“My Kids Are Into Goth, Punk and Emo Sub-Cultures”

My two teenage daughters are interested in the goth, punk and emo sub-cultures. I’m not sure how to deal with this. Could you give me some good Christian parenting advice?

I asked a couple of Christian counselors for advice about your question.

The first came back with this response:

> *The best overall reference I’ve seen for teens is the book Age of Opportunity by Paul David Tripp because it makes it clear the target for change is their HEART, not just behavior – otherwise we just create cooperative rebels (work the system to make life easier for “me”) or religious Pharisees. There is an audio series by the same name, available from Resources for Changing Lives, 1-800-318-2186 – web site www.ccef.org.*

The second, who is a child psychologist, made these suggestions:

1. First of all, DON’T come down heavy with the hammer, telling them they are not allowed to pursue these interests. It will only backfire.

2. These lifestyles and values are meeting a need in your daughters. There is no shame in having needs; God gives us needs for others to meet, and for Himself to meet. Your job is to find out what need goth/punk/emo is meeting, and then subtly provide other, healthier ways for them to get those needs met.

3. Don’t communicate that you’re going to change your children and they’re going to have to stop this behavior. It won’t

work; we don’t have the power to change other people. We do, however, have the power to gain understanding about WHY they behave as they do, and then adjust our response to it.

4. Seek to understand your daughters’ thinking and feeling about this. Many kids feel alienated from their parents, believing that their parents don’t really care about how they think and feel (which is, unfortunately, all too true in many families). So make a plan to meet for 5-10 minutes each night, for a week, to LISTEN. Ask, “Please help me understand why goth/punk/emo is important to you. Tell me one thing that you like about it.” Draw them out with unjudgmental questions; the goal is to understand, not to change them. Each night, try to get another part of the big picture.

5. After a couple of weeks, when you have learned something about what these cultures are doing for your daughters, see if you can find other ways to get those needs met at times that interfere with activities that mean more involvement with their questionable friends. Many times, it’s an esteem issue. Looking like the other people in that sub-culture makes them feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging. . . legitimate, God-given needs that are better met in the family and with friends whose values are consistent with the family’s and with God’s.

6. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for wisdom to be loving without being controlling. Pray that you will see what YOU need to do to make sure your daughters’ emotional needs are being met. The hard thing is that adolescence is a time when, developmentally, it is normal and right for their attention to turn to friends and want to fit in with their friends more than their families. This is important for growth into independent adults. But the choice of one’s friends can make or break a young person. Which is why it’s essential for parents to know what’s going on, with whom, and hit our knees on our children’s behalf.

This is a big issue and not an easy one. I pray God’s blessing on you as you seek to be wise in the face of unhealthy cultural pressures.

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