

Dealing With Current ‘Hot Topics’ Without Getting Fired

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Today’s world is filled with new challenges that the Church hasn’t faced before. The children in our ministry are exposed to what we would consider “hot topics” regularly at school. Both parents and the Church would like children to be shielded from these “hot topics” for as long as possible. The problem with this approach is that the Christian “side” of these topics is often silent, while the world shouts in the children’s ears!

The Challenge



1. The “world” (schoolteachers, media, friends, textbooks, etc.) is shouting their message (God is “old fashioned,” the Bible is not a valuable or viable source for life guidance – it is “old fashioned,” homosexuality is a personal choice, and should be supported) to our children!



2. The Church is not as “loud” as the “world.” Why?
 - a. Fear of “offending” parents
 - b. Fear of destroying innocence
 - c. Fear of not being viewed as “tolerant”
 - d. Respect for the parents



3. The result of the Church’s “silence” may be that the “world’s” “voice” is the first one heard! And the only “voice” the children hear from the Church is “hate.”
4. Three distinct expectations from parents:
 - a. To help them teach their own children about the “hot topics”
 - b. To teach their children about the “hot topics” for them
 - c. To only teach the Bible, and nothing else
2. Trying to address the “hot topics,” while “navigating” through the expectations could be dangerous.
3. We can’t address all the “hot topics” with the children themselves (the fear of “ending innocence,” or inadvertently interesting children in the topic before they are ready to deal with it.)

The Solution

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
Proverbs 22:6

1. Parent Support / Involvement
 - a. Understanding / listening to the parents
 - b. Connecting with the parents (to develop trust and a relationship)
 - c. Supporting / training / networking with the parents (seminars, messages, “tools” to use)
2. “Spiritual Immunization” (Similar to vaccines or immune system boosters)
 - a. “Immerse” in God’s Word
 - b. Inspire with significant godly adult influence
 - c. Instill a personal definition of “right” and “wrong” based on God’s Word
 - d. Challenge children to find satisfaction in God (the shepherd), and thus not “hunger” for worldly things
 - e. Address the “need” without ever talking about the “hot topic”



3. Active Listening (compare to Paul's example in Acts 17)
 - a. Listen for hidden "needs" in comments (discernment)
 - b. Listen for unspoken questions or interests (connect with parents)
 - c. Listen for spoken questions or interests (connect with parents)

Paul's example in Acts 17

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.'

...They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.' (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)"

"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.'"

4. Satisfy the "hunger" or need (through appropriate means). Ask yourself:
 - a. Can the need be "satisfied" through appropriate means?
 - b. Can appropriate satisfactions of the need be "positively reinforced" through words or actions from others?
 - c. What does God's Word say about the need?



5. General guidelines for satisfying the "hunger" or need appropriately:
 - a. Provide clear and strong scripture as foundation for identity, value, and morals
 - b. Compliment the child consistently regarding worth, talents, etc. in God's eyes
 - c. Develop healthy relationships with godly mentors (support parents)
 - d. Provide opportunities for service to others
 - e. Involve the child in fun activities as often as possible

Examples: Carrots instead of donuts, water instead of soda, salad instead of pasta, etc.

6. When possible, address the "hot topic" directly
 - a. Consultation with parents

"Your child asked an interesting question today..." or "Your child expressed an interest in _____ today. How can I help you in dealing with that interest?"
 - b. Consultation with church supervisors
 - c. Age-appropriate progression (from "Be nice to everyone" to "Take your thoughts captive," to "Keep yourself pure before marriage")

7. Jesus' example with the "Woman at the well." (John 4)
 - a. Jesus perceived her "need" for significance, security, and the love of a man.
 - b. Jesus supplied her with "living water" to quench her thirst.



Expressions / Needs / Solutions Chart – Related To Gender Identity

Expression	Possible Need	Solution
1. A “tomboy” girl	For more physical activity For more “danger” For more challenge To be valued by males To learn to be “feminine”	Affirm that girls can be physical too. Affirm that girls can do dangerous things. Affirm that girls can face challenges. Confident male compliments and value. Confident females modeling, supporting. <i>The story of Esther (Esther 1-10)</i> <i>The story of Ruth (Ruth 1-4)</i> <i>Proverbs 31 woman (Prov. 31)</i> <i>The story of Rahab (Joshua 2)</i> <i>Jesus’ affirmation of females</i>
2. A “soft” (nonathletic) boy	To be valued beyond sports To be affirmed artistically To be affirmed emotionally To be challenged mentally	Strong, nonathletic male connections Affirmation and use of artistic ability Affirm godly males’ feelings, emotions Male/female affirmation of thoughts <i>Jesus’ emotions (weeping, anger, etc.)</i> <i>Paul’s humility (Philippians 3)</i> <i>Peter’s emotions (Matthew 26: 69-75)</i> <i>Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10)</i> <i>God looks at the heart (1Sam. 16:1-13)</i>
3. A boy or girl who is very “touchy” or “huggy”	Physical touch Affirmation through touch Attention from opposite sex Attention from same sex	Plenty of appropriate touch Touch and “Good job” affirmations Strong male/female attention/affirmation Strong male/female attention/affirmation <i>“Touch is good within boundaries”</i> <i>“Don’t touch in swim suit areas”</i> <i>“Personal space and private areas”</i> <i>“Be a man/woman of God”</i> <i>We are wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14)</i> <i>God is always with us (Ps. 139)</i> <i>Acknowledge Him always (Prov.3:5)</i>
4. “I think I’m gay.”	Gender identity Gender comfort Being “trendy” or “cool” Acceptance Significance	Compliment gender qualities Reinforce gender uniqueness/value <i>“I’m so glad God made you a boy/girl.”</i> Compliment him/her on talents, gifts, etc. <i>“I love you just the way you are.”</i> <i>“God loves you just the way you are.”</i> <i>“Follow God, not your feelings.”</i> Affirm his/her value <i>“What an awesome boy/girl you are!”</i> <i>“You’re a powerful boy/girl for God!”</i> <i>Male/female - in His image (Gen.1: 27)</i> <i>Who a “man of God” is (1 Timothy 6)</i> <i>Who a “man of God” is (Eph. 4: 17-32)</i> <i>Who a “man of God” is (Eph. 5:1-33)</i> <i>Who a “man of God” is (1Tim. 4: 12)</i> <i>Who a “woman of God” is (1Peter 3:3-6)</i> <i>Who a “woman of God” is (Prov. 31)</i> <i>Who a “woman of God” is (Eph.4:17-32)</i> <i>Who a “woman of God” is (Eph. 5:1-33)</i> <i>Who a “woman of God” is (1Tim. 4: 12)</i>
5. “He/she is so gay”!	To be valued Significance Acceptance	Compliment him/her re: love for others See above re: “significance” Affirm the value of being “unique” <i>God made us in His image (Gen. 1:27)</i> <i>God made males+females (Gen. 1:27)</i> <i>Homosexuality is a sin (Rom. 1: 26-28)</i>