



UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S YOUTH

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CULTURE QUOTES

“It’s hard to say what has changed the last five years in sex beyond ‘a lot.’ You have all the information and you have no rules. It is a struggle to grow up with a healthy attitude towards sex.”

Anna – 18 Years Old
Edmonton, AB

Hugging is the New Hello

Melissa has never known a time when she and her friends, both male and female, didn't greet each other with hugs. "I didn't know hugging was a new thing. I assumed it was something my parents did as well." The truth is that a hug is the new "hi" to this generation of young people. It has really come into vogue the past few years, even among adults.



Girls freely hug each other and hug the guys as well. The guys are a little more reserved when hugging and may prefer the "man-pat" which involves shaking right hands followed by a right shoulder-to-shoulder bump. It looks more masculine. However, the body contact is still there; twice in fact.

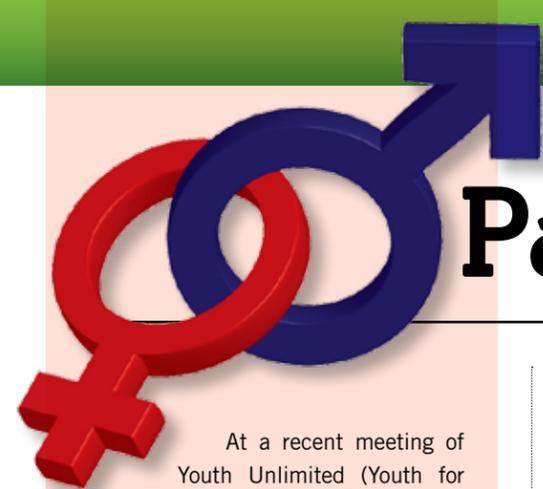
Francine Kopun writing for *centralparent.ca* says the most popular hug is the side-squeeze: Teenagers stand beside each other; they extend their arms to the side and move in for a cheek-to-cheek hug. This may sometimes be accompanied by squealing. Some say the trend is the result of the "no-touch" policies developed in the 1990s in response to a growing concern over child sexual abuse.

Youth Unlimited believes that a couple of other social factors have come into play as well. **First**, the continued break down of the family has left more and more young people without significant rela-

tionships with parents and other adults. As God-created human beings, we were made to live in community and community involves hugs, kisses, and squeezes from loved ones. For boys it often comes in the form of play or rough-housing but it is still there. We love it when someone touches our arm or gives us a hug. It reminds us we are human and being touched by a hug or man-pat tells us we are still alive.

Second, there are thousands of kids in Canada starving... for relationships. Kids spend endless hours on Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging but never really see or speak to another person. A 21-year-old youth worker asked if her generation was having trouble developing human relationships. The question came from her observation that many of her friends seem uncomfortable or incapable of creating lasting personal friendships. After all, real relationships require time, energy, and patience; they don't come instantly. It would then seem logical that kids who are longing for relationship and human contact would then be overly exuberant when seeing a friend in person and respond with a hug rather than the normal hello. Besides, a hug feels much better and what do we really mean by hello anyway?

Next time you see a couple of young people employing their social ritual of hugging, think about what may lie behind it. Life for them is a seamless world of technology which is so impersonal and so virtual. The new media can never replace our longing for human touch, especially a good squeeze.



Parents Need to Talk About... Sex

At a recent meeting of Youth Unlimited (Youth for Christ) workers from across Canada, it was very apparent that one of the most pressing issues facing our young people is sexual promiscuity. Every staff person had a sad story about what they were seeing in their communities. The common thread was the number of kids getting involved at younger and younger ages. It isn't uncommon for 11 years olds to now be involved in sexual activities.

Things are changing, and changing quickly. Anna, 18, from Edmonton, Alberta puts it this way when asked how sex has changed since she became a teenager. *"It's hard to say what has changed, beyond 'a lot.' Sexuality has become very individualized yet open; something that whacks you in the face everywhere you look but something that is also considered above judgment. Sort of like telling the government and church to stay out of the bedroom while inviting the media in. You have the information, and you have no rules."*

Most adults don't realize it but one of the best methods of restraining adolescent sexual behaviour is *talking*. Research shows that parents who talk to their children about issues of sexuality have kids who often delay involvement and intercourse longer. It is truly a challenge for moms and dads to get their message across in a culture of no restraint; a culture which looks down upon young people who wish to remain sexually pure.

