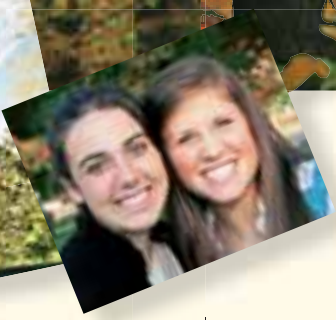




Talking about **STANDARDS**

BY JANET THOMAS
Church Magazines

*These teens from New Hampshire have several
standard answers to the questions they get.*



Every day at lunch, a kid at Caleb Earnshaw's school asks him, "So Caleb, when are you going to have sex?"

And every day, 15-year-old Caleb gives the same answer, "Not until I'm married."

The next question is always, "Why?"

And it is the answer to this question that attracts the crowd. Caleb says, "I look at it as an opportunity. Every day, people gather around for the conversation, all these people sitting around us, listening intently. Every day I tell him about God's plan for marriage. I've told him that way you never have regrets, but he just doesn't understand how I can make that choice. I write to my friends who are on their missions and ask them what to say."

Caleb, who lives in the Concord New Hampshire Stake, is like most of the teens in his stake who must regularly defend the choices they have made to live gospel standards.

At least for Caleb, one thing has made his situation easier. There are older Mormon kids who have established a good reputation in the school. "We've had some others go before us, like Tyler Cook. He has three older brothers, and they are great examples. Everybody knew them. They kept their standards, and it makes it so much easier for us to keep ours. If I say I'm Mormon, people will say, 'Oh you're like the Cooks.' Or they name off some of the older Mormon kids. They are all on missions now, but they made our lives easier by how they chose to behave in high school."

Strong Defense

Having to defend their choices to live gospel standards is a regular part of school life for the teens in the Concord New Hampshire Stake. Many are just one of a few members in

their schools. Some of the standards outlined in *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet are easy to defend, while others end up being hard to talk about with friends.

The girls overwhelmingly found modesty to be one standard that they had little trouble defending. Jessica Payne, 17, of the Laconia Ward, says, "Modesty is easy. I do sports, but I'm the goalie, and I wouldn't wear tank tops anyway. It has never been a subject I have to talk about with my friends. They like to wear long pants or long shorts. We're used to dressing that way."

"Modesty and no drinking are easy to explain, and people understand. But language is tough," said Arica Chatterley, 16, of the Manchester Ward.

But for Sarah Ayer, 16, of the Laconia Ward, the subject of drinking has become a sticking point with some classmates. "Someone in my chemistry class asked me what would happen if I drank.

"They asked, 'Would your parents disown you?'"

"'No, they wouldn't do that,' I answered.

"'Then why don't you just try?'"

"'First of all, it's bad for you. God gave us the Word of Wisdom, so we can know what is good and bad.'"

"'Would you go to hell if you were swearing and drinking?'"

Sarah stopped for moment in her story and shook her head. "It's weird how extreme some people get. I had to explain about repentance."

Then Sarah said something that truly answered her classmates' questions about standards. "Living them daily makes it easy to continue to live them."

Caleb Earnshaw and Shelby Finlayson (far left) were accidentally color coordinated when they met with the rest of the Concord New Hampshire youth for a Saturday activity. Other teens from the stake also posed for photos.





These teens share the challenge of being few in number yet standing out at their various schools because they choose to follow Church standards. Defending what they believe is often a daily event.

Why Wait to Date?

It seems like one of the most difficult standards for these teens to convince their friends of is waiting to date until they are 16.

Jared Crain, 17, of the Bedford Ward said that it was tough before he turned 16. He was always being asked why he couldn't go out. "My whole school got excited about me turning 16 and were putting up posters announcing my birthday."

Elena Halley, 17, of the Ascutney Ward said she had to explain it a little differently. "They don't get that we're young. We have a very long time to date and get to know somebody we can consider marrying. I've seen a lot of couples who have dated too young end up sadly."

By extension, the standard that goes with dating is maintaining purity. Josh Savage, 15, of the Ascutney Ward said, "No one gets it. Everyone asks me why. I have that conversation all the time, and they will relentlessly bug you. My friends at school have no intention of waiting until marriage. I have to talk about it all the time."

"It's definitely easier to be around guys from the Church. You have none of that pressure. You can just relax and talk about other things. They don't try to use your standards against you."

Watch It!

Two other standards that cause a lot of discussion are not drinking and not using profanity. Mitchell Mender, 17, of the Lebanon Ward says, "My friends just can't understand why I don't want to have any 'fun.' A lot of times I tell them that I like

being able to remember what I do. I see that a lot of them get into trouble. I tell them I don't want to ruin my life like that. They know me and that I'm not going to give in. Others are a little surprised that I'm not going to give in."

Seth Sansoucie, 15, of the Canterbury Ward says that it seems like everybody in his school swears. "Some ask why I don't swear. I say it's against my religion. My friends don't swear a lot, but every once in awhile I'll have to say, 'Hey, watch it when I'm around.' "



Loyal Friends

Some of the teens in the stake are lucky enough to have good

friends who share some of their standards and defend their beliefs to others.

Mackenzie Nimmo, 16, of the Bedford Ward says, "My friends are really understanding and completely accept my religion. They are happy that I have something that I actually stand for and believe in, but sometimes it gets difficult. I may know that there's a big party that's going to be happening, but I'm not invited. My friends look out for me. They say, 'She won't want to come to this. We don't want her to be here because of the things that are going to be happening.' "

A Popular Pamphlet

Teens seem to love having the standards written down in the *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet. They find it handy to give to friends and to refer to.

Megan E. Snyder, 17, of the Bedford Ward says, "I have the little one in my wallet, and I whip that out so many times. I love it."



“My cousin has one, and he’s not Mormon,” says Olivia Searle, 16, of the Laconia Ward. “He carries it in his wallet. Lots of my friends have a copy.”

“They always find it really interesting,” says Elisabeth Earnshaw. “Some think that people don’t respect Mormon standards, but I find that if I ever discuss them with anyone, most of the time they are very accepting. They may not understand, but they respect someone who is able to follow those standards.”

Leading to Happiness

Following Church standards makes these New Hampshire teens happier. Megan tries to explain it to her friends. “My friends ask me why I get up early and sacrifice my time for seminary and Church. They also tell me all the time how happy I am. They don’t see the correlation. I’m excited about things I do, and I work hard. They ask, ‘Where does that come from?’ It’s partly from my parents, and it’s also from my Church activity. They don’t

see how happy I am because of staying close to the Church. They are so worried about things. They don’t have any benefits that last.”

Having to stand up for their standards makes these teens stronger. They love to get together at stake events to be around friends who don’t question what they stand for. It’s a relief to have these kinds of friends, and this support carries over to their schools.

Elisabeth Earnshaw and Jared Crain are in the same ward and go to the same high school. Jared loves watching Elisabeth defend herself and what she believes. “It’s fun to watch Elisabeth because she will always stand up for her standards. She’s awesome. And it helps make it easier for me too.”

For youth in the Concord New Hampshire Stake, standards are simply a part of life. And that makes their lives better. **NE**

All the stake’s youth and leaders crowd the benches for a photo (below). They love getting together with Church friends they don’t see often.

