

imMEDIATE



Impact

What is your child learning today that you're not teaching?

What is your child learning today that you're not teaching?

By Kirk Noonan

Lindsay Harrup, a colleague's 15-year-old daughter, attends church regularly, is active in her youth group, is an honors student at a Christian school and is an ace on her notebook computer. That final detail puts her within clicking distance of a worldwide Web of information and misinformation.

At her parents' insistence, Harrup's Internet service provides a thorough filter to pre-empt any pornography she might stumble upon. Even so, that hasn't stopped the occasional unsolicited and insidious e-mail from slipping into her inbox.

"I immediately put that person's address on my block list," says Harrup, "so I never hear

from them again."

Porn is not the only detrimental thing teenagers have to contend with on the Internet and in the world. Each day, up to 500 times according to some research, children and teens are bombarded with advertisements packed with messages telling them they would be happier or cooler if they owned or did this or that. Add these to the countless messages they are exposed to from movies, television, magazines, the Internet, music, video games and books and it is easy to see why so many children and teens are swayed from one product to the next and even from one worldview to the next.

Media and advertorial messages

have the power to alter a young person's worldview, self-image and consumer tastes. They do so by making cogent claims about what is important in life, what constitutes right and wrong, and what parameters children and teens should use in measuring themselves against society's virtual yardstick of success.

A recent trip to the mall takes my family past billboards of picture-perfect models promoting light beer, instant tanning, 24-hour fitness centers, body piercing and must-have luxury cars. If Harrup stands in line with her dad at the grocery store, she can glance over headlines on a dozen magazines dealing with subjects never discussed around the family's dinner table.



imMEDIATE impact



In a world where everyone from toy manufacturers to Hollywood executives are vying for your children's attention it is a parent's duty, say experts *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* spoke with, to be staunch gatekeepers regarding what messages children and teens receive and embrace.

Many voices, many messages

"The media has replaced parents as the teachers regarding relationships and sexuality," says Fred Stoeker, author of *Every Young Man's Battle*. "Parents need to be engaged in their children's lives or they will not have the impact they were designed to have."

As evidence Stoeker and other leaders point to a host of disturbing findings.

- According to the *Journal of Pediatrics* report "Impact of media on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors," the average youth spends one-third of each day with various forms of mass media, mostly without parental oversight.

- A University of California study found children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep.

- Two-thirds of those 8 to 18 years old have a television in their bedroom.

- The *Journal of Pediatrics* reports preteens and teens with a television in their room are more likely to use drugs, smoke cigarettes, binge drink and have sex.

- The average child's home has three television sets, three radios, two VCRs, two CD players, one video game console and one computer (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999).

Mixed messages

For some children Saturday

mornings are exciting not because of the cartoons they are watching but because of the commercials they see. Marketers excel at combining sights, sounds, special effects and portrayals of extreme contentment in 30-second spots that engage and thrill children.

Parents today might remember commercials from their own childhood, such as Mean Joe Green tossing his jersey to a little boy in the tunnel at a stadium in exchange for a Coke. Or the Connect Four commercial where the girl beats her older brother with four across diagonally and he says, "Pretty sneaky, sis." Or the theme song for Oscar Mayer bologna: "My bologna has a first name, it's O-S-C-A-R. My bologna has a second name, it's M-A-Y-E-R ..."

Point is, commercials and the media in general have a profound impact on those who consume them. Recent studies report commercials aimed at boys generally emphasize activity, but commercials aimed at girls usually highlight the importance of appearance. Some preteen girls have taken notice and have allowed persuasive advertisements to taint their body image. In a 2002 study, teenage girls who viewed commercials peopled with thin models expressed lower confidence, more anger, and dissatisfaction with their own weight and appearance.

By midadolescence, children have watched about 15,000 hours of TV (more time than they have spent with their parents or friends). Doing so has opened up a whole new world of ideas and viewpoints from which to choose. Much of what children see suggests unhealthy behaviors (e.g., drug use, violent tendency and sexual experimentation), if

not actually beneficial, are normal and expected features of adult life.

Another study suggests children with higher exposure to sexual activity on TV were almost twice as likely as kids with lower exposure to initiate sexual intercourse. Parents may feel they are adequately monitoring sexual content by simply avoiding premium cable movie channels. But network TV is rife with sex.

In a sample of TV programming from the 2001-02 season, sexual content appeared in 64 percent of all TV programs. Those programs with sexually related material had an average of 4.4 scenes per hour.

Portrayals that included sexual risks, abstinence or need for sexual safety were depicted in only 15 percent of the shows with sexual content.

Vicki Courtney, mother of three teens and author of *His Girl* DVD series, offers one blatant example.

"MTV not long ago had a program about pimps and their prostitutes," she says. "I was thinking, *What if my child were to watch something like this? What would they walk away thinking?* And we know what they're walking away thinking when they're exposed to shows even like *Desperate Housewives* and *The OC* — sex is recreational. The main message they're getting from media at large — movies, music, television, the fashion magazines — is a clear message that sex is recreational."

Courtney says parents may not be able to keep their children from all explicit material, but they can create teachable moments when inappropriate content sneaks through their defenses.

"When you see that Victoria's

Secret commercial and you can't get to the TV fast enough, or hear a song on the radio and you can't switch the station fast enough, take that opportunity to say, 'Wow, did I just hear what I thought I heard? Did you see that? Did you notice how they parade those women around there? Isn't that sad how the world has come to a place where girls try to dress this way and they think the only way they have worth and value is if they can look like that?'"

