls (Eating Disorder Resource Center of British Columbia).

"Society and the media have a lot to do with it – the whole stupid girl epidemic. There's a push for us all to be size zero and shop all day and not contribute anything to the world. It used to



**"What happened to the dreams of a girl president
 She's dancing in the video next to 50 Cent
 They travel in packs of two or three
 With their itsy bitsy doggies and their teeny-weeny tees
 Where, oh where, have the smart people gone?
 Oh where, oh where could they be?"**

Stupid Girls—Pink

be just a clique of girls like this, but it's spreading like a virus," continued Pink. "*My message? Try everything till you find what you're good at.*"

Good advice for all of us. Parents need to affirm, encourage, and love their teens, especially the female ones. Our culture is very hard on girls and it will take the loving focus of a dedicated parent to guide them into healthy adulthood.

Helping Teens Make Healthy Decisions

Canada is a pretty decent place to live. Materially speaking, there is little we do without. At first glance, most children enjoy prosperity, opportunity and better health than any generation before. Plus, they have more disposable income than ever before.

But there's a growing unease that grips many adults when they look at today's youth culture. Many sense something is going very wrong in the way we raise our children. The recent rash of school violence continues to concern us. Drug use is still high. Kids are depressed, pressured and pushed. Parents are nervous, as more and more kids seem to be making unhealthy decisions.

Consider these findings from a USA Today poll:

- About nine in 10 parents said it's harder to raise kids to be "good people" than it was 20 years ago.
- Two out of three say parents are doing a worse job.
- 76 percent say TV, movies and pop music are negative influences on kids.
- While 75 percent of parents say they've taken steps to shield their children from outside "undesirable" influences, 73 percent concede kids cannot be shielded from the pervasive influence of our culture.
- Over 50 percent of those polled agree with this statement: "There are so many bad influences out there that even for parents who do a good job there is a good chance their children will get into serious trouble."
- Six of 10 say the "lack of a close-knit neighborhood or community" is a problem.

Life seems more challenging for all kids. While things may look okay on the surface, they are faced with a growing number of choices in an environment where parental input and guidance seem to be on the decline.

Not long ago a parent lamented that he had no idea what he was going to do with his 16-year-old son. Things had gone from bad to worse. Dedicated Christians, he and his wife have done everything they can to help him make the right choices but their son was still



struggling. Fearing his son was involved in the drug culture, the father secretly wire-tapped the family phone. As the parents feared, they learned their only son was very involved in the buying and selling of illegal drugs at his private school. When confronted, the son didn't deny his involvement. His attitude that "everyone's doing it" alarmed his parents, but it's typical of the morally relativistic response often heard in today's culture. These parents couldn't figure out how their boy, brought up in a loving Christian home, could make such terrible choices for his life.

Parenting today may be tougher than a generation ago but that's no reason to give up hope. Yes, there are many negative influences in the lives of our kids. Nevertheless, parents still play the most significant role in raising children. With that in mind, what are some of the steps we can take to guide our teens into making healthy decisions? Here are a few that might be helpful:

First, we must ask ourselves, "What do I believe?" We need to consistently live the standards we hope to pass on to our kids. We have to live out what we want our kids to become because they usually grow up to live out who we are. In one survey, 94 percent of the kids interviewed said their parents are "very important" role models.

Second, we need to teach our kids to think through all the facts before making a decision. In today's world of visual imagery, so many of today's decisions are based on how a product will make me "feel" or how I will be viewed by others. The use of intellect

and reason has been replaced with feelings and intuition. Making a decision based solely on how something makes you "feel" is a dangerous way to live.

Third, we need to challenge our teens to set and manage healthy patterns of thinking by asking them "why" they do what they do. As our children move into the early teen years, they become intellectually capable of wrestling with various options. Our goal is to get them to think for themselves in healthy ways. Chuck Swindoll says, "Training should prepare the child to think for himself. Overprotective parents, as well as easily threatened parents, are weak here. Insecure moms and dads have great difficulty inculcating solid, biblical principles in their children, apart from a long list of do's and don'ts."

