

“Anyone who thinks teenagers are immune to self-image issues doesn’t know teenagers. But how many times do parents contribute to a teen’s lack of confidence without even knowing it? Nicole O’Dell’s practical suggestions and insightful advice help guide parents through the minefield of raising a self-assured yet godly adolescent. A great tool for anyone who cares about teenagers!”

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Hot Buttons Series

Hot Buttons Internet Edition

Hot Buttons Dating Edition

Hot Buttons Drug Edition

Hot Buttons Sexuality Edition

Hot Buttons Bullying Edition

Hot Buttons Image Edition



HOT BUTTONS

**IMAGE
EDITION**

Nicole O'Dell

 **Kregel**
Publications

Hot Buttons Bullying Edition

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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 Image Edition is for all the young people who have wished they were someone else, and for the parents who love them.

➤➤➤ *Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are.*

—Malcolm S. Forbes

Contents



| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| <i>Preface</i> | 9 |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | 11 |

Part One: Image Hot Buttons

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 1: Prepared: Answering <i>Why</i> | 14 |
| Chapter 2: Watchful: Answering <i>When</i> | 22 |
| Chapter 3: Proactive: Answering <i>How</i> | 30 |

Part Two: Identifying the Image Hot Buttons

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 4: Popularity | 49 |
| Chapter 5: Self-Esteem | 56 |
| Chapter 6: Body Image | 66 |
| Chapter 7: Eating Disorders | 76 |
| Chapter 8: Celebrities & Media | 88 |

Part Three: Pressing the Image Hot Buttons

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 9: Practical Procedures | 98 |
| Chapter 10: The Armor of God | 104 |
| Chapter 11: Strategic Scenarios | 112 |

Part Four: Parent-Teen Study Guide

Chapter 12: Confession 147

Chapter 13: Forgiveness 152

Chapter 14: Clean Slate 157

Recommended Resources 165

Notes 166

About the Author 168

Preface

image.

Sometimes I wonder why I didn't start with this subject as I began the Hot Buttons series. So much about choices and the power to make good ones comes from self-confidence. How a person feels about appearance, self-worth, social status, and everything else that contributes to one's self-image significantly impacts daily choices.

As we'll see as we move through this book, the image I've had of myself over the years has contributed to both my poor choices and my good choices. Some experiences early on led me down a road of destructive choices that were fueled by a poor self-image. I wanted so badly to be accepted by my peers and valued by others, and I didn't believe I had inherent worth, so I succumbed to peer pressure and pursued popularity at all costs.

As I've worked on this book, I've prayed that my heart would be transparent and that I'd be able to convey what the Lord has shown me as I've walked this road both as a teenager and as a parent. I want only to share the truth and pass along the information parents need to hear, and then give you the tools you need to talk to your tweens and teens about these issues and to make a difference in their lives.

As parents of these wonderful creatures God has entrusted to us, we want so badly for them to see themselves as He does, and as we

do. So how can we make that happen when the world is constantly shouting that they aren't good enough? That's what we're here to uncover.

As I've shared in each Hot Buttons book, the game of Scenarios came about 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—like I was.

I knew I'd have to be willing to talk about the tough subjects like sex, drugs, alcohol, addictions, dating, and pornography, perhaps even before they actually knew what those things were. If I had any hope of being as proactive as I wanted to be, no subject could be off-limits and nothing could be ignored.

That's significantly more difficult with the issue of self-image because it's rooted in the most subtle lies. Combating the lies of the enemy isn't easy, but we can do it!

The practice of Scenarios became a favorite activity in my home and proved invaluable in preparing my teens to make good choices. The best part was the talks we'd have after the choices were made and the consequences were presented. My children felt free to explore, ask questions, safely experiment 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, Mom and Dad, to bring those principles and practices into your home. You'll find each hot-button issue covered in detail with warning signs and recommendations laid out in simple form. Then, you'll find the Strategic Scenarios, which will enable you to approach your teens with these topics and give them the same opportunity to make the safe discoveries that I gave my kids.

And I trust you'll see the same results I have.

Acknowledgments



Thank you so much, Kregel Publications, for embarking on this amazing project with me. I can't thank you enough for your trust in me and for allowing me to work on these vital tools that will help parents guide their tweens and teens to make victorious choices.

I want to thank those special friends of mine who know just what to say when I'm feeling nervous or inadequate. Cynthia Gramm, you top the list. Your encouragement means the world to me.

To my Savior, Jesus Christ, thank You for the love You lavish on me that has pulled me from the pit of my own image issues. Without the work You continue to do in my heart and life, I'd never have been able to share this message with readers, let alone even come close to seeing myself the way You do.

PART ONE

Image

HOT

BUTTONS

What exactly is a hot-button issue?

It's one of those topics people generally acknowledge to be inflammatory or controversial. It's a real issue that hits hard and is often confusing—one that can be life-changing and often requires immediate attention.

My goal in writing these Hot Buttons books is to face these topics now, together, so you can walk your kids through the necessary prep work, rather than ignore the issues and wait until they pop up sometime down the road when you'll have to react. You have the parental right and the godly responsibility to hit these issues hard, head-on, preemptively instead of simply reacting to the challenge-of-the-day. Once your teenager brings a subject up to you or you find out it's a problem, you've missed the opportunity to lay the foundation on that topic. Someone else already did it for you. Don't allow that to happen.

