**RAISING CHILDREN WHO USE FOOD,**

**DRUGS, AND ALCOHOL FOR BODILY HEALTH**

***Preschool and Elementary Years***

Children of all ages need to hear words like this repeatedly: ***You are not your body. You are a soul, a person who takes care of your body.*** *Nobody else can do it. It’s* ***like your personal pet,*** *who can’t take care of itself, and trusts you to do it. Give it what it needs, not what it demands. Then like a good pet, it will obey and serve you, and be a pleasure to you and others. But* ***if your body bosses you around****, you will be a nuisance to others. You may even act like a whiny dog demanding treats. If you are indulged now with food, later you’ll demand worse things, like* ***alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs*** *to make you feel OK. Do we know somebody like that? Do you want to end up like \_\_\_\_\_\_* (name people you both know, including yourself)?

For kids to learn self-control from you, you’ve got to **be consistent** with them. These one-liners can reinforce your consistent consequences:

* *If you want your* ***dessert*** *that much, you’d eat the* ***vegetables*** *your body needs so you can have it.*
* ***When you act bossy and rude,*** *I won’t give you any sweets, or even my attention.* [walk away]
* *Too much sugar and you act like* ***you can’t listen or control yourself*** *well. So that’s enough.*

***Middle and High School***

At this age, hormones, peer groups, and love interests can make teens feel uncomfortable in their bodies. Besides, they no longer look like cute children, and don’t yet look like powerful, independent adults. From all these influences, they may sometimes give eating, smoking, vaping, drinking, and drugging *credit* for the good times they’ve had, and then even make them a *requirement* for good times they want to have in the future. Adjusted for your child and for the situation at hand, you might ask your kids things like this:

* ***Would those kids [you use with] really like you****, just the way you are, even without drugs? Why do you think so?*
* ***What do your friends do for fun*** *naturally, without (drugs)? How healthy does that look to you?*
* *How are* ***their lives helping others****? What makes you think so? Does that matter to you?*
* *How healthy are* ***their relationships*** *with their families? with others who don’t (drink/use)?*
* *You seem to be trying to prove that* ***this is* your *body****, but is it really? Is it your own, or is it on loan?*
* *How is* ***your body image****? How does your body look and feel to you right now? What would fix that? How do you know that would satisfy you?*
* *Are others making you feel ugly? How so? What could make you feel* ***good-enough looking*** *around them?*
* ***Is your body minding you****, or does it seem to have a mind of its own sometimes? When is that?*

Draw them out in accepting, calm, curious conversation. If that’s hard, maybe include a third person they trust. Find out which people they most want their bodies to look like and why (their idols). Ask what they long for in life, what they think these other people have that they don’t (their invisible idols). Ask how they think these people have used their bodies to get these things.

Then help them see the *real, lasting* versions of what they long for. *Where does genuine beauty/wealth/power/confidence/intimacy/peace come from? Don’t you also want to feel these things coming up in you from within, so you always feel you have enough to share, so that others are drawn to you for it?*

Help them discover that these powerful assets come from God, given through people who share them freely, needing nothing in return, people who make you feel beautiful, strong, and worthwhile. Be one of those people. Once you are, they’ll want to know how you found your beauty, strength, contentment, etc., how you get yourself refreshed when you get run down. Remember they won’t care what you know until they know that you care.