

*“As a parent of teens I’m eager to get all the help I can, and especially when it comes to the challenges and complexities of raising them in a digital world. Eliza Huie’s little book offers help—help that is wise, practical, and biblical.”*

**Tim Challies**, Author and blogger

*“I really like this book. It is unafraid to go right to where teenagers are and right to what parents worry about. In imitation of a heavenly Father who knows and cares, its top tips are immensely wise.”*

**Ann Benton**, Author and speaker

*“Don’t let this book’s brevity fool you. Counselor Eliza Huie has packed in a plethora of biblical and practical wisdom on a critical issue facing every parent today. Read it, digest it, and be better prepared to have meaningful conversations with your teen about sexuality as God designed and intended it.”*

**Jonathan Holmes**, Pastor of Counseling,  
Parkside Church; Biblical Counseling Coalition  
Council Member

*“As the father of two teenage daughters, with friends of varying ‘sexualities’ I was delighted to read this book. It is a fantastic little primer and will be extremely useful for those parents struggling with some of the sexual issues of our day. Down to earth, biblical and full of common sense. Get it.”*

**Mez McConnell**, 20Schemes

*“There are thousands of ways in which this world is screaming in your kid’s ears, ‘Have sex!’ ‘Forget purity!’ ‘It feels good so take it!’ Parents of teenagers need help in an over-sexualized world. Eliza Huie’s *Raising Teens in a Hyper-Sexualized World* is going to be a useful resource for parents. Short, concise, and an easy read, you will walk away with edifying and instructive thoughts for your parenting.”*

**Deepak Reju, PhD**, Pastor of Biblical Counseling and Family Ministry, Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, DC), Author of *On Guard* and *The Pastor and Counseling*

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# KEEPING UP IN A HYPER-SEXUALIZED WORLD

We live in a hyper-sexualized world. Marketers use sex to sell products that are completely unsexy like cat food and drain cleaner. Almost every movie (even if it is a movie for children) has an obligatory sexual reference or scene. Clothing designers create fashion to emphasize a sensual look. Sexual lyrics are common in music. Ready access to the internet makes sex available at your fingertips. With the simple click of a button sex is in full view from just about anywhere. The *Huffington Post* proclaimed this startling statistic: “Porn sites get more visitors each month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter

combined.”<sup>1</sup> So how do parents keep up with such a world? The barrage of messages the media sends and the ease of access to sexually explicit material can leave parents feeling defeated before they even attempt to approach the subject with their children. However, it is vitally important that we do not leave our teens to navigate this subject on their own. It cannot be avoided and it will not go away. We are thinking about it and our kids are thinking about it. It is my hope that this small book will help parents, who are raising teens, to engage more effectively on this topic. There is no easy way to approach the teen years and all of the challenges they bring. Listing several tips will not make navigating this subject easier. Yet my desire is that the guidance here will give you direction where you may feel lost, and encouragement where you may feel defeated. The tips I give are things gathered from walking with parents, from personally parenting teens, and from research and reading on the subject. It is not meant to be exhaustive but will hopefully provide helpful direction as you parent teens in this hyper-sexualized world.

While it is best if parents have begun the conversation about sex long before the teen years, it is my experience that most parents wait as long as they possibly can to bring up the subject. Even then it is usually brought up on a special father—son weekend or a mother and daughter date, and the subject is awkwardly avoided whenever possible from then on out. So this book is for parents of teens who need help right now. It is for parents who are fearful they have waited too long or haven't talked enough. It is for parents whose teens are making concerning choices. It is for parents who think their teens have escaped being challenged in the area of sexuality.

These tips come in the form of what not to do. Each tip starts with “don't.” However, the idea isn't to make you feel guilty or disheartened, but rather to help you to see the grace that God offers us through our parenting triumphs and struggles. It is very possible at this point in your parenting you may have already done some of these “don'ts.” Mistakes are a part of the parenting process. There are no perfect parents. There are no perfect teens. And there are no

perfect parenting books! Just like our teens, we don't always do things the way we should. You have not failed if you have done any of these things. I too have done some of them. But like most things in the teen years, you will usually get more than one swing at issues.

In each "don't" you will see integrated "dos" to help you better interact in situations you may find yourself facing with your teen. In looking at it from this perspective you may better see your own need for Psalm 103 and the grace and mercy found in Christ. With that perspective you can have hope that within every interaction with your teen there is potential for great good. So allow these tips to help you think through how you want to handle that next conversation, or perhaps they will help you to start that next conversation. We are all works in progress, and our teens are no exception. It is also important to remember that God knows your own and your teenager's weaknesses and failings. Psalm 103 is full of good reminders to parents of teens. There is truth there for both yourself and your teen. Before going any further in this book, take a moment to read through Psalm 103, and ask



the Lord to help you hold tight to the perspective presented there. As you read the passage consider both your story and your teen's.

*Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!*  
*Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,  
who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.  
He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.  
The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
He does not deal with us according to our sins,*

*nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who  
fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions  
from us.  
As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who  
fear him.  
For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.*

*As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.  
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from  
everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children, to  
those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.  
The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.  
Bless the LORD, O you his angels,*

*you mighty ones who do his word,  
obeying the voice of his word!  
Bless the LORD, all his hosts,  
his ministers, who do his will!  
Bless the LORD, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

The Lord knows both our frame and our teen's frame, and has compassion on us. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve. In fact, in Christ, our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. He is a forgiving and redeeming God. With this perspective in mind, here are seven tips for parents raising teens in a hyper-sexualized world.

