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multi-published author of *Stars in the Night*

“Talented author Nicole O’Dell has created a book that is a must-have for every family. Her fresh insight and voice of experience will speak to tweens/teens and parents alike.”

—Jenny B. Jones, award-winning author of the
A Charmed Life series and the Katie Parker Production series

Hot Buttons Series

Hot Buttons Internet Edition

Hot Buttons Dating Edition

Releasing Fall 2012

Hot Buttons Drug Edition

Hot Buttons Sexuality Edition



HOT BUTTONS

**DATING
EDITION**

Nicole O'Dell

 **Kregel**
Publications

Hot Buttons Dating 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 Dating Edition is dedicated to my oldest daughter.

Natalie, you're proof to me that parents can earn the respect of their kids and that teens do take their parents' advice. I can't thank you enough for respecting the boundaries I've set, seeking to understand why they're important, and sharing our decisions openly with others. You are an amazing young lady, and I pray daily that your husband is out there somewhere, as focused on his future with you as you are on yours with him.

▶▶▶ *You don't really understand human nature unless you know why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around—and why his parents will always wave back.*

—WILLIAM D. TAMMEUS

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Preface

My parenting is very different from my painting. When I paint a room, I open the can, grab a roller and have at it. Much to my husband's chagrin, there's nary a roll of tape to be found nearby. My bare furniture stands trembling as teeny specks of Toasted Almond Satin float to the ground. Why don't I take a moment or two to protect my belongings? Your guess is as good as mine. I'm just much more focused on the end result than I am on all that boring prep work.

However, when it comes to parenting, my focus is all about the preparation. I employ prep-work tactics like prayer, communication, patience, observation, humor, and togetherness. Those tactics lay a solid groundwork so that when the paint splatters of life start flying, my children are well protected. I guess that's why my kids are turning out a lot better than my walls!

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 easier to control 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 making any choice—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 another teenager's bedroom.

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, 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. *Hot Buttons Dating Edition* deals with the boy-girl attractions and relationships that appear far too early in our kids' lives. You, as a parent, will glean information and practical tactics to employ in your home to immediately bring the issues that come with those relationships front and center.

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 date rape. 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 what your teens or preteens face in boy-girl relationships these days. Each chapter of this section includes motivation, encouragement, and direction for setting boundaries, along with 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. You'll be able to take away practical and precise words in the form of *Strategic Scenarios* that will help you press the hot buttons that relate to dating. Your kids will be able to live out the scenarios and learn from their choices in a risk-free environment. I'll share truths about the topic, help you figure out how to handle it in your own home with the method of *Strategic Scenarios*, and give you a prayer you can pray to ask God to help you with that certain issue.

In part 4, you'll build relationship—relationship with God and with each other. You'll have the opportunity to identify specific dating 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.

Acknowledgments

I'm forever thankful to God for His gift of restoration. Considering all the mistakes I've made along the way, it's only by His hand of mercy that I have the life I do and the authority to write this book.

I need to thank fabulous authors Cara Putman, Jenny Jones, and Jill Williamson for taking the time to consider the premise of the Hot Buttons books and offer their professional endorsements.

My agent and friend, Chip MacGregor—you rock!

Thank you to my wonderful Twitter and Facebook friends for their endless help with my rapid-fire questions about dating.

I suppose a thank-you should go to my previous boyfriends—who shall remain nameless—for being unwitting research partners on the subject of dating.

Erik, Natalie, Emily, Logan, Megan, Ryleigh: my inspiration for life, love, and writing. My love for you guys is often too much for this mama's heart to take. I wish you could feel its depth for even a brief moment, but I guess it'll have to wait until you have kids of your own.

Wil, my wonderful husband, thank you for your undying support of what I do and for being such a great daddy. Even with all the bumps and bruises along the paths of our individual lives, I'm so glad we ended up together. I can't wait until we say, "Here we are, li'l ol' man and li'l ol' woman, sitting on a porch."

PART ONE

**Dating
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*

If you're like me, watching a child transition into a dating teen is one of the scariest and most momentous periods to face as parents. I think many of us fear it because we still bear scars from our own foray into the world of adult relationships. We're all too fully aware that teenage dating relationships, and poor choices therein, can lead down a path of pain and destroyed hearts, and leave piles of devastated self-esteem in their wake.

