

Help kids love and value themselves as God's own



Self-esteem takes a big hit as kids approach and enter adolescence. As their bodies change, young people are constantly bombarded with unattainable standards in the media. Cornell University's Joan Brumberg says America has "a culture of kids who are being socialized to unrealistic images." These impressionable kids constantly come up short when they compare themselves to society's perceived ideals.

When self-esteem suffers, kids react in numerous ways. The worse kids feel about themselves, research shows, the more obsessed they become with buying stuff. Others turn to violence to try to fit in. One study found that girls are turning to alcohol to manage their low self-esteem and to repress anxieties and fears. Some kids behave provocatively or have plastic surgery to try to fit in and attain the world's beauty standards.

When teenagers see themselves through the world's eyes, they'll fall short. Our job is to help them begin to see themselves through God's eyes. God not only made each young person in God's image but also has a plan for each of their

lives.

David R. Smith at theSource4YM.com says an effective strategy for boosting self-esteem is providing service opportunities. "When we put young people in situations where they help others who are worse off than themselves, it is not only a great opportunity to show love and compassion to the needy, it provides these young people with a larger world view than the 'plastic' exterior they see in the media and the shallow world around them." Read on for more ideas about boosting your teenagers' self-image in a God-centered way.

We know the world sends messages about our worth, but what messages do we send ourselves? Consider these helpful insights from *Guy Talk, Girl Talk*.

- 1. Start describing yourself by your character instead of your appearance.** The next time someone asks you to describe yourself, reveal elements of your personality rather than physical attributes.
- 2. Take extra time to examine what's in your heart.** If we are more than our bodies, we need to start taking time to see what is hidden in our hearts. We should discover the things that are good and help them grow stronger. We also must find the things that need work and spend time making improvements to the condition of our hearts. We need to love our souls!
- 3. Reflect what's in your heart for others to see.** Carry yourself confidently and walk with your head lifted high. Now that you know the good inside your heart, make sure you reflect it to others. You'll be surprised how people respond to the new confidence you have found within yourself.

Pulse

Many kids don't like what they see in the mirror.

- 81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of getting fat, and 66% of girls ages 10 to 14 say they want to change some aspect of their appearance.

(Dove Campaign for Real Beauty)



- High school girls tend to see themselves as 11 pounds over their ideal body weight, while boys perceive themselves as heavier than they are and want to be even bigger. *(American Journal of Health Behavior)*
- Not everyone agrees there's a self-esteem crisis. Psychology professor Jean Twenge says today's kids are brimming with self-confidence, which can lead to narcissism. Setting unrealistic goals can blow up in kids' faces, Twenge says. *(The Narcissism Epidemic)*

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Explore kids' self-image and God's image of them by asking:

1. What's your opinion of your body and yourself in general? Do you like what you see in the mirror? in your heart? Explain.
2. How accurate are your perceptions of yourself?
3. Can people have a too-high self-esteem? Explain.
4. What does it take to be satisfied with your looks and with yourself in general?
5. What do you think God sees when he looks at you? What, if anything, might God want to change about your character or attitude?

from Scott

One of my favorite quotes is from a well-known contemporary Christian author named Max Lucado and is part of the title of his book *Just Like Jesus*. The quote reads, "God loves you just the way you are, but (God) refuses to leave you that way."

I can't help but think this is a good message for our youth to hear. It affirms our identity as children of God and reinforces for us that, above all else, God loves us. At the same time it highlights the fact that we are all (youth and adults alike) works in progress. There is no such thing as perfect and flawless. Cool and popular are human judgments that are by their nature corrupt.

I am convinced that the only relief from the trials and travails of adolescence is found in the arms of Jesus—in a deep understanding of identity in Christ. Our efforts in helping our youth navigate these difficult years are best directed toward reinforcing this identity for them. "God loves you and so do I," may be the best thing an adolescent can hear.

