

“I wish I’d had Nicole O’Dell’s *Hot Buttons Drug Edition* when I was raising children. It might have saved me a lot of heartache later. Bad choices can destroy a child’s life, but preparation can protect a child from destructive mistakes. This book teaches parents how to prepare their children in practical ways. A must-read for every parent!”

—Terri Blackstock, author of *Intervention*,
Vicious Cycle, and *Downfall*

Hot Buttons Series

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Releasing Spring 2013

Hot Buttons Bullying Edition

Hot Buttons Image Edition



HOT BUTTONS

**DRUG
EDITION**

Nicole O'Dell



Hot Buttons Drug 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 Drug Edition is dedicated to brave souls like Ed King and Betty Jacobson who have fought addiction and won, and then dedicated their lives to helping others battle its stronghold.

Love you all!

▶▶▶ *The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.*

—SAMUEL JOHNSON

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Preface

I wonder if anyone has ever said, “You know what? I think I’d like to be a drug addict.” I sincerely doubt that’s ever happened. Addiction is born from a wrong choice made in response to a need of some kind—an emptiness that screams to be filled.

As a mom, I’ve strived to make sure that there was no emptiness in the hearts of my kids that would lead them down that road. I also vowed to find a way to make sure they didn’t wonder about experiences so much that they just had to try them. The same is true in my ministry. So much of what I say has to do with helping teens find their value, acceptance, and completeness in Christ. When we look to anyone or anything else to meet the needs of our hearts, we will come up empty. The search to fill that hole will often lead down the path of addiction.

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 poor choices, like I was in my own teen years. I believed that if the information came from me, it would be easier to filter the information and help them process it in a healthy way. I wanted to find a way to help them see and understand the consequences of poor decisions without the added stress of peer pressure and other outside influences.

I knew I'd have to be willing to talk about the tough things 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.

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 that 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 around our dining room table instead of in someone's bedroom or in the backseat of a car.

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. They felt free to explore, ask questions, experiment safely—and then, when similar scenarios came up in real life, they were prepared to make the right choices.

This book—and the entire 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 recommended action steps laid out in simple form. Then you'll find the Strategic Scenarios, which will enable you to approach your tweens and teens with these topics and give them the same opportunity to make safe discoveries that I gave my teens.

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

Acknowledgments

I am thinking of three people very close to me who have overcome addictions in their adult lives. I'm proud to know them and so admire their strength and faith. I uphold them as examples of how addictions can be overcome in the strength of Almighty God. These three people stand out to me as miracles of hope . . .

My mother-in-law, Betty Jacobson, dealt with years of alcohol dependency before checking herself in for treatment and embracing the process with the power of God as wind in her sails. Since her recovery from alcohol addiction, Betty has been an AA leader and sponsor for others struggling with addiction.

My mom, Carolyn Charz, ended a thirty-year love affair with nicotine completely cold turkey. No patches, no gum—just resolve and prayer. She has never looked back and I'm so proud of her.

My husband, Wil, has overcome several kinds of addiction in his life. I have so much respect for the way he embraced the power of God to turn his life around. One such story involves his twenty-year smoking habit. One night he lay in his bed and prayed that God would take the addiction from him. He woke up the next morning without a bit of desire for a cigarette and never smoked again.

Those three people prove that it can be done through the power of Christ. Addiction is a stronghold, but our God is mighty and able to break the chains.

PART ONE

**Drug
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*

When you hear the word *addiction*, what do you think of? Drugs? Alcohol? Cigarettes? They're all part of it, that's for sure. When we're talking about teens and addiction, though, it's more than the substance itself. We need to look at the whys, whens, hows, and wheres of anything that draws our teens in, captivates their attention, and places a stronghold on their hearts and minds as well as their bodies.

When teenagers cling to a substance or a habit as a means of release and grow dependent on it, it becomes paramount to everything else—including your wishes and God's will, not to mention friendships, goals, ambitions, and reputations. But what can you do?

Your kids are going to experiment with things no matter what,
aren't they?

All teenagers do,
don't they?

And there's nothing you can do about it,
right?

You're powerless in the struggle against temptation and experimentation.

You should probably just pray hard, hold on, and hope the storm passes with little collateral damage.

A taste of alcohol now and then doesn't equal alcoholism, and puffing on a cigarette out behind the movie theater doesn't make someone a chain smoker.

Right?

Wrong.

Experiment is nothing but a soft word for sin and disobedience. It's a way to excuse poor choices as a sort of rite of passage and overlook behaviors that could have tragic, life-altering effects. We can't look the other way when it comes to anything our kids do, but that's even more true with behaviors that can lead to addiction, which is a powerful stronghold. Rest assured, we'll talk in great detail about the mechanics of teenage addiction in chapter 4, and you'll discover some surprising truths.

Dispelling the myth of effective insulation.