Prepared:

Answering *Why*

Image. Body image. Self-esteem. Don't you get kind of tired of all the focus on this subject, which does nothing but turn a person's attention inward? *How do I look? What am I worth? Where do I fit in with the rest of the world? Am I good enough?*

God answers all of those questions in His Word, but today's youth culture is rabidly desperate to hear the answers from its peers. The tweens and teens of today aren't willing to take God's word for it, or our word for it—after all, what do parents know? So we have to be intentional about speaking a healthy, godly self-esteem into our kids' lives. We need to make it happen for them. We need to equip our kids to ward off the attacks of the enemy designed to keep them filled with insecurity, because that insecurity will cripple their effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

Each flicker of self-doubt, each instant the enemy robs your teenager of joy or zeal, can be countered with some level of preparation—whatever groundwork we've laid in our kids' lives. In those moments, these are the resources our children have to pull from. That preparation cannot be ramped up in the heat of the moment. In that instant, their commitment is what it is and there's no more

time to gird it up. They're on their own with whatever tools we've already given them.

That might sound harsh, but the world is a harsh reality of comparison and not-good-enoughs. And amid the pursuit of popularity or the clamor for approval, it's difficult to raise wise, godly teenagers who are willing to deny themselves confidence or security in the social realm. If you're in the process of raising tweens or teens, you probably already know that it's rare for kids to get a healthy grasp on their image without guidance. You likely are dealing with either an overinflated or an undervalued sense of self.

Each extreme carries its own set of concerns. Bringing a teenager down from an inflated ego is a challenge. It's important to break the selfishness without breaking the spirit. You don't want to hurt the good parts in the process. On the other hand, overcoming a negative self-image is not an easy battle and it's a personal one I still fight to this day. But there are ways to reshape it and to overcome its effects.

Dispel the myth of effective insulation.

Do you ever wish you lived in a Christian bubble, able to completely insulate your children from the world? As much as that would make life easier for us in the short term, it would result in teens who are sent out into the world unarmed and unprepared for situations they won't be able to avoid forever. Visualize a scene in which an adolescent steps from a time machine into a war zone. If they enter the fray with no preparation or skills, they'll fall.

Our kids will face temptation, peer pressure, and self-esteem issues in their schools, hanging out with friends, and even at their churches. This

is a fact. Since we know what they'll face, isn't it more important to prepare them for good choices with a solid foundation, than it is to attempt to create a sterile, pressure-free environment in a world that makes it impossible?

If you're at all like me, you wish you could walk with your kids through the battles of life—guarding and guiding them through each pressure-filled moment, each decision between right and wrong, each temptation. You wish you could stand in for them until they are mature enough to see and appreciate the big picture. But, while we absolutely should have high expectations and maintain a tight grip on the reins as we raise our families, we also need to prepare our kids to stand alone, to be strong in the face of temptation.

Nothing we do can fully protect our kids from the powerful combination of peer pressure plus insecurity. You can, however, 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—when all the preparation, forethought, and wisdom we've been equipping our kids with comes to a head. In the heat of the moment, 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.

Take the mystery out of sin!

The early years are for training our children. In Mark 14:38 we're warned to watch and pray about temptation. The spirit might be willing to avoid

it, but the body is weak. How much more so for someone who isn't prepared for the 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.

Therefore you shall **lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul**, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall **teach them to your children**, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut. 11:18–19 NKJV)

Why does it matter? Why put so much focus on guarding your kids against the pursuit of popularity and a good self-image? What's in it for them if they stand on God's Word in the face of peer pressure, risking friendships, popularity, good times? They need to care about what God has called them to do. A line from my favorite worship song says, "Break my heart for what breaks yours. . . ." That isn't makeup, trendy clothes, and a perfect body. Only a time-invested parent, who prays as much as she talks and listens as much as she prays, will raise a teenager who can see past the mirror and the celebrity gossip to the heart of Christ.

What tools will they need? Our teens and preteens need truth. And they need a life filled with wholesome things like church activities and sports—rather than too much time home alone riddled with boredom or too much time with outside influences like the wrong kinds of friends and the media. They need to be a part of a family that is serving the Lord, and

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

And they need to be prepared for the backlash that inevitably comes from saying no: persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right. Children need to reach their teen years already armed with the tools necessary to make the hard choices—willing to withstand and endure persecution for the sake of Christ. Willing to walk alone if that's what He asks them to do.

What's the next step? 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, prayerful insight into the hearts and minds of your teens.

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

When we recognize that our kids struggle against a forceful current of media influence, self-esteem battles, and lies from the enemy, it's very difficult not to panic that they'll be swept away. We love them so much; we see such beauty and worth in them—it's hard to imagine they can't see it and might be more inclined to listen to strangers than to us.

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:

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.

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. Self-esteem involves internal matters of the heart that we may struggle to identify. 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. In fact, we're told in Ephesians 6:12 that our struggle isn't even "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."

As Christian parents, we need to insulate our families from negative outside influences. We should be watching over the words and images that enter our children's young minds through television, movies, and the like; and we need to be standing, ready to jump in with help the moment we see signs of danger. Our purpose is not to raise naive, uninformed wimps, but to safeguard our kids from the wiles of the enemy who whispers lies into their young, eager minds.

We have been given tools in God's Word to prepare us to guard against the confusion of this world. And we're granted partnership with the Holy Spirit, who will lead and guide us according to godly wisdom and insight. That guidance is invaluable as we prepare our kids for their popularity struggles, their body-image woes, and the quest for their personal identities.

CHECK POINTS >>>