



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Countercultural Parenting, Part 5 MEDIA OVERSIGHT

The Catechism of the Catholic Church stated: "...Communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion, and formation ... and the influence exercised on public opinion" (#2493). That remark is an understatement! Consider how many children look like carbon copies of a rock star despite arguing that a school uniform limits their individuality. And how many use the same speech patterns, vocabulary and behavior of entertainment personalities who, too often, display disrespect, vulgarity, crudeness and rudeness? How many youngsters display dress and body language that signals sexuality far beyond their years?

Input affects output. What goes into the minds of children shapes their perspective, attitude and behavior. (That's true for adults, too!) Heroes of counter-culture are needed to help children develop into respectful persons of virtue. Do that by exerting oversight of media influences despite child protestations, "You treat me like a baby" or "All my friends are going" or "I'll be the only girl in the fifth grade who doesn't watch that TV show."

Counter-cultural parents strive for consistency in five goals:

1. Eliminate movies, TV shows, music, books, on-line activities, jokes, conversation and entertainment that portray crudeness, vulgarity, disrespect, irreverence, sexual promiscuity, lying, manipulation, cheating, violence and disregard for human dignity.
2. Provide entertainment choices that are uplifting, ennobling, respectful of persons, and offer life-giving messages.
3. Engage in on-going communication and discussion with children that explains the "whys" and "why nots" of your media policy.
4. Monitor movies and music for content, values and attitudes that are both expressed and implied. Sources like www.screenit.com review movies and www.family.org/entertainment/MediaWise/ offer formative information.
5. Whenever you witness a life-blocking situation in media, take a stand. Express your disappointment and engage your child in a critical analysis of the issue. That can occur simply by asking the question, "What is the message? Is it life-giving or life-blocking?" This raises consciousness, which in turn contributes to conscience formation.

As with issues of physical safety, parents have the right and the duty to oversee the kinds of entertainment that their children experience. Too much "entertainment" portrays themes of violence, human indignity, promiscuous sex, sexual abuse, and sex without emotional bond and without commitment. At all times these are life-blocking messages but particularly during adolescence when youth is highly impressionable, searching for identity, struggling with issues of integration, obsessively

concerned about the opinions of peers, approval and acceptance, and focused on fad and fashion in designing their identities. Adolescence is a time for ideals and value formation. If the culture does not foster positive images, counter-cultural parents must!

INTERNET SAFETY

Progress has its price and this is true of advances on the super highway! Though the Internet provides exciting educational and cultural experiences, it also opens children to possible exploitation and harm through the misuse of e-mail, chat rooms, profile posting, social sites, personal websites and opportunities to gamble and purchase products. *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety*, a free brochure available through your local FBI Field Office, offers parent support for the following three issues: (1) What signs suggest that your child might be at risk on-line. (2) What you should do if you suspect that your child is communicating with a sexual predator on-line.

(3) What you can do to minimize the chances of an on-line exploiter victimizing your child.

To keep your child safe on-line use blocking software and parental controls available through your Internet service provider. Keep yourself up-to-date about necessary parent precautions, i.e., www.getnetwise.com, www.safekids.com, www.safeteens.com. Most of all:

- communicate openly and honestly with your child
- establish balanced time limits for Internet usage
- walk over to the computer at unexpected times
- monitor your child's on-line activity
- house the computer within public view

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies (like Instant Message/IM or transmitting voice, photo, and video) or mobile phones. Similar behavior by an adult is called cyber-harassment or cyberstalking."

Explore the website of Parry Aftab and the Wired Safety Group at www.stopcyberbullying.org to learn:

- how cyberbullying works
- what solution-methods to apply to each of the four types of cyberbullies: (1) the vengeful angel, (2) the power-hungry or Revenge of the Nerds, (3) the "mean girls," or (4) the inadvertent cyberbully or "Because I Can."
- ways of prevention
- how to respond to a cyberbullying incident
- where to report cyberbullying (www.wiredsafety.org)

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