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Parent Network of Catholic High Schools

“Teaching your Teen to be Strong in a Tough Culture”

SUMMARY

On November 5, 2009, The Parent Network of Catholic High Schools Speakers Series welcomed Dr. Meg Meeker, a mother of four and pediatrician with over 20 years experience whose work with children, adolescents and families is extensive. She shared her expertise, insight and strategies to a full house of parents with teenagers at Saint Joseph Academy.

According to Dr. Meeker, kids today are up against forces that we as adults in our 40's and 50's did not have to face. We are living in a world—a culture—that does not encourage our children to be smart, honest, and morally-centered citizens, and parents worry whether their children can survive and prosper in such a world.

Our children are being pushed on the “train” that seemingly takes them to happiness, being cool, rich and famous. The message of the “train” is highly sexually charged and parents are standing on the side of the tracks with their hands behind their backs watching helplessly as their precious children hop on board a runaway train.

As parents, we have been duped by the “train,” believing we have no authority or ability to influence our children. This is completely untrue.

So, the question is: What can we do to stop this craziness?

The truth is, we are the parents and we need to realize our God-given right to oversee our children's well-being—no matter how difficult or uncomfortable the situation might be. We need to trust our instincts in parenting and do the right thing with our kids, for our kids. We need to exert our influence and authority in our homes.

Our generation's fight for sexual freedom—the “right” to sleep with whomever he or she wants—has led to drastic increases in sexually transmitted diseases. In the 1960's, there were two known sexually transmitted diseases. In the 70's three to four; 5 to 6 reported STD's in the 80's—and now, now there are more than 30 sexually transmitted diseases reported since 2000 putting our children's health and overall wellbeing at risk.

An astounding 20 million American a year contract a sexually transmitted disease and half of these are teenagers.

Early sexual experiences among teens can also cause emotional and spiritual problems among teens.

Depression, for example, is defined as “losses stuck inside the human heart that go ungrieved” and is recognized in teens who are sexually-active and carry the burden of guilt in their hearts.

As the caretakers of our children, we can no longer bury our heads in the sand and not recognize how today's culture is dominated by sex. Kids think that if they are not sexually active in high school they're weird. They will do anything to fit in and they often think they have no choice but to have sex.

Sex sells and the media—and many manufacturers—seduce our kids with sexual images, innuendo, lyrics; and sell millions of sex-based products to our children.

But we know better: Sex is a beautiful, wonderful creation of God for a man and woman to share in marriage.

In truth, there is a short window to abstain from sexual activity— maybe 10 years. When a young adult gets married at say age 25, he or she will have the opportunity to enjoy a healthy, loving sexual relationship for 60 plus years. That's wonderful!

But to really know this kind of loving relationship, our children have to abstain *now*, so they can have the opportunity to more fully experience intimacy within their married relationships for years to come.

Additionally, kids are being conditioned to plug into cell phones, texting, the Internet, Facebook and IPODS. As a result, kids are disconnecting from their parents, family and friends—disconnecting from the human voice and facial expressions. As a result, loneliness is rampant among teens.

Kids must have down-time from all things electronic. Teens *need* conversation to build character and deepen relationships, and that can only happen through time shared with parents, family and friends in the flesh. And it is our responsibility to turn off our cell phones and shut down our computers, if we expect our children to do it, too.

Dr. Meeker also brought attention to the fact that the media—both in TV and film—belittle men. Just watch and see how often adult men and dads are negatively portrayed in the average American TV sitcom. Notice how dads are increasingly being portrayed as idiots who need their kids to help them get along in the world.

Dads— it's time to reclaim your power! You are the most important man in your daughter's life. Be honest and trustworthy. Maintain a high level of integrity. Keep your daughters safe.

Your daughter needs you to be her prince—her knight in shining armor, her hero! Connect with her life. Listen more than talk. Live life *with* her. One of the most powerful ways to boost your daughter's self-esteem is to love her. Give her a hug; a kiss on the cheek every day. A father's touch is so important.

Moms: from the time of conception to 10 years old, the parent-child relationship is very much focused on the mother and child. From age 10 to 18, that relationship shifts and becomes more about the father and child.

As mothers, we need to let dads be dads and not sabotage them. We need to get out of the way and be there to support and listen to the fathers of our children. Simply put, we need to be parents—together.

This postmodern era of parenting is causing parents to worry more about stifling and oppressing our children. We have relinquished our authority and right to parent our child. We have become insecure in our parenting. We want so much to get it right, but we don't know how.

As parents, we have a God-given responsibility to take charge of our teenagers. *Remember, we are the adults: We know what the right thing to do for our teens is.*

So, it's time to be honest with ourselves. When it comes to parenting, what are we afraid of? Are we afraid of our kids? Are we afraid that if we set rules, limits and consequences for our teenagers they won't be popular? Maybe they will be marked as *different*?

Why are adults struggling to be strong, positive role models—models of self-control, honesty, healthy lifestyles, prayer, faith, joy and love? Are we afraid our teenagers won't like us?

As parents, we need to realize that love for our children means making sure they know they have our love. In turn, they must learn from us how to love properly. As parents, we are our children's emotional safety-net, and we need to stay focused and connected to our children. Our children need us. And they need to know that, as their parents, we are smarter, stronger and can see the bigger picture; and they need to know that their parents will hold them accountable for their actions. In turn, parents must model the desired behavior, trustworthiness, integrity, and prayer life.

As parents, we can no longer stand on the side of the "train" tracks and watch as our children hop on board. We need to take back our influence and authority. We need to be the parents.

Reflect back and think about how concerned you were about the possibility of your young child running out in the middle of the street. You would never allow it to happen, right? Because safety was your number one priority.

These issues—the issues Dr. Meg Meeker so succinctly brought to the surface—these issues that our teens are facing today—sex, alcohol, drugs and the Internet—are all speeding cars endangering our children's physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Your child is running toward the highway. What are you going to do to keep your daughter or son safe?