

Using Rap Music to Teach Teens

Do you cringe every time your teen changes the radio to a rap music station?

Many parents misunderstand the message behind rap music. Adults tend not to listen to rap or if they hear it come on the radio, they switch stations. Many parents are ready to shut our ears and close our minds to the music our teens are listening to. But if you view rap music as a means to opening up a discussion with your teen, you can use it to teach and transfer your values on to your children. Here are some tips for teaching with rap:

- Understand that rap, like other forms of music, voices concerns about issues such as teenage pregnancy, crime and racism. It is not much different in this way than rock and roll was in the 1960's, and can cause the same sort of "generation gap" between parents and teens today.
- Listening to music that parents find objectionable is a normal teen behavior. It doesn't mean your child will listen to it forever, and it doesn't mean your child will act on the negative ideas of many rap songs. Keep it in perspective and don't over react!
- Even though some rap music is not positive, the discussion you have about it can be. Rap has the potential to educate young people. If you tune in to what your children are listening to, you can find some "teachable moments" when values can be addressed.
- Listen to the music your child listens to, or search for lyrics on the internet. Then, wait for the right moment to discuss the song. Don't bring it up when you are upset with your child about something else and don't use it to blame the child for some misbehavior or bad attitude.
- Riding in the car is a great time to listen to music and discuss it with your teen. The "captive audience" aspect of riding in the car can lend itself to good discussions.
- Encourage your teens to think about what they are listening to, and find out what they really think about the ideas expressed in the rap music. Ask them to explain the message of the song to you and tell you how they feel about it.
- Resist the urge to turn off rap music when it comes on the radio. Develop an appreciation for it and learn to see it as an opportunity to discuss your teen's interest with him.
- Expose your child to rap artists who promote positive messages in their lyrics; a few of these are Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Common and Krs-one. Discuss these songs as well as the more negative ones, and suggest contrasts to your teen.
- For more information about rap music, visit www.DavetD.com.