The National Campaign for Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in Washington, DC offers these "ten tips" based on their research for helping parents talk with kids about sex. Although designed for parents, it is great advice for anyone working with or caring about teenagers.

1. Be clear about your sexual values and attitudes. Communicating with your children about sex, love and relationships is more successful when you are certain in your own mind about the issue. Parents need to be clear on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They also need to be able to explain why they set the standards as they do.

2. Talk with your kids early and often about sex, and be specific. Most young people know far more about sex than their parents realize. Talking about sex is part of their world and is much more common and "out there" than a generation ago. Kids are often more comfortable with the topic than the parents trying to speak to them. Be honest, open, and respectful. Remember, it is a two-way conversation, not a lecture.

3. Supervise and monitor your children and teens. Establish rules, curfews, and standards of acceptable behaviour and enforce them. If the rule says no members of the opposite sex in the bedroom with a door closed, enforce it. If boyfriends and girlfriends are not allowed in the house when parents are absent, enforce it or arrange for others to be present during that time. If need be, call the other person's parents and talk to them about your standards.

4. Know your children's friends and their families. Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teens become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents even meet with those parents to set common rules and boundaries. Welcome your children's friends into your home and talk to them openly.

5. Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating. Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble.

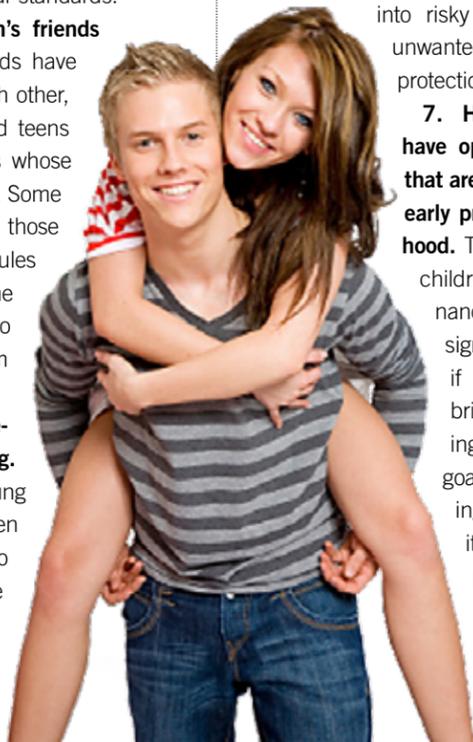


Let your child know about your strong feelings about this throughout childhood - don't wait until they are teens.

6. Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is.

And don't allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is. Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl but the risk of matters getting out of hand increases when the guy is much older than the girl. Try setting a limit of no more than a two- (or at most three-) years age difference. The power differences between younger girls and older boys or men can lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection.

7. Help your teenagers have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood. The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright. This means helping them set meaningful goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true, and helping them reach their goals.



8. Let your kids know that you value education highly. Encourage your children to take school seriously and to set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood. Be very attentive to your children's progress in school and intervene early if things are not going well.

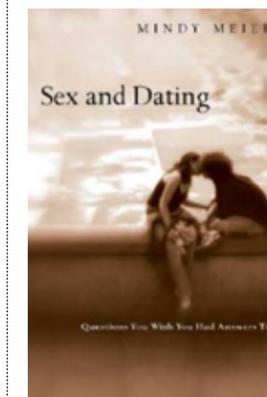
9. Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to. The media (television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are chock full of material sending the wrong messages. Sex rarely has meaning, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few people having sex ever seem to be married or even especially committed to anyone. Is this

consistent with your expectations and values? If not, it is important to talk with your children about what the media portray and what you think about it.

10. These first nine tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age. Strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, and rich in communication, and one that emphasizes mutual trust and respect.

It is important to remember that it is never too late to improve a relationship with your children or teen. Never underestimate the great need children feel for a close relationship with

their parents. Most young people want the guidance, approval, and support of a loving mom and dad.



Great book resource by Mindy Meier

"Lone-Mothers" a Growing Trend

According to Statistics Canada, there were over 1.1 million female lone-parent families in Canada in 2006, representing 80% of all single parent families, and 12.7% of Canada's nearly nine million families. Compared to the picture taken by the 1981 Census, this represents a doubling of the number of lone-mother families in Canada.

Not only has the number increased the last 25 years, lone-mothers "look" different. The Vanier Family Institute points out that these mothers are more likely to be in their late 30s and 40s (61% in 2006 vs. 43% in 1981). They are also better educated with 82% of single moms in 2006 having completed grade 12 while in 1981 only half had achieved that education level.