Verse of the Month

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" (1 Samuel 16:7)

David was an unlikely choice to be king. Of Jesse's sons, David was the youngest and shortest. But God looked deeper and knew who he'd help David become. In his wisdom, God does the same thing for each of us.

What's Up With Kids

Youth-culture expert Walt Mueller, writing at SimplyYouthMinistry.com, offers practical tips for helping your kids cope with body-image issues.

We're raising a generation of kids, both girls and boys, who have been hammered by images of culturally defined beauty and perfect body types since the day they were born. Consequently, they believe they're nothing unless they look and are shaped a certain way. Never are they told by the media that if they have nothing in this world but a relationship with God through Christ, they will have everything. As parents, we must do everything in our power to steer our kids away from pursuing unhealthy and unrealistic idols of appearance. But how?

First, we must pray for our kids. Ask God to fill them with a desire to conform to the "who we are" image of Christ rather than to the "what we look like" images thrown at them by the world.

Second, watch what appearance messages you send through your words and actions. Our comments about kids' weight, shape, etc. hit them hard. Be sure to love your kids for who they are, not for what they look like.

Third, deal with your own body-image issues. Let's face it: We've grown up in and continue to live in a world that's sent the same flood of messages our way. Have you given in? If so, that's sending messages out loud and clear to your kids.

Finally, help your kids identify media lies and stereotypes. Consciously process them together in a way that leads your kids to realize how these images stray from God's design for people created in his image.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: A record executive discovered Usher at age 13 on *Star Search*. Since then, he's sold more than 40 million albums worldwide and has won five Grammy awards. *Billboard* magazine called him the second-greatest artist of the previous decade.

Albums: *Raymond v. Raymond* (2010), *Confessions* (2004), *8701* (2001), *My Way* (1997)

What Parents Should Know: Most of Usher's songs are about relationships and love, but many also deal with sexuality—in very explicit language. Usher's nonprofit organization helped rebuild parts of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

What Usher Says: Regarding his growth as an artist, Usher says, "The knowledge that rests in the mistakes slowly but surely become wisdom.... Where I stand as a husband, as a father, as an individual, as a businessman, is all a testimony to what I've been through and where I've been."

Discussion Questions: What are some positive consequences that can result from mistakes? Would it be better if we never messed up? Why or why not? Read aloud Romans 8:1-4. What do these verses say about our past—and future—mistakes? What attitude should Christians have about our sins, and why?

Christian Artist

Background: TobyMac, a member of the former Christian rap group DC Talk, has gone on to a successful solo career. His songs have been featured on films, TV shows, sports events, and video games, and he won a Grammy in 2009.

Albums: *Tonight* (2010), *Portable Sounds* (2007), *Welcome to Diverse City* (2004), *Momentum* (2001)

What Parents Should Know: TobyMac is a genuinely talented hip-hop artist. His infectious sounds are a viable alternative to often-profanely secular lyrics. He is vocal about his commitment to diversity, saying we are all God's children.

What TobyMac Says: "Music is something that can actually open people's minds to who God is. Music will never change the world, but God can choose to use music, and that's what I count on. I want [my songs] to move people's lives forward—move people toward God."

Discussion Questions: How similar are you and your peers, culturally and faith-wise? Are you comfortable being around people who look different from you? Why or why not? What are God's views about diversity? Read aloud John 3:16. What evidence have you seen of God's love for everyone? What can we do to reach across cultural lines?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Legion* (releases Jan. 22)

Genre: Supernatural thriller

Rating: R (for strong bloody violence and language)

Synopsis: God loses faith in mankind and wants to start over. So he sends his angels to bring about Armageddon on earth. The archangel Michael (Paul Bettany) is now a fallen angel who's siding with the humans. He tries to protect a waitress who might be pregnant with the second coming of Christ.

Discussion Questions: Do you think God ever gets disgusted or angry with humans? Do you think he ever punishes us for our sins? Explain. What is God's plan to save our broken world? Read aloud Matthew 24:30-31. What do you think it will be like when Christ returns to earth? Do you want that to happen during your lifetime? Why or why not?

