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**Hot Buttons Series**

*Hot Buttons Internet Edition*

*Hot Buttons Dating Edition*

**Releasing Fall 2012**

*Hot Buttons Drug Edition*

*Hot Buttons Sexuality Edition*



# **HOT BUTTONS**

**INTERNET  
EDITION**

**Nicole O'Dell**

 **Kregel**  
*Publications*

*Hot Buttons Internet Edition*

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

O'Dell, Nicole.

Hot buttons / Nicole O'Dell. — Internet ed.

p. cm. — (Hot buttons series)

Includes bibliographical references (p. ).

1. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity.

3. Internet—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Christian teenagers—Conduct of life. I. Title.

BV4529.O343 2012 248.8'45—dc23 2012003661

ISBN 978-0-8254-4239-1

*Printed in the United States of America*

12 13 14 15 16 / 5 4 3 2 1

*The Hot Buttons series, as a whole, is dedicated to my mom who had to deal with more hot buttons when I was a teen than she'd care to remember. Also to my six children who have so graciously provided the research I needed to write these books . . . whether I wanted them to or not. And to my husband, Wil, who somehow managed to make my teen years look like a walk in the park.*



*Hot Buttons Internet Edition is dedicated to my writer-sisters: Jenny B. Jones, Cara Putman, Kim Cash Tate, Cindy Thomson, Marybeth Whalen, and Kit Wilkinson. Your sisterhood is proof that the Internet can be a wonderful place.*

*Love you all!*

▶▶▶ *When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.*

—MARK TWAIN

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# Preface



Years ago, when I was searching for ways to lead my children to make good decisions, I decided it would be far better to talk to them proactively about issues they would one day face than it would be to wait until they were buried under the consequences of their poor choices. I believed it would be far easier to guide the way they perceived the information and to help them understand the consequences of poor decisions if they could look at them objectively, without the added stress of peer pressure and other outside influences. I needed a safe way to talk with my kids about things like sex, drugs, alcohol, addictions, dating, pornography, Internet use, and other hot-button issues—perhaps even before they actually knew what those things were.

So, I devised a game I called Scenarios.

I would give my kids a scenario as though it were a situation they were facing at the moment. It ended with a choice they had to make between three or four options, which I spelled out to them. I made sure they felt safe in choosing any option—even if it was clearly the wrong one. This was a learning exercise, and I much preferred that my kids make their mistakes within the safety of a dining room discussion rather than in a less forgiving environment.

The practice of Scenarios became a favorite activity in my home and proved invaluable in preparing my teens to make good choices. The best parts were the talks we'd have after the choices were made and the consequences were presented. They felt free to explore, ask questions, and experiment safely with the options—and then, when similar scenarios came up in real life, they were prepared to make the right choices.

The Hot Buttons series was birthed as a way for you to bring the principles and practices of my family's Scenarios game into your home. This book deals with Internet activity, online access, and the various dangers lurking in the cyber world. When you start to delve into these issues, you're going to see the threat in every direction. Ultimately, God is in control, but you are His ambassador in your home.

In part 1, I will cover the idea of confronting hot-button issues in general—why, when, and how you should take a preemptive stand. Some parents may feel that ten or eleven years old is too young to start talking openly with tweens about things like pornography or sex trafficking. These introductory chapters will explain why I vehemently disagree.

In part 2, I detail various hot-button issues to help you understand the specifics of each Internet hot button your kids will face. Each chapter of this section includes warning signs to watch for and recommended action steps to take right away.

In part 3, I give you everything you need to start pressing the hot buttons and proactively preparing your teens to make good choices. It's in this section that you will find Strategic Scenarios to work through with your kids. These Strategic Scenarios will enable you to approach these hot-button topics and give your kids the same opportunity to make safe discoveries that I gave to my kids—and I trust you'll see the same results I have.

In part 4, you'll have the opportunity to identify the specific Internet hot buttons in your home, reverse mistakes, and do the work to repair any damage that may have already been done. Then you'll be prompted to make a plan to avoid those dangers in the future. You'll also be walked through the dual processes of confession and forgiveness, both within your family and in your relationship with God.

One thing you'll notice about each Hot Buttons book is that they're all structured in the same way. Some of the content is reiterated with subtle changes to direct it to the issue being discussed. This similarity is intentional. The truth of God's Word doesn't change, and the importance of good decisions is universal. The Bible is clear and effective—and speaks for itself. I recommend that you work through the parent-teen study guide for each book, even if you've done it before. The Lord will show you new things as you approach His Word for answers on each new hot-button issue.

The Hot Buttons books are designed to serve as manuals for those tough, preemptive discussions you need to have with your children. My goal is that you'll be able to pick up any edition and use it as a learning and teaching tool to prepare yourself and your kids to face potential dangers. Then when a specific hot-button issue pops up in the future, you can come back to the appropriate edition and use it as a quick-reference guide.

These books (and other tools and resources out there) are great ways to tackle the tough issues our kids face, but nothing is more effective than prayer and communication. I pray that you'll use the Hot Buttons books as steps leading you to better communication with the Father through prayer and with your teens through open dialogue.