No one ever sets out to be a single mother and their task of raising children without a father is challenging. They do alone what normally takes two healthy parents to fulfill. Some do a great job of going it alone but the majority often deals with serious issues.

As the number of fatherless children has risen over the past couple of generations, so have teen suicide, alcohol usage, drug addiction, teen pregnancies and promiscuity. Research has shown for years that girls who don't have fathers (or who have no meaningful rela-



tionship with their father if he is present) tend to be sexually active at younger ages and have more partners. Boys can often turn to aggressive behaviours as a way of dealing with the anger of a missing father.

The old African proverb that it takes a whole village to raise a child seems strangely pertinent to current Canadian culture. We need to be mindful of the young people around us, not just our own, and their family circumstances. Many men pass up opportunities to positively influence the fatherless young people in their sphere of influence. As one teenager recently exclaimed, "I'm going a million miles an hour, have no idea where I am going, and have no one to walk with me." If more fathers would give time to at least one young person outside their own family, we could change some desperate lives for the good and for ever.

Two NEW Seminars for Parents and Youth Workers

In addition to these two new seminars, please visit www.paulrobertson.ca to check out the other eleven. To book Paul to do a seminar for parents, youth workers, or professional groups, please call 905-453-7991 or email paulrobertson@rogers.com. Now is a great time to book for 2010-2011.

Understanding a Generation Who Adore Themselves



For the majority of Canadians kids, the most influential institution in their lives is not school, friends, or family but modern media. The message it brings shapes their values, beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes. Media answers every question a young person can have especially when there is no significant adult involved in their life. Is there a God? Is

it OK to have premarital sex? Should I respect those in authority over me? How do I settle things when someone wrongs me?

The life of a teen is composed of a series of responses to everyday queries including this: *Who or what should be the centre of my universe?*

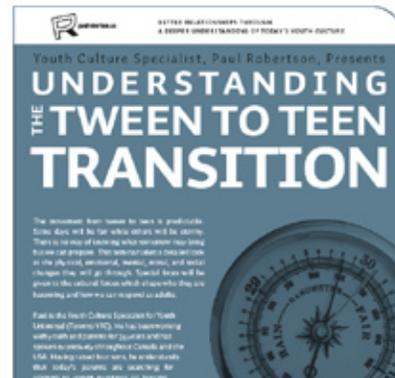
The answer at every turn in pop culture and media is simple – YOU! The loudest message they hear today is “it’s all about me.” Youth culture has fallen madly in love with itself. The new holy trinity of “me, myself, and I” is to be worshiped at all cost and at all times. No one is more important than you. You are entitled to everything and you deserve the best possible with the least amount of effort. The most disturbing part of all is that it is perfectly normal, and acceptable, to be vain, self-centered, and conceited. The problem is we are raising a generation who care only about themselves. Altruism is slowly being suffocated.

This seminar looks at the growing trend of celebrity narcissism – its implications for our kids and how we can help them cope with the growing pressure to focus only on them. In addition to demonstrating the development of narcissism in today’s youth culture, a number of practical responses for both parents and youth workers are presented.

“I have always been impressed with Paul’s commitment to kids and culture. His presentations to parents and youth workers on both sides of the border are insightful and encouraging!”

Josh McDowell, Josh McDowell Ministry, Dallas, TX

Understanding the Tween to Teen Transition



The movement from tween to teen is predictable. Some days will be fair while others will be stormy. There is no way of knowing what tomorrow may bring but we can prepare.

A preteen is a person under the age of thirteen. Most people think of them being a person aged 10-12. Marketers call them

“twens.” A blend of between and teen, “tween” in this context is generally considered to cover the age range from eight to twelve years.

For parents and youth workers, the tween years can be exciting and challenging, often in the same moment. One thing for sure, the culture wants them to grow up too quickly. Little girls find their bodies changing at earlier ages; marketers want them to dress like sexy women. Little boys learn early that to be accepted you need to have the right kind of body type – buff and cut. They may look grown up but they are still children at heart on their way to adolescence.

This seminar takes a detailed look at the physical, emotional, mental, moral, and social changes they go through. Special focus will be given to the cultural forces which shape who they are becoming and how we can respond as adults. In addition, over 20 practical responses for parents and youth workers are provided to help our children make the tween to teen transition.



Paul Robertson is the Youth Culture Specialist and Director of Church and Family Resources for Youth Unlimited.

www.paulrobertson.ca