

PROFANITY IS THE NEW "NORMAL" AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

-WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PUT A CORK IN IT.

6 out of 10 teachers think the problem is much more serious than 5 years ago.

Gallup researchers asked 13- to 17-year-olds to rank a long list of "serious behaviors". They found that "using profanity in public" was considered the least serious offense of all. Not so long ago, foul language was common only in prison cellblocks, HBO comedy specials, and R-rated action flicks. Now there's a blue streak running through algebra class, supermarket express lines, peewee soccer games, and even church mission trips. The Center for Media and Public Affairs found that profane language is used once every six minutes on network TV shows. every two minutes on premium cable shows. and every three minutes in major motion pictures. FOX featured the most foul-mouthed shows among the broadcast networks. while HBO led the cable networks.

THE CASE FOR CLEAN

What's a youth worker to do about profanity? If you set yourself up as one of the verbal morality police, you'll reap frustration. You might claim victory within your church walls, but what impact have you had on your young people once they go home? And do cuss words flash through their hearts and minds even if they're unspoken? We're after a deeper change than simple policing can bring.

Jesus looked beyond outward behaviors (whether obviously immoral or piously religious), and focused instead on people's hearts. He was interested in real transformation, not facade renovation. Right now in your life and mine, he's working to transform us from the inside out. You can't change your students' habits by mind-meld, but you can foster purity of speech and thought in them.

1. Scripture does take a stand on cursing. Ephesians 5:3-4: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." James 3:9-11: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. This should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?"

2. Cursing denies Jesus' presence in all things, at all times. Ask your kids how they think Jesus feels when they drop the "f" bomb in his lap. He lives inside them, so he knows everything they say. Do they flinch when Jesus hears them cuss, just like they would if Grandma was in the room? Better yet, ask them to imagine Jesus peppering the Sermon on the Mount with some colorful adjectives. Can they do it? Why do we think speech that's unacceptable for Jesus is okay for us?

3. It's impossible to unconditionally love someone using foul language. "They'll know we are Christians by our love." In a world that's hungering for unconditional love, cursing does nothing to communicate grace.

4. Cursing violates the spirit of humility. One slip of the tongue does not doom a kid, but it could be a gauge for his character. Christianity is all about laying down your life for Christ, and for others- it's hypocritical to hold on to foul language when humility demands you lay it down.

5. Cursing is a fake alternative to real power (and, for that matter, real humor). Some young people use profanity to compensate for their lack of power. When they spout taboo words, they feel more powerful. Using normal, acceptable speech will not (in their minds) get people to listen to them or force their desired result. When they use foul language, they're exerting a false maturity. We should challenge kids to true maturity, not cheap substitutes. We should offer them the freedom and authority in Christ, not what the world offers instead. And any idiot can get a laugh using profanity because shocking words produce laughter- but they're not truly funny. Ask kids to put their favorite foul-mouthed comics to the test. Remove the curse words from their acts and replace them with tamer alternatives- are they still funny? Real humor doesn't need fake gimmicks to produce laughter.

6. Cursing undermines integrity. When kids use swear words in certain situations but not in others, they're teaching themselves to play fast- and- loose with their integrity. We respect integrity, and we disrespect situational character. A word that's acceptable only in limited company or location shouldn't be used at all.

7. The broader culture still labels foul-talkers as ill-educated, uncreative, and lacking in self-control. Society, believe it or not, still looks down on serial cussing. Foul language is a marker for a poor education, anemic self-control, and a distinct lack of creativity. Ask them how many people who consistently use profane speech (outside the entertainment industry) get good jobs, gain positions of power, or earn prestige. Next, ask them to think about their initial impressions of people who cuss do they assume they're intelligent, happy, successful, and Christian? Probably not.

8. Clean language is the ultimate counterculture rebellion Finally, surprise your young people by telling them that people who keep their speech clean are out-rebelling the culture's I notorious bad boys and girls. Even a two-year-old can say F words. The world notices people who refrain from using them & respects them for it. All kids want to stand out from the crowd and carve their own path as unique individuals. Clean speech is one way to do it. In fact, pure language might be the new cool.