# Acknowledgments

Wil, Erik, Natalie, Emily, Logan, Megan, and Ryleigh. I'm so in love with you people. Thanks for loving me back and supporting me on this journey.

I want to thank Diana Sharples and Jill Williamson for their invaluable, rapid-fire critiques of this book and their feedback on the Hot Buttons concept as a whole. Jill, the changes you've already made to your own online presence in response to this book are tangible proof that the words sank in. Thanks to you both for your eyes, ears, prayers, and friendship!

My writer-sisters: Jenny Jones, Cara Putman, Kim Cash Tate, Cindy Thomson, Marybeth Whalen, and Kit Wilkinson. You guys are my heart . . . my partners in writing, and in life. I am so thankful to God for your humor, your prayers, your support, and even the occasional, "Are you crazy?!"

Valerie Comer, the sounding board of your mind is where many of my ideas are fleshed out. I so appreciate your never-ending questions and challenges that pull the best of me out from somewhere in there. When I'm satisfied with good enough, you make me reach for more. And funny enough, you're another one who shouts a well-deserved, "Are you crazy?!" on a semi-regular basis.

Chip MacGregor, literary agent extraordinaire, thanks for not telling me I'm crazy, even when you think it. Thanks for helping me navigate the rough waters of the publishing industry, and for having faith in me.

And, lastly, I'm forever thankful to God for His redemptive power and His forgiveness. Without those two things, I'd have no authority to write this book.

**PART ONE**

**Internet**

**HOT**

**BUTTONS**

What exactly is a hot-button issue? A *hot button* is any emotional or controversial issue that has the potential to trigger intense reaction. What topics jump to mind that fit this description when you think of teens and tweens? Pretty much everything that pummels your kids with temptation and threatens to pull them away from a walk with God. Music, dating, computer use, texting, partying . . . The list goes on. Moms and Dads, these issues are real and often confusing. They require attention—*before* they arise. Ignoring them can have dire consequences that our children will have to live with for the rest of their lives. The decision to just wait until an actual situation arises before we face a subject is naive, at best, and possibly lethal. We have both a parental right and a godly responsibility to hit these issues hard, head-on. If we approach them preemptively, our teens will be prepared to face and handle life's toughest battles.

# Prepared:

## Answering *Why*

It is surprising how little power many parents exercise over the lives of their teens. In so many homes, the teens are in charge. They use manipulation tactics, bad attitudes, arguments, and even threats to get their way. They play on parents' fears and weaknesses, and they know just when to strike and how far is too far. Parents throw their hands up in the air and surrender the fight. Their lukewarm tactics become about surviving, not thriving. They figure they only have to endure the trial of the teen years for a short time and, if they can just get through this season, things will be better.

Mom, Dad, if that's your attitude, please think about how that sounds. You're basically saying you aren't going to worry about what your teens do or think, and you're just going to hope and pray that you all reach their adulthood with as few proverbial bruises as possible. I beg you to rethink the teen years. Where infancy was training for toddlerhood, and childhood was preparation for the teen years, the teen years are the foundation for adulthood. It's during these most important years that your teenager will:



- prepare to choose a mate
- establish financial habits
- develop a work ethic
- cultivate parenting skills
- grow into—or out of—a deeper personal relationship with God

The teen years are an extremely important preparation time! And, parents, it's time to stand up and make these years count. You don't need to *get* through these years; you need to *power* through them. Take charge, and make a difference.

I'm not advocating for a take-no-prisoners attitude in our homes, however. Our children need to feel love, not condemnation. They should trust that we're an ally, not the enemy. You're not fighting *against* your kids in hopes of coming out victorious over them; you're in a battle *for* them.

For our struggle is **not against flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and **against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** (Eph. 6:12)

## Dispel the myth of effective insulation.

Let's face it. If we're raising our kids as Christians, they're at a huge disadvantage by the world's standards. The world assumes that teenagers from churchgoing, Christ-following homes are socially underdeveloped, behind the times physically and emotionally, and uneducated in worldly matters like politics, public issues, pretty much everything in the news.

As Christian parents we try to insulate our families from negative outside influences; we keep watch over the things that enter their young minds through television, movies, language, peer pressure, and the Internet. Our goal is not to render them unsavvy but to shield them from the wiles of the enemy. Then things that are seemingly innocuous, like social media, come along and swallow our families whole.

Don't you wish we could walk with our kids through the battles of life—guarding and guiding them through each pressure-filled moment, each decision between right and wrong, each temptation? While God-honoring parents absolutely should have high expectations and maintain a tight grip on the reins as they raise their families, we also need to prepare our kids to stand alone.

You can't control what the world throws at them, but you can affect how prepared they are to defend themselves against the onslaught. In each and every pressure-filled moment of decision, there comes a point just before the final decision is made, a point when all the preparation, forethought, and wisdom we've been equipping our kids with comes to a head. Once the hot button is pushed, the opportunity for laying groundwork is over; in the heat of the moment there's no time for anything else, and they make a choice based on all the work that came before. Our teens need to be equipped to make the right choice; armed with something more than *no*; braced by facts, your wisdom, and God's Word.

