

WISDOM

By Joe Cavanaugh

I recall an incident at Southdale shopping center when I saw a young mother swat her four-year old and reprimand, "You're acting like a child." I wanted to say, "Excuse me, your child is a child." As a new father, I can see their perspective: parenting would be so much easier if children acted less like children.

Kids are kids; they are not adults. And kids need adults to act as adults in their lives. Children rarely are able to navigate the path to adulthood by themselves, a situation which bodes poorly for the many children and teenagers who lack caring and courageous adults in their lives to guide them through the many challenges they face.

I am often amazed at the wonderful insights that young people share. On the other hand, I am rarely impressed by their wisdom. Wisdom is the result of experience; embarking on life's difficult journey, and finding your way through to the other side. Grandparents have wisdom. Teenagers—though open and eager to learn—do not yet have wisdom. We endanger our children when we expect them to act and think with wisdom while their moral and decision-making processes are still in development. The danger of adults abdicating their responsibilities and neglecting to share their wisdom is that kids can be harmed — sometimes irreparably.

Adults need to be intimately involved in young people's lives, creating healthy and wise boundaries to keep them safe — whether it is a gate across the stairs for a toddler or clear rules concerning drinking for middle school students. Youth speaker extraordinaire Mark Scharenbroich explains it well when he says a parent's job is to draw the line; a teen's job is to cross the line; and the parent's job is not to move the line but to bring the teen back to the right side of the line.

Young people need our wisdom. They need to see that we have navigated the ups and downs of life—and so can they. They need to learn that when we say "no" to something (and they need to hear "no" more than many of us are saying it), it's because we love them and know a thing or two about life that they don't.

What, in your wisdom, you can do to help young people:

- Read David Walsh's book, *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*.
- Don't let your teenagers go to un-chaperoned parties, or on un-chaperoned spring break trips.
- Limit your child's screen time. (time spent in front of the TV, computer, video games, etc.)
Young people now average 44 hours per week (According to the National Institute on Media and the Family).

**For more information on Youth Frontiers, please visit www.youthfrontiers.org.

