

if we do not approve. We will have a greater opportunity to influence behaviour in our own home than if we 'chase' our child away to somebody else's house.

Good advice

Drawing the line between what behaviour we will and will not tolerate in our children is very hard. A good piece of advice which we gratefully received a long time ago is to choose a few important things over which there is no negotiation, and accept some things that we would prefer not to. Whilst we may dislike our offspring's 'wild' hair cut (what would those at the meeting say?), it is surely better to allow this than, say, to capitulate on attendance at the meeting. Inevitably there are

likely to be brethren and sisters who will make known their disapproval of our child's appearance at the meeting, but the fact that they are at the meeting at this stage of life is much more important than how they look.

Lastly, we must try to afford our children the forbearance that our heavenly Father shows to us. It has to be a matter of prayer that our children will learn from their own mistakes. We cannot expect to be able to save them from making the same mistakes that we made in our youth. It is by God's mercy that we have been preserved from our own youthful foolishness. Our daily prayer should be that God will give us the wisdom and strength to care for our children, and will be there for them when we fail.

The perils of the world

It's not easy being young these days. The world is very persuasive, and has some wonderful things on offer. David Simpson (Kings Norton, Birmingham, UK) has written an article designed to assist parents, and concerned brothers and sisters, who want to help.

IT IS A GOOD idea to start by finding out what the world is really like. Any newsagent will direct you to a few magazines targeted at young teenagers or young men and women. They come in both his and hers guises. Have a good look through them, and put yourself in the young person's position. The world has changed so much since many of us were young. Even ten years can make a huge difference. For example:

- Did you know that the youngsters at some of our residential youth weekends now use their mobile phones to warn each other when the warden is approaching?
- Are you aware that there are drugs introduced at some of our teenage parties?
- Do you realise that pornographic films are now available not only through videos and DVDs, but also via mobile phones and the internet?

Whilst there is no harm in the first of these three, there is a real problem with the other two. How can we help our families, and our ecclesial young people, to cope?

Be aware

May I suggest that we all find out just what the modern world is offering? It must be twenty-five

years since I walked across the yard of the school where I taught, and two thirteen-year-olds were nattering on to me about a particular pop idol who was gay, and showed me pictures of men who were going out with each other. I looked at the lads in amazement. They weren't being rude or unpleasant; it was apparently just their normal conversation. It wasn't mine, of course; I was horrified. But in the intervening twenty-five years, I doubt if schoolboy conversations have cleaned up in any way.

Unless we go for a total separation strategy for our children, and school them at home¹ (and even then can we stop them watching TV, going to friends' houses, or reading undesirable material in bed?), are we able to divorce them from twentieth-century life? We cannot, and in my humble opinion it is not a good idea to seek to do so. At some stage they will have to earn their living in the world, and that will be at just the stage when we pray they will be thinking about baptism. It might help if we think of learning about the world as a sort of vaccination. Provided they can see or hear what goes on, and always are encouraged to come to us and discuss things, then a little dose of understanding could well mean that they can resist the big dose of practice later.

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1. This matter of schooling our young people at home is dealt with elsewhere in this magazine, with alternative views being given. See pp. [263](#), [267](#).

sexual relationships are, and that “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). When my family were at school we had an excellent booklet sent from the Education Authority suggesting how to proceed to answer their questions on ‘difficult subjects’. We in our Brotherhood ought to write a similar booklet, but taking the Bible as our authority.²

Drugs have entered our society in an alarming way. I was in a stationer’s shop in Birmingham recently, getting some CALS photocopying done, when a young man came in to buy a bulk supply of little plastic bags. What did he want them for? He was a drug dealer, and the bags were the right size to put his powders and tablets in.

Alcohol is everywhere. We must work out our strategy towards drink, and be quite prepared to explain why we don’t encourage our teenagers to frequent bars and clubs. Is having a quiet drink at home hypocritical? The principle remains true to this day: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). Young people, baptized or not, who state that they go on to a pub after our Sunday night meeting should have been told that our homes are always open and available. Why not forestall this problem by arranging a rota of homes where a free and open discussion can take place, and a good supper is provided? Who needs pubs then?

May I suggest that we should be aware of these modern problems, and perhaps on an ecclesial basis prepare our answers *before* matters are raised by our children?

Fifty years ago I saved up ten shillings, then banked it. When I had done this enough times I bought a bike. But today we are encouraged *not* to wait—just buy on credit! Do our families see the endless invitations to borrow, or take out new credit cards, which almost daily come through our door? It’s also now possible for young people to own their own credit card; just think what temptations then lie ahead with the ability to purchase virtually anything over the internet!

Being aware of the modern world will enable us to guide our young people. Nearly 4,000 years ago, Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land” (Gen. 34:1). I imagine that this means she went window shopping. Dinah wanted to see what other girls were wearing and doing. She, poor girl, had a football team of brothers, and probably was starved of female company. Had she been told not to flutter her eyelids at strangers?

