

Encourage teenagers to strive for integrity

If recent news reports are true, cheating is rampant among today's teenagers. Some people say technology is to blame because it makes academic dishonesty easier to pull off. Others attribute the problem to our competitive society and its message that you should do anything possible to get ahead.

People of all ages are tempted to cut corners to achieve success, wealth, and popularity. Why put in extra effort when other people take unethical shortcuts? Why pay for media when you can (illegally) download it? Why put relationships in jeopardy by being honest? The reason is that God commands us to be truthful. Disobeying his laws leads to consequences—even if we aren't "caught" and punished by earthly authorities.



In a *Group Magazine* survey of more than 26,000 teenagers, half agreed with this statement: "I've done things no one really knows about that impact my ability to feel loved by God." Sinning makes us feel far apart from God, but the good news is that he offers forgiveness and grace.

Church isn't the only place kids can hear this message. Parents play a bigger role than you might expect. Christian apologist Josh McDowell says, "The most powerful impact upon a child's ethical, moral, and spiritual development is the relationship with the parents. It is 300 times greater than the church."

Remind your teenagers that Jesus knows what it's like to battle temptation and struggle with God's will. He not only set an example for us but also offers us strength to make wise choices and display Christian character.

The small-group resource *Guy Talk, Girl Talk 2* (Simply Youth Ministry) offers helpful Bible-based advice that young people can follow when they're tempted to compromise their values:

1. Run away from the situation. "Flee the evil desires of youth..." (2 Timothy 2:22a, NIV). This may seem like a strange way of dealing with temptation, but even the greatest of superheroes had weaknesses. Superman never did well against kryptonite, so he avoided the stuff altogether.
2. Run toward what's right. "...and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace..." (verse 22b). Beating temptation has a lot more to do with saying "yes" to right living than it does with saying "no" to whatever is tempting us.
3. Run with brothers and sisters who are pursuing pure living. "...along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (verse 22c). If we aren't running with other people who are going in God's direction, we won't be running for very long.



Pulse

In its biannual *Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth*, the Josephson Institute presents teenagers' self-reported values and behaviors. Some snapshots:

- 30% of kids admitted stealing from a store in the past year.
- 64% said they've cheated on a test in the past year.
- 83% of teenagers said they've lied to a parent about something significant.
- 36% said they've plagiarized an assignment using the Internet.
- 26% of survey respondents said they lied on at least one or two questions on the survey!
- 93% said they were satisfied with their personal ethics and character.



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Begin a conversation about integrity by using these discussion starters:

1. Among your friends and classmates, how widespread are cheating and lying? Are you ever tempted to take part? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the consequences people face for cutting corners—even if they aren't caught?
3. What does a life of integrity look like to you? What prices might you have to pay to pursue such a life, and are they worthwhile?
4. What are some ways you can resist temptation and conquer evil?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will desire to develop a character that reflects their relationship with Christ.
2. Your teenagers will be able to resist temptations to cheat, lie, and steal.
3. You're able to set a strong example of integrity for your kids.
4. Your family encourages one another to strive for honesty and truth.

Verse of the Month

"Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good."
(Romans 12:21)

Part of the problem in our battle with temptation has to do with our approach. This verse is one example of how Scripture is clear that we don't overcome temptation merely by saying "no" over and over. We conquer, or overcome, by doing good. Our focus must be on developing good habits through the power of the Holy Spirit, not on breaking bad habits through the strength of our own will.

Going Deeper

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, Lane Palmer, a writer for Dare 2 Share (D2S) Ministries, writes about the consequences of day-to-day choices:

The "boomerang effect" doesn't happen just with Australian sticks; it also happens with the choices we make every minute of every day. Here's how one author put it: Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.

The Bible warns us about the boomerang effect that happens with our choices. Check out Numbers 32:23; Job 4:8; Luke 12:2-3; and Galatians 6:7-8. Just as the boomerang operates on principles of physics and aerodynamics that are unchanging, the spiritual law of planting and harvesting operates on unchanging principles designed by God himself. God loves us too much to let us keep throwing destructive choices into our world that will eventually come back to destroy us. That's why he warns us so much.

But the good news is that you can change this very minute. God promises the boomerang effect with positive choices, as well: "Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12).

Decide today to bury the sinful, destructive choices that threaten your destiny, and start planting positive seeds of seeking God and trusting Christ. Treat your body, mind, and soul as the temple of God, and you won't believe what amazing things will come back not to haunt you but to give you the fulfilling life that Christ made available to you through his death. Remember: You make your choices, and then your choices make you.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Rihanna, 22, was born in Barbados but came to America at age 16 to pursue a singing career. After auditioning for rap king Jay-Z, she signed to his Def Jam label. Rihanna has released five albums in five years and has won numerous awards, including Grammys.

Albums: *Loud* (2010), *Rated R* (2009), *Good Girl Gone Bad* (2007), *Music of the Sun* (2005)

What Parents Should Know: Rihanna quickly went from a teenage star to a “Good Girl Gone Bad”—the title of her third album. Her music contains profanity and frequent sexual references. She does contribute to numerous causes and started a foundation for terminally ill children.

What Rihanna Says: “When I was young and I would watch television and I would see all the children suffering, I always said when I grow up I want to help.”

Discussion Questions: Why is there suffering in the world? Is it possible to avoid suffering? Why doesn't God just get rid of it? Read aloud 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8. What hope do we have “in the midst of suffering”? How can God make good come out of suffering? How can you help someone who's hurting right now?

Christian Artist

Background: Britt Nicole, 25, started singing in the church choir at age 3. She pursued a full-time music career rather than attend college, and in 2007 she released her first album. Britt's songs have been featured on NBC's *The Biggest Loser*, and MTV's *Newport Harbor: The Real Orange County*.

Albums: *Acoustic EP* (2010), *The Lost Get Found* (2009), *Say It* (2007)

What Parents Should Know: Britt has a big heart for teenage girls; she's part of the girls-only Revolve Tour and sings at other conferences that minister to young people.

What Britt Nicole Says: “When I heard [God] very clearly, I had to obey him.... God was saying, ‘You've given me part of your heart, but you haven't given me everything and I'm asking you for your life; will you surrender? If you give me your life...I'll bring every dream in your heart to pass.’”

Discussion Questions: Have you ever heard God's voice? How did you react? Do you think God speaks as much now as he did during Bible times? Why or why not? Read aloud 1 Samuel 3:4-18. How can we know if God is speaking to us? How easy is it for you to follow God wherever he leads you? How can you become more obedient to God's direction?

FILM WATCH

Movie: *Just Go With It* (releases Feb. 11)

Genre: Romantic comedy

Rating: PG-13 (for frequent crude and sexual content, partial nudity, brief drug references, and language)

Synopsis: To cover up a careless lie, a plastic surgeon (Adam Sandler) who's romancing a much younger woman enlists his office manager (Jennifer Aniston) to pretend she's his soon-to-be ex-wife. When more lies backfire, the manager's children become involved.

Discussion Questions: Why is lying often so easy? Have you ever had lies stack up on top of one another? If so, how did you handle that? Read aloud Acts 5:1-11. What's your reaction to these verses? Does the punishment seem harsh or appropriate, and why? Why does God value truth so highly—and how can we?