## TIP 1

# DON'T OVERREACT

As she sat across from me tears streamed down her face. Guilt and shock mingled in her words. Through brokenhearted sobs she shared with me how she and her husband had found significantly graphic videos on their thirteen-year-old son's computer. Who was this person with whom she was confronted? She felt so confused, so betrayed. Their young teen was active in youth group, kind to his siblings, and sensitive to the needs of others. He was all a parent could want. Of course he was not perfect, but beyond occasionally forgetting homework or skipping chores to play another round of video games, they had little to complain about regarding him. So his

computer activities seemed so out of place, and his engagement with sexual material so much worse than his parents could have imagined. His mother's response displayed the level of shock this discovery brought.

Suspicious of his new desire to be less visible when "playing games" on his computer, she did some searching one day while he was at school. To her complete shock she was not met by gaming sites in his history, but instead vulgar and graphic videos of sexual acts and visits to pornographic websites. Her world felt shattered. The weight of his innocence lost was unbearable as she scrolled through his history. She couldn't help but cry out loud at this discovery.

When her son came home from school that day he was met by his mother, her face clearly swollen from lengthy crying. She attempted to hold it together but at her first initiation to talk to him, she crumbled and the tears were unstoppable. Understanding what must have been discovered, her son immediately was upset and promised never to do it again. He apologized profusely and begged through tears

for forgiveness. She would expect him to do no less. This was her sensitive child; he had been in tune with right and wrong since he was a toddler. He knew by his mother's reaction that his was a moral failure. "How could you do this?" were the only words she had, delivered with uncontrollable sobs.

His father was no less disappointed. His reaction to the discovery was an attempt to assure this situation would never happen again. He took his son's laptop and told him he would never use it again. To secure this reality he threw the laptop in the trash bin. Both he and his wife were reacting to their pain—pain that in that moment was blocking them from considering how best to respond to their son.

In situations like this it is very challenging for parents to know how to respond. As a parent your heart is breaking. You question yourself and your child all at the same time. Perhaps there is anger mixed with the pain. Anger at your child that your trust was trampled. Anger at yourself for being fooled. Anger at your spouse for not being more proactive in

talking to your child about appropriate use of the internet. Maybe even anger at your son's or daughter's friends for sharing the website with them. There may also be grief, disbelief, and shame. Despite this very challenging situation, it is important not to overreact.

When parents overreact to sexual sin in their teens, it can create an environment where sexual sin is perceived as the “unforgivable sin”, but that just is not true. Scripture tells us that “sexually immoral” was once how many of us were described, but we were washed and forgiven (1 Corinthians 6:9—11). Overreaction also inhibits continual communication. It is heartbreaking to see your child fall into sexual sin, but parents need to take their heartbreak to the Lord first, and be willing to explore what it means to respond thoughtfully rather than react shockingly.

Overreaction can also come in the form of punishments so significant that your teen will see you as someone to hide from when they fall. A father once told his teenaged daughter that if he ever found out she was having sex with her boyfriend, she would not be welcome

in their home any longer. In fear of losing connection with a family she loved she began living a life of hiding her sexual activity, leading to deep loneliness. Another teen told me that his parents said if he ever got involved in pornography or sexual activity they would stop paying for his college. As a freshman in college, and a young Christian, he did struggle with porn and this was greatly troubling to him, but it was not something he was going to talk to his parents about because he understood their consequences.

Sexual sin is not the unforgivable sin. It is serious but forgivable. Your teens needs to hear of the cleansing that is theirs in Christ. They need to know that they can be washed clean. They need to know and see that this is where the gospel becomes very relevant. Christ died for their sexual sin. They need to know they can have forgiveness from God, but they also need to know they can have forgiveness from you. If God does not hold this against them, when they repent, then neither should you. Holding forgiveness out to teens makes repentance all the more desirable.



Likewise, do not react in such a way that this stops all conversation about sexual matters. Talking about sex with your teen is awkward and challenging, but overreactions to their mistakes will make it all the more difficult for them to talk to you in the future. To avoid overacting consider the following:

- Go to the Lord first. Pray for wisdom to know how to approach your child. Remember your own struggle for sexual purity, and ask the Lord to keep your heart humble and your words wise.
- Remember that sexual interest is a normal part of growing up. At one time the opposite sex was gross and annoying, but suddenly, with the help of hormones, they have become much more interesting. Your teens are created by God as sexual beings. Walk with them in understanding the good boundaries God has set up for sex, and teach them the value of honoring the Lord with their bodies.

- Give yourself time to reflect before you respond. Instead of simply reacting to situations where your teen has compromised in their behavior or shared a struggle they have had, let them know that you value this conversation and you want to take some time to think through how to answer or respond.

The Lord is merciful to give us many opportunities with our children. If you have had moments of overreacting to their mistakes, take heart in our redeeming God who uses all things for good. Prayerful reflection and sensitivity to the Lord's leading can give you great reason to hope that the next situation that catches you off guard will be an opportunity to respond in step with the Spirit as you lean on Him to guide and direct your responses. He is a good Father who always reacts appropriately even to our overreactions and He can restore these moments.