

## Cut pop culture puppet master's strings

**S**avvy. A necessary new conventional wisdom. As important as reading, writing and arithmetic, if you want to help kids succeed in the information age, you've got to have pop culture savvy.

Back to school is an anxiety-filled time for any parent. Those feelings are more pronounced if your student is in middle or high school and with good reason. A whole generation of students that fancy themselves more enlightened and independent than anyone else is actually being herded like mindless cattle to the cash registers.

What's for sale? Their identities. Parents who've endured the back-to-school shopping frenzy understand how advertisers are franchising the teen experience.

Big companies pay specialty consultants top dollar to give them the inside track to the buying habits of our sons and daughters. The



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have.

How can parents combat the ideas that are served to them through music videos, slick advertising and TV shows like *The O.C.*? The first step is to acknowledge that pop culture puppet masters exist. Secondly, you not only need to be aware of the tactics that advertisers use to manipulate your kids, you need to utilize some savvy-based tactics of your own to save them from a "virtueless reality." The following are three tips on effective pop culture savvy:

**Be involved:** To teens, relationship is of the highest

\$150 billion, 12 to 29 demographic is characterized by a huge wallet and an empty soul. It's a scary trend that shapes every experience our teens

virtue. Today's students seek out advice from the people they consider friends. Ask questions without first framing them with your "parental" opinion. If we let our emotions block our ability to respect their opinions, we lose an important opportunity to connect.

**Be informed:** Involved doesn't simply mean shutting our kids to and from their social events. Neither does simply knowing their social calendar make us informed. Make a reasonable effort to research the sources of information that students identify themselves by.

**Be inspired:** Your teenager's world needs to be influenced by people who have a stake in their success. If only students knew how their passionate pursuit of relevance and significance was so irrelevant and insignificant to the companies who sell them their identities. Focus on those innate

characteristics in your teen that you as a parent see and understand and let them inspire you. Expose them to voices of wisdom like teachers, pastors and other community leaders and allow other passionate, creative and brilliant people to inspire your teens.

There's something uniquely untamed about teenagers who find their identity in their higher purpose. The gateway to adulthood is discovering your ability to care. As parents, our reason for existence is to help our kids navigate life's challenges. You can use pop culture savvy to let them know they can tap an inner compass to define themselves.

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