

PARENT/STUDENT WISE CHOICES GUIDE

5th Grade Conversation

OBJECTIVE

Have a meaningful conversation with your son or daughter about how to make wise choices.

THE 411

Scientific research at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) using magnetic resonance imaging has found that the teen brain is not a finished product, but rather a work in progress. Until as recently as 2000, most scientists believed that the major “wiring” of the brain was completed by as early as three years of age and that the brain was fully mature by the age of 10 or 12. Now findings show the greatest changes to the parts of the brain that are responsible for functions such as self-control, judgment, emotions, and organization occur between puberty and adulthood. This may help to explain certain teenage behavior that adults can find mystifying, such as poor decision-making, recklessness and emotional outbursts.

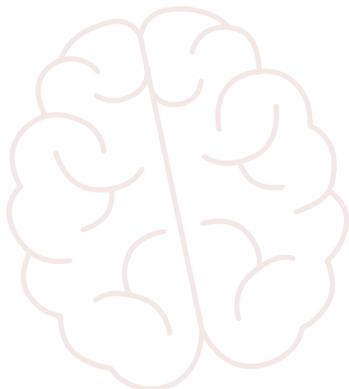
Dr. Jay Giedd of the NIMH says, “Unlike infants whose brain activity is completely determined by their parents and environment, teens may actually be able to control how their own brains are wired and sculpted.” Giedd is suggesting that kids who “exercise” their brains by learning to order their thoughts, understand abstract concepts, and control their impulses are laying the neural foundations that will serve them for the rest of their lives. The frontal lobe portion of their brains is still developing, but now is a great time to reinforce the importance of making wise choices among their friends. The practice of making wise choices now will create habits that will carry on throughout their lives.

*Information obtained from a fact sheet on adolescent brain development by the upstate center of excellence at Cornell University.
www.actforyouth.net/documents/may02factsheetadolbraindev.pdf*

SUGGESTION

Take your son or daughter out on a date, but this time with a twist: Every decision made during the evening must be decided by a coin toss. Before you get in the car, ask your child for a suggestion of where you should go to eat, and then you offer a suggestion as well. Flip the coin to decide where you will go. During the meal, toss the coin again to decide whether to drink water or soda, have chicken cordon blue or a salad, and whether or not to order dessert. Then after dinner, let the coin decide what you will do next.

The significance of relying on the coin is that you don't have control over your choices, but something else — the coin — does. Use this exercise to discuss the way your son or daughter makes decisions. Who do they seek for advice? What role does the Bible have in helping make the choices? Whose voice is louder: parents or friends? How do your child's choices today affect their future? Do they ask, “What is the wise thing to do?” The discussion suggestions below may help you with this conversation.



DISCUSSION

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The purpose of tonight is for us to have a fun night together, but also to have a great conversation. As you get older, you will begin to make more and more decisions on your own, and I want to help you make wise choices.

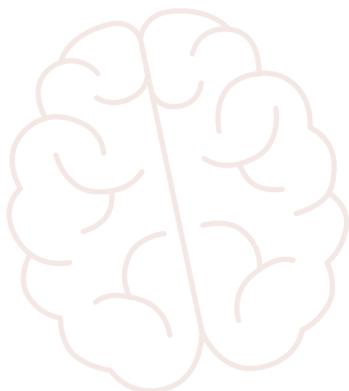
ASK: Did the coin make any decisions for us tonight that you didn't like? Why or why not?
 What didn't you like about having the coin choose all of our decisions?
 Did the coin make it easier than normal for us to make decisions? Why or why not?
 Do you ever find yourself doing what someone else tells you to do just because it is easier than having to make a decision on your own?
 Do you ever see anyone at school giving in to the pressures of others just so it is easier on them?
 What are some dangers that you can face when you don't make decisions for yourself?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: It's important for you to make your own decisions and ask yourself the question, "What is the wise thing to do in this situation?" But making the right choice is sometimes a hard thing to do when we don't know what the right choice is.

ASK: Can you think of a few people in your life you can trust to give you good advice? If so, who?
 How do you know you can trust this person's opinion?
 Do you think praying to God helps you make wise choices? Why or why not?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Praying helps us make wise choices, because when we accept Jesus into our life, the Bible tells us that God sends the Holy Spirit into our life and He is there to guide us and speak truth to us. Let me read you a few verses from John 16. These are Jesus' words, and he is telling the disciples that after He goes to heaven, they will be OK, because when He leaves, He will send the Holy Spirit to guide them.

READ: **John 16:7-15 (NIV)**
 "But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in Me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring Me glory by telling you whatever He receives from Me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever He receives from Me.'"



SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The Holy Spirit helps us make wise choices and helps us know what to do, but the Bible also helps us make wise choices. Here are some verses that can help you when you are faced with a tough decision or temptation.

READ: **When faced with temptation** – I Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

When making a big decision – Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

When they don’t know what to do – James 1:5 (NIV)

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

When choosing friends – I Corinthians 15:33 (NIV)

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

When needing advice – Proverbs 11:14 (NIV)

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”

PRAY

Spend some time praying that God will give our children the strength to stand up to the pressures they will face in middle school. Also ask God to give them the confidence to know that they were created in His image and they are created for the good works that He has prepared for them to do.