But what do you do? Teens are going to have crushes; they're going to be attracted to and want attention from the opposite sex. You're powerless in the struggle. You should just pray hard, hold on, and hope the storm passes with little collateral damage, right?

Wrong.

Mom and Dad, you're in charge, and you need to set the rules. The teen years are an extremely important preparation time, and you need 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.

Parents need to be in charge, but I'm not advocating for a take-

no-prisoners attitude in our homes. Our children need to feel love, not condemnation. They should trust that we're an ally, not the enemy. In one sense, it's *us* against *them*. Us—our insight, our God-given wisdom, our life experiences—versus them—their temptations, their pressures, their desires. But 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)

Dispelling the myth of effective insulation.

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, and the like, and we keep them from participating in mature behavior like dating and relationships before they're ready. This is in no way intended to put them at a disadvantage but to shield them from the wiles of the enemy who whispers lies into their young, eager minds. It's not enough, however, to just say *no* (though that's a good first step).

We may wish we lived in a Christian bubble, able to insulate our children from the world, but pretending we do so ignores a huge need. It results in teens who are sent out into the world unarmed and unprepared for things they can't avoid. Our kids will face temptation, peer pressure,

and sinful desires; it's a fact. 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.

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.

Nothing we do can fully protect our kids from facing temptations, pressure-filled moments, decisions between right and wrong. You can't control what their peers throw 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 moment just before the final decision is made, a moment 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. They know what they know, and in the heat of the moment there's no time for anything else. They make a choice based on all the work that came before. And 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, especially when it comes to their dating choices, and ultimately their purity (which is covered in *Hot Buttons Sexuality Edition*). If we're proactive, our children can reach their teen years empowered 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!

In Mark 14:38, we're warned to watch and pray about temptation. Even for Christian adults, our spirits might be 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 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.

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)

Before your kids approach dating age, you need to guide them in the knowledge and application of God's Word and the pursuit of His will. 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 dating.)

As we move forward in fully equipping them, we need to teach them three things:

- Why it matters
- How to honor their commitments once they make them
- That they aren't alone

Why does it matter? What's in it for them if they stand on God's Word in the face of peer pressure, risking friendships, popularity, feel-good relationships? Our teens need to believe that the Lord has a plan for them and His ways are best. They need to care about arriving at the altar with their hearts intact. They need to see the value in preserving their sexuality and their purity. A time-invested parent, who prays as much as she talks and listens as much as she prays, will raise a child eager and willing to say NO and mean it.

How do they honor their commitments? Making commitments is scary. Preparing for the unknown is challenging. Teenagers need to make commitments with a clear mind and not wait until the pressure hits, but there's still the risk that they'll face a temptation and wonder why they ever made the promise in the first place. So, in order to keep those commitments, they need your continued guidance as they adapt to each new phase of life; and they need options—a busy life with wholesome things like church activities and sports, rather than too much time home alone plagued by boredom.

Where will we be during the process? Mom, Dad, Guardian—you need to make a commitment too. Your teen needs to know that you'll be aware of what's going on, and that you'll do whatever is needed to help them honor God, obey you, and respect themselves, including open the door to outside resources when necessary. This all requires time, communication, and godly insight into the minds of your teens. Our kids need to

be a part of a family that is serving the Lord and watching parents who practice what they preach, so they can continuously grow in the knowledge of the Word and in relationship with God.

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

Today's choices can have permanent consequences for our children. It's difficult to let go and trust that everything will just work out fine in the end, knowing that some of our teens' decisions will affect the rest of their lives. When we recognize 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 >>>

CHECK POINTS

- ✓ The battle we fight is not *against* our teens, it's *for* them!
- ✓ Knowing what's coming, we need to get in there and do some strategizing—some proverbial button-pushing—so we can prepare them for the spiritual war they're going to encounter.
- ✓ While God-honoring parents absolutely should have high expectations and maintain a tight grip on the reins as they raise their families, they also need to prepare their kids to face persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Each pressure-filled moment of temptation, each decision between right and wrong, is backed up with some level of preparation—groundwork we've laid, conversations we've had, rules we've enforced.