

# Inside the Teen Brain

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



## YOUTH CULTURE HOT QUOTE

*"We don't have to please God in any other way, really, other than to be brutally honest. That is the root not just to a relationship with God, but it's the root to a great song. In fact it's the only place you can find a great song, it's the only place you can find any work of art of merit."*

Bono, for Fuller Studio's video project *Bono & David Taylor: Beyond the Psalms*, [www.fullerstudio.fuller.edu](http://www.fullerstudio.fuller.edu).



When my kids were little, there was nothing I didn't know. . . at least that's what they thought.

And then they grew up and turned into teenagers. Suddenly, I knew absolutely nothing. I quickly learned that in many ways, their attitudes were changing with their brains.

Amazing developments in the area of brain research are especially encouraging for parents of teens. In years past, it was assumed that a child's brain was fully formed somewhere between the ages of eight and twelve. Newer imaging technologies show that the brain is an organ that grows and transitions, just like the adolescent to whom the brain belongs. The brain itself is going through a period of growth during the period between puberty and young adulthood.

Research shows that the brain's pre-frontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop. This is the area of the brain that is responsible for planning, organizing, judging consequences, decision-making, impulse-control, self-control, and emotional regulation. When all is said and done, the brain may not be fully formed until our teenagers reach the age of 24 or 25 years old! While right is still right, and wrong is still wrong, this ground-breaking research explains a lot about teenage behavior. Teens have difficulty controlling their impulses, they lack foresight and judgment, and they are especially vulnerable to peer pressure.

Wise parents learn that while it is important to continue to offer structure, Godly guidance, direction, advice, and explanations, they should at the same time give their children some freedom to make their own decisions. Some of the best lessons are learned through discovery.

Your kids will appreciate this, and it will benefit them in the long run. Parents who continue to do all the thinking for their teenagers will raise children who will have difficulty making vocational, marriage, educational, time-management, ethical, and other important choices later in life. In our house, our general rule has been this: When they are children, we most often think for them. As they move into adolescence, we most often think with them. We do this so that when they become adults, they will be able to think for themselves.

As parents, encourage the use of these new intellectual capacities by doing the following:

- Challenge your teenager to reflect on issues about which you might not see eye-to-eye. Share God's perspective by leading them to Scriptures that speak to the issue or situation.
- Encourage discussion, and be sure to listen before offering advice.
- Treat your teenager as an adult whose opinions you value by allowing them an increased role in the family decision-making process.
- Always teach God's standards of right and wrong, and be sure to explain and enforce appropriate consequences. By doing so, you will provide the structure their developing brain lacks. In effect, you will become their pre-frontal cortex!

Now that my kids are adults themselves, suddenly I'm smart again. Trust me, there will be a day when you too will get smart again! ★

## Burger Restaurant Brand of the Year

Source:  
2017 Harris Poll EquiTrend  
Rankings



**1. Five Guys Burgers and Fries**

**2. In-N-Out Burger**

**3. Shake Shack**

**4. Wendy's**

**5. Culver's**

**6. Whataburger**

**7. McDonald's**

**8. SONIC America's Drive-In**

**9. Smashburger**

**10. Steak 'n Shake**



### QUICK STATS

Almost half (45%) of kids get a mobile phone with a service plan between the ages of 10 and 12.

(Nielsen's Fourth-Quarter 2016  
Mobile Kids Report)

One in seven teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 can't recognize the smell of sweat!

(Aarhus University in Denmark)

### FROM THE NEWS:

## TEEN VIRGINS ARE HEALTHIER

A new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control was released that should spur us on to continue to share God's grand and glorious design for his gift of sex and sexuality **with our kids**. Remember, God has given sex as a gift to be enjoyed within the context of a life-long, monogamous, heterosexual, covenantal marriage between one man and one woman. The report found that high school students who are virgins rate significantly and consistently better in nearly all health-related behaviors and measures than their sexually active peers. An additional report finds that teens from homes where mother and father have a healthy relationship, have warm monitoring relationships with their children, and who have dependable schedules and practices are less likely to be sexually active than peers from homes where these things do not occur. Parents, build a strong family and teach your kids the biblical purpose and place for sex.

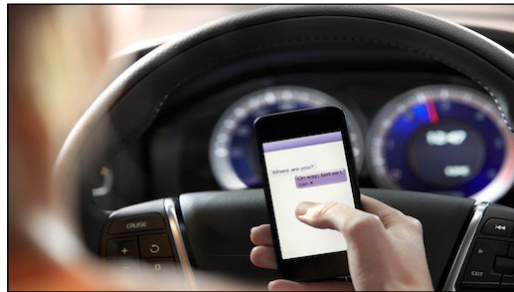
## TRENDS: GENDER IDENTITY

One of the main tasks of adolescence is identity formation.

Teenagers are on a search to answer the question "Who am I?" In years past, the answer teens chose would set the course for how they lived the remainder of their lives. Not so in today's world. Identity formation is now centering around sexuality and gender. And, kids increasingly believe that identity can be fluid, changing from moment to moment and day to day based on how one feels at that point in time. It's not uncommon to hear kids starting conversations with the words, "I identify as. . ." As Christians, our primary identity can and must be found in Jesus Christ alone. We have been made in God's image for a relationship with God. It is only in that relationship that we can find our true selves and then flourish as human beings. We must teach our kids that our primary identity must be first and foremost in Jesus Christ. As we follow him, we should pursue conformity to His will and His way.

