

## Raising Media-Wise Teenagers

### A Healthy Training Menu

By Bob Waliszewski

Upon recognizing the wisdom of feeding the spiritual nature, your teens must then have the discipline to make that happen (Jas. 1:22-25). Old habits die hard. And the flesh seems committed to undermining spiritual nourishment. That's why parents need to develop and nurture new habits in young media fans eager to go the distance for God.

Here in Colorado Springs, Colo., we have the privilege of hosting our nation's Olympic hopefuls at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. There we conducted an interview with Judy Nelson, nutrition coordinator with the center's sports medicine division. The more Judy described her relationship with aspiring Olympians, the more she unknowingly offered a prescription for adults who want to help young people develop a healthy media diet.

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- **Even good kids need coaching.** "You'd think that, being Olympic athletes, they'd eat what's good for them, but that's not always the case," Judy admitted. Does this sound familiar? Just as a body driven by an Olympic dream can be seduced by a Quarter Pounder with cheese or a triple scoop of Ben & Jerry's, good kids from solid Christian homes and dynamic youth groups will be tempted to entertain themselves with movies, TV and music that are little more than media junk food. It happens all the time. That's why parents need to guide even the most serious young Christians toward edifying choices.
- **Avoid a hit-list mentality.** Judy has also learned that, in her profession, throwing out sermonettes about nutrition doesn't work. Now, instead of giving athletes a rigid list of dietary do's and don'ts, she earns their respect by addressing each on his or her own level. In a personal, caring way, they discuss individual needs and goals, and how the proper diet can help accomplish them. In the same way, a heavy-handed attempt at controlling children's entertainment choices often breeds frustration.

That's because presenting adolescents with a "hit list" of forbidden fare doesn't build critical thinking skills or involve them in godly decision-making. What does? Taking time to engage teens in dialogue about content and messages framed in biblical standards in terms they understand.

- **Maintain a healthy relationship.** Judy mingles with the athletes, building a rapport that earns her the right to give advice. Too many parents believe they have a license to lecture youngsters simply because they've been around the track a few more times. A close day-to-day relationship is vital to our effectiveness as counselors.

- **Adapt diets to individuals.** Judy also recognizes that an athlete's age has significant impact on his or her diet. So it is with popular media. For example, what might be acceptable for a teen may not be suitable for an 8-year-old sibling. Keep in mind that there are, of course, poisons that should not be consumed by anyone.
- **Help children "dine out" wisely.** "[The athletes] eat best when they're here at the training center," Judy shared, "but if they're away at school or somewhere else, they can get into bad habits." Likewise, it's easy to control your children's entertainment diet at home or in church. But what about when they're at a friend's house? What happens when they go away to college? Only those who have internalized a biblically-based discernment message will leave home equipped to run the marathon of a holy life.
- **Accept your own limitations.** Finally, Judy Nelson realizes all she can do is offer prospective Olympians her wealth of dietary wisdom. She can't feed them. And though we hate to admit it, we can't indefinitely control the media diets of the young people we love. After we've done our prayerful best to give them healthy guidelines, it's up to them to bring home the gold.

In the quest to raise media-wise young people, it's important to know that you're likely to encounter a few philosophical curves on discernment road. Because many teens today mistake "reality" for "truth" and "tolerance" for "love," you'll likely want to hit these head on so there's no room left for error.