We do not know; but we *are* told that she was raped by the crown prince, and a terrible feud started between her family and his. Whatever Jacob and Leah had or had not told Dinah, there is doubtless a lesson for us in this story; let’s talk to our young people *before* horrible things happen.

Computers

Computers are wonderful machines. Children are taught how to perform tasks on them that some of us older ones can only wonder at. Computers are not sinful, but, like so many inventions, they can be used in a sinful way. The world-wide-web is simply a system of joining computers, or servers, together around the world. Looking through these millions of ‘pages’ is called ‘surfing the net’.

It means that we can access news, facts about the Holy Land, archaeology, and countless other subjects. We can book our holidays online, do our banking, and pay our bills. But by typing in certain codes we can also access pornography, violence and even instructions on how to build a bomb. Godly people do not do these things. But young people can pass on to others what *they* have seen on the web, *and* how to find it. So again we should be aware.

Is it sensible to allow our children to go to their room and spend long hours unsupervised surfing the net? God-fearing parents will not allow indecent material to be viewed by their children, and at the very minimum will use one of the parental control features which disables the worst pages. And recently the horror of ‘chat rooms’ has been highlighted in the media. Although many of these sites are innocent, and simply allow people of any age to ‘chat’ via their computer, paedophiles can pretend to be young people, and can ‘groom’ young people for sex. We have all read or heard of youngsters who run away with older men whom they met on ‘chat rooms’.

There is also another drawback associated with the over-use of computers and games such as Playstation or Gameboy. They can easily make the young person become withdrawn and insular. Hours spent by oneself, or with just one other person, can lead to personality disorders and lack of communication skills. Parents who value family life, and pray that their offspring will accept Christ

2. See [“Helping children learn about sex and relationships”](#) (p. 234).

and take an active role in ecclesial activities, will therefore not permit too many hours to be spent twiddling buttons.

Friendships

This has always been a most difficult area for parents to control. What the child does, and with whom he or she makes friends, cannot always be controlled by parents. Associations made at school, college and work are completely out of parents' realms of influence. But here again, surely the scene will be set at home, before the young person actually goes out and lives their independent life. Standards will be set, advice given, and scenarios enacted, so that a Christlike standard will have been set.

"The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4). Our young people will acknowledge at Sunday School or on CYC night that such sentiments are valid, but when they are separated from us, and totally surrounded by worldly people, they will possibly gravitate towards their friends, and put such sentiments behind their backs. It is one of the curses of being part of a group that we do not like to appear 'different'. (Haven't you noticed how awkward *you* feel when everyone else in the ecclesia seems to be engaged in something, or even just talking happily, and you are left out? No one likes to feel the odd man out.)

May I suggest, therefore, that we should make every possible effort to surround our young people with friends in the Truth, so that they *do* have a sense of belonging? *And* always emphasise that outside friends are welcome inside, for example in the following ways:

- Right from a very early age, birthday parties could be a mixture of school friends and Sunday School friends.
- Encourage them to bring their school friends to CYC.
- When they are getting older, welcome their fellow students to your house.
- Invite their friends along to ecclesial outings and rambles.

Violence

Many of today's films, videos and video games centre on violence. Is it any wonder, then, that political demonstrations often end in violence? Have you noticed how often a goal in football or a win in other games elicits a clenched fist and a thump in the air? These days aggression and violence seem to be a sign of victory. Why? Even

contestants in game-shows and quizzes clench their teeth and show their pleasure by punching the air with a fist.

Our young people are surrounded by aggression and violence. Last year the youth of many French cities showed their frustration and lack of 'belonging' by burning thousands of cars, and going on the rampage, wreaking havoc, hurling bricks at policemen, and burning buildings. Why? Apparently they felt left out, and frustrated because they were being sidelined. Their views were not listened to, and they felt that the authorities were trying to ignore their racial roots. None of this gives any cause to act violently, but the French youngsters felt that this was their only way to get noticed.

John the Baptist told even soldiers to "Do violence to no man" (Lk. 3:14). Christ's message was, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you" (6:27). If therefore we follow these guidelines, we will not be drawn into the modern web of violence and aggression. Our young people must see that we have been with Jesus.

Our conversation

When we are at home it is very easy to discuss the members of our ecclesia, and of the wider Brotherhood. This is good, and you will notice how often we mention people we know in other ecclesias, especially when we meet someone new. But if around the meal table we run down the speaker, or dissect someone's motives or attitudes, our young people will hear, and take note. Our attitudes and our comments about others will be picked up by our families, and at the least could be the means of spreading malicious gossip around the Brotherhood, or at the worst be responsible for our own dear family deciding that, despite our religious attitude to life, we are no different from other families. This could lead to them turning their back on the Truth.

To take this further, the Greek word translated 'conversation' in the AV usually means behaviour. It doesn't refer just to speech, but to our way of life. Therefore, if we are to lead and influence our young people by *our* way of life, we must do as James exhorts: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (Jas. 3:13).

Our young people will learn from us. We must guide them through the perils of the world, as we ourselves have been guided.