

PARENT/STUDENT WISE CHOICES GUIDE

7th Grade Conversation

OBJECTIVE

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

THE 411

Research at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) by scientists using magnetic resonance imaging has found that the teen brain is not a finished product but is a work in progress. Until as recently as 2000, most scientists believed that the major “wiring” of the brain is complete by as early as 3 years of age and that the brain is fully mature by the age of 10 to 12. Now findings are showing that 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, the teens may actually be able to control how their own brains are wired and sculpted.” Giedd suggests 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 teens’ brains is still developing, but now is a great time to reinforce the importance of your son or daughter making wise choices among their friends. The practice of making wise choices now will create habits that will carry throughout their lives.

Information was obtained from a fact sheet on adolescent brain development put together 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 the only catch is that every decision made for the evening must be decided by a text to one of your teenager’s friends. Before you get in the car, text – or have the son or daughter text – the friend to make the decision on where you will eat. While eating, text another of their friends to decide whether you should drink water or soda, eat chicken cordon blue or a salad, or order dessert or no dessert. After dinner let another of their friends decide what you will do next.

The catch of the night is that you don’t have control over your choices, your teenager’s friends do. Use this exercise to have a great conversation with your son or daughter about how they make decisions. Who do they seek for advice? What role does the Bible have in helping make the choices? Whose voice is louder, their parents or their friends? How do choices made today affect their future? The discussion suggestion below may help you have 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, I realize that you are basing more of your decisions on what your friends tell you. I want to talk with you tonight to help you see the importance of making wise choices outside of the influence of some of your friends.



ASK: Did any of your friends make any decisions for us tonight that you didn't like? Why or why not?
 What didn't you like about having your friends choose all of our decisions?
 Did it make it easier or harder for you to have your friends make your decisions? Why?
 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 others at school giving in to pressure just to make it easier?
 What are some dangers you may face when you don't make decisions for yourself?
 Can you think of a few people in your life that you can trust to give you good advice? If so, who?
 How do you know that you can trust his or her opinion?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: I want you to have good friends you can trust and help you make wise decisions, because friends help make us stronger.
Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." But I also want you to learn to make decisions apart from your friends, because that is often the wise thing to do. **Proverbs 13:20 (NIV)** says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." I'm not calling your friends fools, but I know from being in junior high, sometimes students don't always make the best choices. I want you to learn to make wise choices.

ASK: Where do you get your wisdom from?
 Do you think you get wisdom from reading the Bible?
 How do you think the Bible helps you make wise choices?
 Do you think that if you asked yourself what the Bible says about this situation, that you would make the right decision most of the time?
 When you make bad choices, what keeps you from making the right choice?
 How can I help you make good choices?
 Do you feel comfortable asking me for advice on your decisions? If not, what decisions are tough to talk to me about?

PRAY

We must be sure and pray with our sons and daughters to help them make wise choices on their own. Ask God to give them wisdom in all areas of their lives. Ask God to help strengthen our relationships with them.