Teens will likely face persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right. If we're proactive, our children can reach their teen years already armed with the tools necessary to make hard choices in the face of those afflictions—willing to withstand and endure them for the sake of Christ and for their own well-being.

## Take the mystery out of sin!

If you were to start a new job as a police officer, you'd have to go through a lot of training first, right? They aren't going to just hand you a gun and give you keys to a squad car, then send you out into the community to learn as you go.

You'd be trained to recognize the signs of danger and respond to them with strength and confidence. You'd be given tools to help you remain in control in various situations. You'd understand the power of your weapons and how to use them appropriately. And you'd be trained to stand firm in the face of any kind of threat.

In Mark 14:38, we're warned to watch and pray about temptation. Even for Christian adults, our spirits are willing to avoid temptation, but we are cautioned to be attentive because our bodies are weak. How much more so for someone who isn't prepared for temptation! We may have raised the most well-intentioned kids on the planet—ones whose spirits are willing—but their flesh is weak. They need to be trained.

**Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds;** tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **Teach them to your children,** talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 11:18–19)

We may wish we lived in a Christian bubble, but pretending we do so ignores a huge need. It results in teens who are sent out into the world unarmed and unprepared for situations they can't avoid. Our kids will face temptation, peer pressure, and sinful desires; it's a fact. Why not

arm them with understanding and preparation? It's more important to prepare your children than it is to attempt to create a sterile, sin-free environment in a world that makes it impossible.

Through the knowledge and application of God's Word and the pursuit of His will through advanced preparation, today's youth need to be committed to safe Internet practices before they ever approach a computer. Ephesians 6:13 says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (In chapter 10, we're going to do just that as it pertains to your teens and the Internet.)

Parents can help their kids achieve the level of advanced preparation they'll need to stand by

- helping them figure out why they should care;
- giving them the tools they need to succeed; and
- walking them through the process of making good choices.

*Why should they care?* What's in it for them if they stand on God's Word in the face of peer pressure, risking friendships, popularity, good times? Our teens need to believe that the Lord has a plan for them and His ways are best. The most effective ways to instill those beliefs are to model them and teach them. A time-invested parent, who prays as much as she talks and listens as much as she prays, will have the best chance of raising a child eager and willing to say NO and mean it.

*What tools do they need?* Our teens and preteens need options. A busy life with wholesome things like church activities and sports—alternatives to the negatives. They need to be a part of a family that is serving

the Lord, and they need to be watching parents who practice what they preach. They need to continuously grow in the knowledge of the Word and in relationship with God.

*How can they walk through this?* They need you to walk with them, hand in hand, step by step. Mom, Dad, Guardian—they need you to be aware of what’s going on. They need you to know them well. This requires time, communication, and godly insight into the minds of your teens.

### **We can be confident parents, even in these scary times!**

Today’s choices have such far-reaching and permanent consequences for our kids, it’s hard to trust that everything will just work out fine in the end. Some of our teens’ decisions will affect the rest of their lives. Knowing that they’re ill-equipped to make those choices, it’s very difficult not to panic. It would be easier to lock them up for a few years and check in at, oh, around twenty-two.

We do have a promise to cling to, though.

**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Phil. 1:6)

Let’s break that down.

*Being confident of this:*

You can be sure that this is the way it is. It’s a promise.

*He who began:*

Who began it? “He” did. Not you. Not your teen. God started . . .

*A good work:*

The work He started is a good and righteous thing.

*Will carry it on to completion:*

It will be finished. He didn’t start something only to see it fall to pieces because of some teenage mistakes. It *will* be completed. It’s a promise of God, and I choose to believe Him.

*Until the day of Christ Jesus:*

Here’s the thing, though. Every one of us, including our teens, is a work in progress. This work, which will be completed, has a long way to go . . . until the day of Christ Jesus, to be exact.

The battle we fight in protecting, shielding, and preparing our teens for life’s hot-button issues isn’t as black-and-white as a physical battle in which the wins and losses can be easily quantified. We must often blindly face the battles for our kids, operating more on faith than on sight, being obedient to the call of Christ and reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have been given tools in God’s Word to prepare us to guard against the confusion of this world, however. And we’re granted partnership with the Holy Spirit, who will lead and guide us according to godly wisdom and sight. That guidance is invaluable as we prepare our kids for life’s battles.

# CHECK POINTS

- ✓ It's time to stand up and make these years count. You don't need to *get* through these years; you need to *power* through them.
- ✓ The battle we fight is not *against* our teens, it's *for* them!
- ✓ "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph. 6:12–13).
- ✓ Today's youth need to be committed to safe Internet practices before they ever approach a computer.
- ✓ A time-invested parent, who prays as much as she talks and listens as much as she prays, has the best chance of raising a child eager and willing to say NO and mean it.
- ✓ We cannot wait until our teens come face-to-face with peer pressure and expect them to know how to handle something they aren't prepared for.