When I was a teenager, things like alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs were never far from my thoughts or my friends' minds. I remember testing my parents' boundaries at wedding receptions, backyard barbecues, birthday parties, and any other events where I thought they might have their guard down.

I'd ask for a sip of their drink or even try to finagle my own at a wedding. I'd feign curiosity about their cocktail to get them to offer me a taste. And that was right in front of them; you can only imagine what was going on behind the scenes . . . sneaking alcohol from my dad's stash,

buying cigarettes from the vending machine in the lobby at the Chinese restaurant. I never did illegal drugs, thankfully—but that was only by the grace of God because there wasn't a whole lot I said no to.

Through trial and error, I learned what I could get away with, and I came to understand how my parents really felt about those things. Although drinking and smoking were forbidden, since my parents smoked and drank alcohol to differing degrees themselves, I figured out that they wouldn't let me do it because I was underage, and thus it was illegal, not because they really saw anything inherently wrong with those things.

In other words, they told me not to drink or do drugs, but since we never really had discussions about why certain things were okay for them to do but not for me, I drew my own conclusions about what was okay and why. I took it as a “do as I say, not as I do” situation.

Parents, it's not enough to just say *no* or *don't*. You can't just turn your kids 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. Nothing we do can fully protect our kids from encountering pressure-filled moments where they're forced into 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. 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 will-

ing 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. But even though their spirit is willing, their flesh is weak—they need to be trained and girded up with the strength to say no.

We ignore a huge need if we pretend we live in a Christian bubble while the world is crashing down around our teens. It's more important to prepare your children than it is to attempt to create a sterile environment in a world that makes that impossible.

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)

While you absolutely should have high expectations and maintain a tight grip on the reins as you raise your family, you also need to prepare your kids to face persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right in the face of peer pressure. They need to be armed with the tools necessary to make hard choices. You can't just hand down rules and regulations, expecting your kids to follow them and then muddle through the fallout alone. They need to know what's coming. Your job is threefold: to help them figure out why they should care, to give them the tools they need to succeed, and to walk them step-by-step through the process of making good choices.

Why should they care? What's in it for your teens that will encourage them to stand in the face of peer pressure, risking friendships, popularity, and fun times?

- Are they aware of health concerns associated with addictions?
- Do they understand the legalities that go along with teenage drug and alcohol use?
- Do they fully grasp the realities of the stronghold of addiction?
- Do they see the value in keeping themselves free from the claws of sin?
- Do they value your wishes and seek to honor you as you lead them?

What do they need? Our teens and preteens need options. Wholesome things like church activities and sports, rather than too much time home alone riddled with boredom and mischief. But not so busy a life that they don't have time to really know you. 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.

How can they walk through this? Mom, Dad, Guardian, your kids need you to model a godly lifestyle in front of them. This might force you to ask yourself some tough questions when it comes to addictive behaviors or substances to figure out what kind of nonverbal message you're sending and to make sure it lines up with what you say.

Your teens need you to walk with them, hand in hand, step by step.

They need you to be aware of what's going on in their hearts and minds and also in the lives of their friends. They need to know 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. All this requires time, communication, and godly insight. None of these things just happen; they come from intentional pursuit.

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 just 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. God's Word is true and He follows through. You don't have to wonder if this promise will apply to you or to your kids. He said it; you can believe it.

He who began: Who began it? He did. Not you. Not your teen. Knowing that He made the first move toward your teen, and having the assurance He'll keep His Word takes a lot of the pressure off and releases the fear.

A good work: The work He started is a good and righteous thing. There's no doubt that He's operating with your teens' best interests at heart and that He'll follow through with the promise of the Blessed Hope of salvation in Christ Jesus, which is the ultimate good work.

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 that you can believe without a single shred of doubt.

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.

When you see mistakes happen, when your teen seems to pull away, rest assured that the work was begun by God, and it will be completed by Him.

It's a promise.

CHECK POINTS

- ✓ *Experiment* is nothing but a soft word for sin and disobedience. It's a way to excuse poor choices as a sort of rite of passage and to overlook behaviors that could have tragic, life-altering effects. We can't look the other way with behaviors that can lead to addiction.
- ✓ Our kids will face temptation, peer pressure, and sinful desires; it's a fact. Nothing we do can fully protect our kids from encountering pressure-filled moments where they're forced into decisions between right and wrong.
- ✓ While you absolutely should have high expectations and maintain a tight grip on the reins as you raise your family, you also need to prepare your kids to face persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right in the face of peer pressure.
- ✓ Your job is threefold: to help them figure out why they should care, to give them the tools they need to succeed, and to walk them step-by-step through the process of making good choices.
- ✓ Your kids need you to model a godly lifestyle in front of them.
- ✓ They need to know 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. All this requires time, communication, and godly insight. None of these things just happen; they come from intentional pursuit.