

young ages, have *nothing* left to look forward to. There is *nothing left* that will give them a “natural high.” They’ve “done it all.” When there is nothing left that is new, exciting and different — youngsters *will* find *something* to introduce some excitement into their lives. All too often, the only thing *left* that they can find to give them a feeling of exhilaration is drugs, booze, sex, crime, occult, excessive speed or ????

It is our belief that most children, with enough guidance from their parents will discover a passion for *something* constructive that can give them a direction in life. Many unfortunately, are never given the opportunity to find that passion. It is the job of parents to provide enough varied opportunities to allow them to find it. When parents think they may have found it, *encourage* it, *invest* in it and most importantly, be interested in it *yourself*s — *with* the child. Parents are often far too reluctant to invest in some piece of machinery or some sort of scientific devise or a musical instrument in which a youngster *seems* to be interested, for fear that the child will only maintain an interest in it for a short time and then abandon it. Requiring that a child *commit* to a lifetime interest in something *before* they know very much about it is impossible for him or her to do. Parents who are dedicated to finding their child’s passion will look at abandoned items as an *investment* in their child’s future rather than as wasting money. Think about it parents— most of those things can be sold if you’re really *that* concerned about “wasting” a few dollars on the future of your children. Decide today — which is more important, the 401k or the future of your children?

When children have an intense interest in something constructive, and the parents are interested in it also, the opportunities to spend time together and engage in conversations that demonstrate genuine interest in the interests of the *child* are greatly increased. There is *always plenty* to talk about around the dinner table.

Oh yes — the dinner table — now there’s a subject for another entire issue. There’s just not enough room left here to even address the importance of the kitchen table and the house that surrounds it. We’ll get to that later.

So how can parents avoid children losing their innocence in a society that is “bent” on making them grow up too quickly? They can’t in every area. But they can in many ways. It’s not that difficult to just say no to some of the things that everybody else is doing. While we’ve not quoted any Scripture in this article, raising children “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” is of course near and dear to the heart of *every* christian parent. Let us pray for wisdom when God blesses us with a task so great as raising children — children who will serve Him for the rest of their lives.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Putting On The Brakes

In the previous issue of *Diligence* we discussed the subject of stewardship as it relates to our children. In the small space we have for each of these articles, it is obviously not possible to go into any great detail on a subject as diverse as child rearing. However, there are a few more thoughts we would like to add concerning some particular observations we have made in recent years.

It doesn’t take a PhD to notice that children are growing up *much* faster than they did when some of us were young. Two separate studies that tracked 17,000 American and 14,000 British girls found that 1 in 6 now show signs of puberty by age 8 compared to 1 in 100 a generation ago. Nickelodeon (a children’s cable television channel) found that “*by the time they are 12, children describe themselves as ‘flirtatious, sexy, trendy, athletic, cool.’*” Andrea Pennington, M.D., spokesperson for Discovery Health Channel stated; “*It is no longer unusual to find boys and girls (engaging in sexual activity) as young as 12 years of age,...*”

There are of course *numerous* factors influencing this change. Some researchers cite such things as heredity, diet, an increase in obesity, abnormal hormonal changes due to the use of synthetic chemicals, lack of parental supervision and direction, working parents that leave teenagers with freedom in their after-school life, early sex education and the sexualization of children by the media. One might also consider the impact the divorce rate has had on early maturity. Research done in 2002 indicated that girls living in step-father families are almost twice as likely to reach early puberty as girls from non-divorced homes. Research has also consistently shown that girls from divorced families are sexually active at a younger age, have a greater number of partners and are at greater risk of early pregnancy. So while there is surely not *one* thing that can be credited for this change, we *can* be certain that it is a cause for great concern among parents and professionals alike.

Type “growing up too fast” into a popular search engine and 15.1 million references come up. So the opinions and/or research concerning possible reasons for these changes are nearly as numerous as the stars in the sky. We mentioned some of them in the previous paragraph. It’s also no secret that pre-marital sex, drug use, teen pregnancies, suicides, crime and etc. are extremely high among young people. How much of this do you think could be better controlled if children weren’t growing up too fast? So is there *anything* parents can do to help slow down this process?

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Perhaps there is. It's called "putting on the brakes." Let us explain what we mean. Think back on the social events *you* participated in when you were 5, 7, 9 or 10 years old. What about when you were in high school? Here's a few questions we'd like for you to honestly answer before we go on with this article.

