

HELPING CHILDREN MAKE

Good Media Choices

There's one media filter that will never fail your child.

By Lori Fuller and Marissa Widdison

Church Magazines

Sophie, an 11-year-old in Queensland, Australia, was excited to visit her friend's house. First, they tried reading magazines.

"I opened it up to the first page and saw there were some bad words and pictures there," she said. She asked her friend if they could do something else instead, so they decided to watch a movie. But the movie had lots of swearing in it.

"It made me feel uncomfortable," Sophie said. She asked her friend to turn it off.

"No way!" her friend said. "This is the best movie ever!"

So, Sophie went home—disappointed but also happy because she felt like she had made the right choice.

Media is so present in our lives that it's nearly impossible to prevent children from confronting things we wish we could protect them from. There simply aren't enough filters in the world to screen out everything that offends the Spirit. And when children leave home, they can't always take filters along. So what can we do?

What we can do, and *should* do, is help our children learn to recognize, respond to, and rely on an internal filter that will never fail: the Holy Spirit. This preparation happens best through multiple small conversations, starting at an early age and continuing throughout childhood.

Recognize the Spirit

Point out to your children when you are feeling the Spirit during a Church meeting or other time. Your children might be feeling it too! This will help them become familiar with how the Spirit communicates to them. Explain that the Spirit talks to our minds and hearts through good ideas and warm, light feelings.

Talk about what it feels like when the Spirit warns you not to do something. Explain that we might feel uncomfortable or confused. When the Spirit leaves, we might feel angry or upset.

Respond to the Spirit

Just recognizing the Spirit isn't enough—our children must also be prepared to respond to those promptings. As a family, come up with a "get-away plan" for when children encounter bad media. That might include:

- Telling a parent or trusted adult as soon as possible after they see something questionable, so that bad feelings don't linger.
- Creating a code phrase that children can use when they need help escaping bad media or other uncomfortable situations (for example, in one family, a child would text the letter "x" to his parents; in another family, children were told they could say, "My parents need me to come home now").



- Making it clear that children will not get into trouble for accidentally seeing bad media but agreeing on appropriate consequences if they purposely seek out bad media.

Rely on the Spirit

When you rely on something, you trust it. You depend on it. We need to help our children trust that following the Spirit is the right choice. Some children are teased when they turn away from bad media in response to the Spirit. Let's make sure our children understand that such treatment doesn't mean they did something wrong, and it doesn't mean the Spirit failed them. It's part of standing up for what's right. In the long run, we will be happier, healthier, and safer for sticking with good choices!

Remember

The safer our children feel while talking to us, the more likely they will open up about media experiences. Take time each day to ask, "Is there anything today you have questions about?" Then answer their questions in an honest and age-appropriate way. Don't put off answers till "when you're older." You want *you* to be their first, best source for answers—not the internet.

If your child tells you they sought out pornography or other bad media, don't freak out! Remember that it's a good thing they are telling you about it. Keep your face and voice calm. Take shame out of the conversation by using lines like, "Curiosity is normal, but we have standards and rules because_____." If you need to, practice uncomfortable words and conversations ahead of time. Help your child repent and regain a relationship with the Spirit.

Above all, make sure your children feel loved! Remind them that God loves them no matter what. He might not like the choices we make sometimes, but He still loves us as His children. We can always choose to try again and make better choices. That's how we learn and grow in life.

Like Sophie, your children will undoubtedly run into bad media throughout their lives. But, like Sophie, they can have the awareness and fortitude to make right choices. They just need some help from us to learn to recognize, respond to, and rely on the Spirit! ■

Turn the page for resources from the *Friend* magazine to go along with this topic.