And fourth, we need to help our kids think through the consequences of their decisions by asking them to consider the long- and short-term implications. Our children need to understand the positive and negative consequences of the choices they make. We need to help them think through the implications of keeping their word, drinking and driving, sexual activity, honesty, cheating, and the commitment to hard work. Sharing the consequences of decisions you have made in your life can go a long way in cementing these lessons into your child's head and heart.

Every parent must remember that kids who grow up in today's youth culture face lots of confusing choices. It's a tough world out there. They need your guidance and help. Will you give it to them?

Teens Value Parental Input

One of the greatest challenges for any mother or father is to raise a sexually pure child in a sex crazed culture. It can be especially challenging in a culture where our kids spend more time with the media than they do their parents. The problem is the values and beliefs being conveyed through these mediums.

A recent report (Pediatrics, 03/04/05) shows that teens who see a lot about sex in the media may be more than twice as likely to have sexual intercourse earlier than those who are rarely exposed to sexual content.

The study focused on 12-14 year-olds who viewed sexual content in movies, music, magazines, and television. On average, they were 2.2 times more likely to have had sexual intercourse within two years than their peers who had a lighter sexual media diet.

The report also showed that one of the biggest risk factors for early teen sex was the perception that their friends were having sex. However, it

news is that many kids, and parents, aren't even discussing the issue. One-quarter of the teens said they did not know how to talk about sex with their parents. Half the teens said they have never discussed sexual issues with their parents.

Although parents can feel it is pointless to try and counter the culture, kids are longing for them to speak out. Parents need to remember that their silence will always be taken as a permission slip.

So what can a parent do to guide their children into healthy sexual decisions?

First, if you have a son, teach him to take the moral lead. Too many of our boys today are growing up with the "male conquest myth." As much as the culture tells our sons that females are simply objects for gratification, parents need to teach boys about what it means to be a young man of character and that treating girls with respect speaks loudly about who you are as a person.

me" trap by the way they walk, talk, and dress. They need to know that boys are moved by what they see. Girls need to dress in a way that helps a guy keep his mind on the relationship and not the sexual pursuit. Girls who long for relationships need to dress for the occasion.

Third, teach your children about setting standards in advance, not during. The number one reason why kids get too involved is because they don't know where their own personal boundaries are.



The Canadian Association for Adolescent Health (April 2006) also points parents in the same direction. The study contained some good news and some bad news; first the bad.

- Nearly 30 percent of teens aged 14-17 report being sexually active.
- At age 15, one in five was sexually active. Nearly half were sexually active by 17.
- Teens have had three partners, on average, since becoming sexually active.

However, the good news is that most teens see their parents as role models and the most trusted source of information on sexual health.

- 63% of teens called their parents a major source of information on sex and sexual health.
- 43% of teens said their parents are their most useful and valuable source of information.
- 45% of teens called their parents their role models.
- Fewer teens said their role models were stars (about 15%) or friends (32%).
- Those views may surprise some parents. Most mothers who were interviewed said they thought their teens looked to friends and stars as their role models.

also stated that the strongest protective factor was a parent's attitude and involvement with their kids.

The only dilemma with the good

Second, if you have a daughter, teach them to dress for relationships and not sex. Too many young girls have fallen in the "come and get

They need to do three things:

- 1. Decide on the line in advance.** The question isn't "how far will I go?" but "how much do I want to have left for my life-long partner?" You don't want to be just a technical virgin when you get married. Draw the line where you will always be healthy and full of joy.
- 2. Declare the line.** Tell your partner in advance what your standard is. Don't wait till you're on the couch and your parents are out of town. You will never lose anyone worth having by declaring the line.
- 3. Defend the line.** Understand sexual immorality and how it applies to you and your belief system. Don't be fooled into thinking you can always go in reverse. If you do, you'll end up spinning your wheels. Better never to get in the rut in the first place.