Internal and external defense systems

A few months ago Stoeker's son married. The wedding ceremony marked the first time his son, who is 23 years old, romantically kissed a woman. Though unusual, Stoeker says, raising children who are sexually pure is not impossible.

"This is not an easy thing," he admits, "but if we want to have children who don't struggle with sexual issues it's the price we have to pay. We have to teach our children to own their sexuality."

That price included taking a firm stand against the influence of culture. The Stoeker family engaged in bold conversations about sex, pornography and what true love looked like. When his children wanted to watch a movie or television program Stoeker and his wife previewed it — even when it came to PG-rated films.

"There are going to have to be some hard decisions," he says.

Sometimes that meant their children had to give up outings with friends. At school his children would sometimes be laughed at for the stand the family took. But the benefits, he contends, far outweighed the price that was paid.



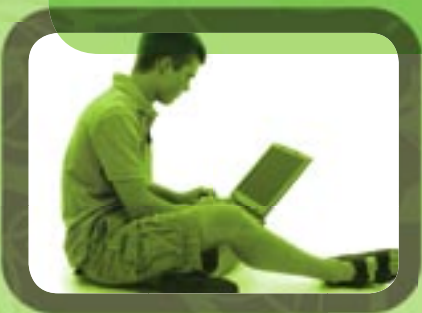
A University of California study found children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep.



imMEDIATE mpact

"It's amazing to see a parent who is taking the responsibility of showing their teenager healthy ways of having a good time. Adolescents love that, they crave that and they flock to that parent's house to be under good influence."

— Dr. Ross Campbell



Stoeker says the children were spared from emotional hurts and bad relationships. One study shows teens who have sexual intercourse wish they would have delayed doing so. Thousands of other teens each year contract sexually transmitted diseases or endure unplanned pregnancies.

When Stoeker's son was dating the woman he eventually married they were never physically intimate. Instead they concentrated on getting to know each other in every other way. Doing so, says Stoeker, laid a foundation for a strong marriage that is now being enhanced by the physical expression of love.

The key to raising children who remain sexually pure, says Stoeker, is for parents to fear God more than they fear man or even what their children think of them.

Courtney agrees. "Parents have to decide they're going to be a parent first," she says. "They have to clip this thing of 'I want my child to like me and I want to be their buddy.'"

Dr. Ross Campbell, author of *How to Really Parent Your Teenager*, agrees and says many parents mistakenly step away from their parenting duties when their children become adolescents.

"It's amazing to see a parent who is taking the responsibility of showing their teenager healthy ways of having a good time," Campbell says. "Adolescents love that, they crave that, and they flock to that parent's house to be under good influence."

But that type of home is rapidly vanishing, Campbell admits. "Most parents are not aware," he

says. "They just do their own thing and hope things are going to turn out right."

One of the keys to standing strong at the gate to your child's heart and mind, says Stoeker, is to keep them from being influenced by the media by not becoming influenced yourself.

"If parents are demanding their children not watch movies or programs with sexual material, they should do the same," he explains. "If a child doesn't have their parents' good influence they don't even have a chance to create their own mind-set, let alone a Christlike mind-set."

The right foundation

No matter how sophisticated or savvy children and teens may appear when it comes to their entertainment choices and products they want, experts say parents must keep in mind children are just children. In other words children need their parents to guide and direct them.

Stoeker and other leaders say the rules children should live by should come from God's Word and not legalism. They also encourage parents to not back down under the onslaught of advertising and media messages that go contrary to God's Word.

"We need to decide that God has entrusted us with these children," Courtney says. "We are called to be stewards and care for them for 18 years or more and to help guide them and train them." **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

Jennifer McClure and Scott Harrup contributed to this article.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

You Can Help ...

BREAK THE SILENCE

The **ReachAmerica Coalition** believes everyone deserves a chance to hear about the saving grace of Jesus Christ . . . even those who live in America!

Because of the church's **silence**, the United States of America is now the 3rd-largest unreached nation on earth.* **More than 200 million people in America do not know Jesus.***

You can help reach our nation by becoming a charter member of the **ReachAmerica Coalition**. Members agree to:

- 1) Pray** regularly for the lost of America and participate in the national call to prayer currently being launched.
- 2) Give** monthly or annually to help finance missionary efforts to reach the lost of America.
- 3) Participate** in **ReachAmerica Coalition** events across the nation whenever possible.

Please help "break the silence."

Join now and become a charter member of the **ReachAmerica Coalition**. Just complete the attached form and mail it **today!**



REACHAMERICA COALITION

*Courtesy of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Yes! Count on me/us!

I/We would like to help reach our nation by joining the **REACHAMERICA COALITION**:

- MONTHLY CONTRIBUTIONS OF \$** _____
- ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION OF \$** _____

This is a ... **INDIVIDUAL** **CHURCH** **BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP**

Church to Receive Credit _____

Mail to: **REACHAMERICA COALITION**
1445 N. Boonville Ave.
Springfield, MO 65802

Or call at:
1-877-840-5400

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ ST: _____ Zip: _____

*Make checks payable to the **REACHAMERICA COALITION**. All contributions to the **REACHAMERICA COALITION** are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Bill my credit card ... **MONTHLY** **ANNUALLY**

MASTERCARD **VISA** **DISCOVER**

CC#: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Name on card (Print): _____

Signature: _____

ACCOUNT # 4865960 (00) 700-001