



Parent Tips

The "Sweet Spot" for Teaching Truth

By Jonathan McKee

What is the best age to teach someone math, the violin... or to binge drink?

Yes, learning is learning. And teen's can actually learn "faster, harder, better, longer, stronger" than adults. It's called synaptic plasticity (1). Toddlers have it in heaps, teens still absorb at a great rate, and adults... not so much.

In short, our kids are sponges. The question is... what are we teaching them?

Synaptic plasticity is a great asset when it comes to learning skills like musical instruments, but it's a great vulnerability in the area of addictions. Young people are much more vulnerable to drugs, alcohol, porn—you name it—compared to adults with the same exposure.

As parents, this should be motivation to not "lower the bar" for our children. No, I'm not advocating becoming the proverbial "tiger mom" and smacking your child's wrist with a ruler if they play the wrong note during their 3-hour violin practice. I'm simply suggesting we realize our kids' potential.

The developmental years present us with a unique opportunity to teach our kid's truth. Think of young people as sponges, absorbing content wherever they go, and slowly developing their own moral code and worldview. This outlook and sense of morality will be what guides them as they leave home and begin making their own decisions in dormrooms, classrooms and chat rooms.

What moral code are your kids adopting? Where are your kids gleaning truth?

There is no better time than the present to teach our kids truth. A new study about substance abuse among adolescents (2) revealed that students with a "religious world view" were less likely to use drugs and alcohol. Why? Because these kids are absorbing truth when many of their peers are absorbing lies. The teen years are a "sweet spot" for learning and setting life patterns. If kids learn their morality from Seth Rogan and James Franco, their choices are going to look a lot different than those who are learning from Jesus.

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So how should parents respond and take advantage of this sweet spot of learning in our kids' development?

HOW DO WE RAISE SPONGES?

ONE

Look for opportunities to dialogue about truth in daily life.

When your kids notice a magazine headline while standing in line at the grocery store, ask them what they think. Use questions to move from monologue to a dialogue and help them articulate what they believe.

(I spend a whole chapter on "creating a climate of continual conversations" in my new book about talking to our kids about sex, *More Than Just the Talk: Becoming Your Kids Go-to Person about SEX.*)

TWO

Create opportunities to share truth.

Don't just wait for our kids to walk up and ask us questions. Create hang out time with our kids providing these quality time moments. If you don't know what to talk about, don't be afraid to use resources to get your teenagers talking or open up dialogue about important issues like sex or general wisdom.

THREE

Limit entertainment media exposure. Most doctors and parenting experts give specific advice (3) about limiting screen time, keeping tech devices out of the bedrooms, monitoring media and co-viewing. Don't just let your kids figure it out for themselves. Provide helpful and realistic guardrails that teach them responsibility.

ARE YOU HAVING THESE CONVERSATIONS?

JONATHAN MCKEE is the author of over a dozen books including *Get Your Teenager Talking*, *Sex Matters*, and the brand new *More Than Just the Talk*. Jonathan speaks to parents and leaders worldwide. Read more from Jonathan at TheSource4Parents.com

1- <http://www.mtv.com/news/1981463/the-teenage-brain/>

2- <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865618890/Teens-with-strong-religious-worldviews-are-more-likely-to-avoid-drugs-and-alcohol.html?pg=all>

3- <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/5/958.full>