- When was the first time you stayed overnight with someone other than a relative without your parents present?
- When was the first time you ever went to a dance or "sock hop"?
- When was the first time you ever "graduated" from anywhere?
- How old were you when you took your first trip out of town with anyone other than your parents — *or* without anyone's parents with the group?
- What grade were you in when you were given the opportunity to try out for a cheerleading squad?
- How old were you when you played on your first organized sport's team?
- When was the first time you ever rode in a limo?
- At what age did you "commit" to playing one particular sport?
- How old were you when you took your first trip to a summer or church camp — alone — without parents?
- Did your mother clean your bedroom or did you?
- Was your bedroom door closed most of the time and off limits to your parents (that privacy thing, you know)?
- Did your parents ever send a cab to take you home from elementary school because they "got stuck" at work?
- When was your first "slumber party"?
- At what age did you attend your first bridal or baby shower?
- At what age did you wear your first tuxedo?
- How old were you when you went on your first date?

Are you starting to get the picture here? It seems that the current social environment promotes the belief that every event or activity that may be exciting and/or appropriate for a high school student or young adult, is "cute" or "fun" when a young child of *any* age engages or participates in the same activity.

The pressure is on for pre-schools and kindergarten classes to have graduation ceremonies for their students. The three year old son of some friends of ours recently "graduated" (in a ceremony with *Pomp and Circumstance* playing) from a pre-school class. He'll graduate *again* next year from yet another pre-school class, then from Kindergarten, elementary school, high school and college. Does it not occur to parents that by the time this child reaches high school and college graduation, there is absolutely no excitement left in that ceremony? There is *nothing* about that event that he will look forward to. He's "been there, done that" far too many times already. Big deal — *another* graduation — so what!!

On May 10th, 2004 the Cincinnati Enquirer ran the following story about Catholic children making their first communion (usually in grade 2).

First communion — Church tones it down — MASON — Limos are rented. Country clubs reserved. Tuxedos and lavish gowns are purchased. And that's just for a child's first communion. Not at St. Susanna in Mason, however. As more families lean toward the extravagant in first communion fashion and parties, St. Susanna is one church that is bucking the trend. There, the families of 268 children who are receiving first communion this season are encouraged to focus on the purpose of the..."

Of course, we don't endorse the doctrine of first communion as the Catholic church teaches, but to St. Susanna parish we say; "Congratulations!!!" Someone there recognized that they simply *had* to put on the brakes.

In Oshawa, Ontario, Canada a 17 year old boy was arrested for manufacturing bombs in his bedroom. Detective Jim Grimley stated; "*The bedroom was set up strictly for the making of bombs, (his) mom and dad thought they should give him space and didn't go into his room.*" Mothers may not particularly *like* cleaning a youngster's room two or three times a week, or even doing all of their laundry for them but it sure reduces the probability of making bombs in the room or hiding drugs in the underwear drawer. Mom is sure to see whatever is in the drawer as she puts away the clean underwear. When children aren't *willing* to let mom clean their room *for* them — there's probably something going on that shouldn't be going on. Mom — it's probably well worth your time to do a *lot* of things for your children that you'd rather not.

Just this past May Texas State Representative Al Edwards (D-Houston) proposed a bill that would reduce state funding to any high school that allows "sexually suggestive" performances by its cheerleaders. At what age do you think a child can be *taught*, by supposedly responsible adults, to exhibit sexually seductive moves? — moves that are *so* suggestive that lawmakers are considering taking matters into *their* hands. Shouldn't *parents* be the ones who are putting the brakes on here?

As more children specialize in single sports at young ages, a growing number are experiencing "repetitive stress" injuries such as stress fractures, bone loss, torn muscles and strains. Kids are especially vulnerable because their young muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments are still growing and sometimes can't handle the strain of intense workouts. "*We're seeing injuries that used to happen to college athletes in little kids,*" said Tracye Williams, health enhancement director for the Peninsula Metropolitan YMCA. "*Torn muscles in their knees, torn hamstrings, back problems — really serious stuff.*" Doctors and fitness experts say parents should be wary of letting a child focus too intensely on one sport before the age of 10, or even before adolescence. Dad — maybe he doesn't *want* to be the star pitcher *you* always wanted to be. Don't push so hard.

We could go on and on with this segment but we think we've made the point. Children who are allowed to experience way too many things and events at very