## LATEST RESEARCH: DISTRACTED DRIVING

Once again CPYU wants to raise your awareness regarding the very real and present dangers related to teenagers and distracted driving.



Researchers are reporting that while all teenagers are prone to engage in the risky behavior of using an electronic device while behind the wheel, females are twice as likely as males to use an electronic device while driving. When it comes to engaging with other passengers in the car, male drivers are twice as likely as females to turn around while driving. Researchers estimate

that 6.3% of the time, teen drivers are engaging in some type of horseplay. Parents, the message is clear: talk to your kids about the privilege of driving, the responsibility of driving, and driving as an act of worship. Teach them to keep their eyes on the road and to put the electronic distractions away. In addition, be sure that they tell their passengers to buckle-up and to sit still. Distracted driving can and does result in serious events that change and end lives.

### *Become the authority:*

You, as a parent, should be the first and last place your children hear about sex and relationships. Typically the more religious a family is the less likely they are to talk about these things in their home. In a study conducted at Penn State, it was found that most students had never talked with their parents about sex, or if they had, it was a very elliptical discussion full of warnings and dangers. Breaking this cycle starts in the home where you can communicate your values and repeat them often. Remember, your voice matters. Study after study shows that you have the most influence on your teens' sexual choices. Use it!

### *Protect what you can and create a safe place for conversation:*

Safeguarding every area of your children's life is almost impossible. But you can establish boundaries for your family with digital covenants that you each agree to, utilizing parental controls where you are able, and downloading accountability software as needed. These tools help protect your family in certain situations, but for those times when you cannot protect them, it is essential to maintain open streams of communication on this subject. This means treating discussions on sex as an ongoing dialogue rather than only a "BIG Talk."



## SEXUAL INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

## 2 Tools for Parenting in a Sexually Charged World

by Jason Soucinek





## Podcast

Youth Culture Matters is a long-format podcast from CPYU.

Co-hosted by Walt Mueller and Jason Soucinek, each episode features an interview with an expert in a youth culture related field.



Listen at  
[www.cpyu.org/podcast](http://www.cpyu.org/podcast).

## FROM THE WORD

On the night before his death, Jesus spoke with his Heavenly Father regarding the Father's will for his followers in all times and all places. Reading and meditating on Jesus' prayer gives us insight into who we are called to be, along with the mark we should aim for as we parent our children and teens. At the beginning of his prayer, Jesus defines eternal life as knowing the Father and the Son (John 17:3). God desires that the main trajectory of our lives be set on the mark of developing a dynamic and growing personal relationship with God. . . a relationship that shapes and forms every nook and cranny of our lives.

If that's the case, what should we be endeavoring to learn for ourselves, and to teach to our kids? "Knowing God" requires us to see that God is a living, ever-present being who we loyally follow and serve. We will embrace the Scriptures and understand the life and teachings of Jesus. We will develop Christ-like character that enables us to be about Christ's work in the world without being of the world. We will understand the importance of the church and our role in it. And, we will ask God to instill in ourselves a Christian way of looking at and living in all areas of life.

**"AND THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE,  
THAT THEY KNOW YOU THE ONLY  
TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST  
WHOM YOU HAVE SENT."**

**JOHN 17:3**

Does that sound like a tall and imposing order? It is! In effect, parenting children and teens is about becoming a Christian educator. And, when it comes to the spiritual nurture of our kids, the most powerful and lasting lessons aren't forced, but they flow naturally out of who we are. To nurture your kids you must first be nurturing yourself. Helping them to know God flows from our own knowledge of God. What are you doing to know and embrace God?

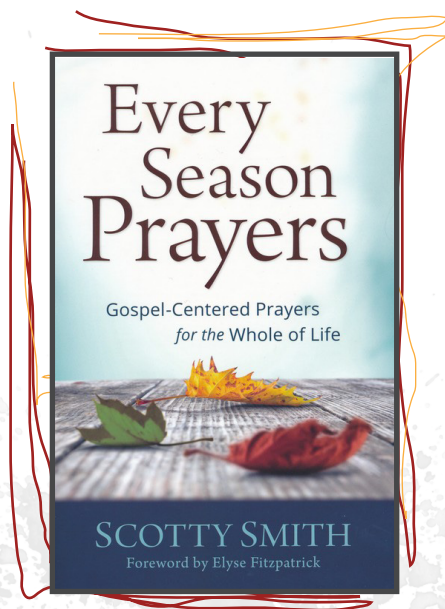
## HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

Are you ever at a loss when it comes to what to say in your prayers?

*Every Season Prayers* offers a treasure trove of prayers that will lead you into a more intimate relationship with God. Topically arranged so you can easily find the sentiments that match your needs, this delightful book includes prayers for:

- everyday concerns, from health and relationship issues to expressing gratitude
- voicing our feelings, stories, and struggles to God
- listening to the heart of God
- congregational confession and worship
- Advent, Lent, Passion Week and more

No matter what your season of life or your daily reality, you will find a prayer you can lift up to God.



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