Parents need to become proactive on this issue of adolescent sexuality. As uncomfortable as the topic might be, it may well be an issue of life and death, heartache and happiness. They are listening regardless of how they act. Don't be silent.

Underarm Appeal

For most men reading this story, thinking about deodorant at age 10 was highly unlikely. If by chance we did think of deodorant, the idea of it making you more attractive to the opposite sex would never have entered one's mind. It simply wasn't part of the youth culture equation.

Sure, back in the 1960s we were intrigued by the *Brut* and *Hai Karate* colognes that were marketed to our fathers featuring football star Joe Namath being swarmed by a bevy of blonde beauties. It was a pleasant change from *Old Spice* and *Aqua Velva*. However, the marketers never made any attempt to even sell them to adolescents.

body – liberally and frequently.

Known as “age compression” in the field of economics, companies know young kids want products typically aimed at older teens and young adults. Smelling older is just another way the consumer culture is happy to make our children old before their time. It is more about image than hygiene. Being sexually attractive for little boys is just the latest twist in their marketing strategy.

The main competitors for this fast-growing market are Unilever (Axe), Proctor & Gamble (Tag), and Old Spice (Red Zone). Each of these brands includes a unique list of scents with suggestive names. Axe features

A Christmas holiday ad for Tag that appeared in the Dec '05/Jan '06 editions of *CosmoGirl*, *Seventeen*, and *Teen Vogue* encourages girls to buy Tag for their boyfriends, with the following warning, “*The makers of Tag body spray will not be held liable should your attraction to your Tag-wearing boyfriend cause you to engage in behavior that grandma may consider ‘unladylike’*”. A girl is shown groping a guy to the shock of family members in the room. Many of these print ads are available online.

Axe has several ads for its shower gel, “How Dirty Boys Get Clean” campaign. One ad shows an empty shower with a sign that reads, “*Occupancy by more than 5 persons is dangerous and unlawful.*” Another ad shows a towel bar outside of a shower with four embroidered towels that read, “*His*”, “*Hers*”, “*Her Sister’s*”, and “*Her Roommate’s*.”

Several ads for Axe’s Touch body spray show camouflaged females (surfboard, elevator buttons, and bowling balls) with the slogan, “*She’ll want your touch.*”

It seems marketers will never run out of ways to sexualize and exploit our children. These product ads run at all times on TV and are frequently the topic of conversation at school. Parents need to be aware of what is shaping the values and beliefs of their children. Even in the most unsuspecting areas of life, namely armpits, companies have found yet another avenue into the undiscerning minds of our offspring.

Special thanks to Doug West at the Center for Parent Youth Understanding for his research assistance.

“The makers of Tag body spray will not be held liable should your attraction to your Tag-wearing boyfriend cause you to engage in behavior that grandma may consider ‘unladylike’”



Through the '70s and '80s, men's fragrances took on a more chic nature as Ralph Lauren's *Polo* and Calvin Klein's *Obsession* hit the adult market. It wasn't until 1994 that CK launched *cKone* with its light citrus scent and targeted it directly toward teens with flashy packaging and genderless looking models.

Searching for yet another new marketplace to conquer, deodorant companies are now pushing their goods on not just teenagers but boys as young as 10-years-old. Unlike the old underarm versions, the new sprays are meant to be applied all over the

“Touch”, “Phoenix”, “Kilo”, “Essence”, and “Voodoo.” Tag’s list includes “First Move”, “Midnight”, “After Hours”, and “Lucky Day.” Old Spice offers up “Pure Sport” (a reference to sex) and “Metallic Ice.”

Knowing that sex always sells, even among the innocent, the promotions for such products follows the same edge format. The websites include a wide array of promotions and games that all share the sexual thread. One Tag line reads, “*The makers of new Tag body spray will not be held responsible for any breach of local customs with regard to ‘Getting it on.’*”



Paul Robertson is the Youth Culture Specialist and Director of Church and Family Resources for Youth Unlimited.

More culture info: www.paulrobertson.ca