

Latona • Photographs by Matthew Scott

# DO I

# is anyone listening?



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topics.  
 "Everything now seems to be a lot more dangerous and life-threatening. Now sex is deadly, absolutely deadly," said Tom Barg, referring to the rise of AIDS. "And kids have gone from alcohol and light drugs, like marijuana, to cocaine and heroin. So you have to give your kids everything you can possibly give them."  
 "You've got to be open to any discussion," Kitty Barg commented. "Karen gives us a little shock once in a while, but we discuss it."

Tom O'Connell noted that such threats as teen pregnancy, AIDS and drugs may also cause parents to impose rules that teens find too confining.

"Parents are afraid sometimes that children won't understand the impact their decisions might have on their lives," O'Connell remarked.

O'Connell, his wife Debbie, and daughter Johanna attended a program on family communication Feb. 24 at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield. The seminar was conducted by Michael Theisen, diocesan youth-ministry coordinator.

Theisen asked participants to voice where they thought the greatest misunderstandings lay between parents and teens. Each generation was also asked to examine its decision-making through the other's eyes.

Johanna O'Connell, 16, reported that "the parents were most concerned about their teens (potentially) having sex."

Meanwhile, her father found that teens felt "there was too much control and interference about who their friends were and where they were going."

Johanna said she now realizes that control was not always the issue when her parents limited her phone time or social life in the past. Rather, she now accepts such decisions as an attempt to get her to raise her grades at school.

"At the time I may have thought

they were

ganging up on me, because maybe I couldn't see the right answer or take the right path," said Johanna, whose family is from Holy Trinity Church in Webster.

Johanna added that it's easier to understand her parents' decisions when they're accompanied by an explanation.

"Never have my parents said 'You're grounded' and I say 'Why,' and they say 'Because I said so,'" Johanna remarked.

Johanna's sister Stephanie, 14, added that she "doesn't always agree" with her parents' decisions, but "at least I understand them."

Their mother, Debbie, added that it's important for parents to respect the teens' point of view as well.

"We just have to put ourselves in their shoes. It doesn't necessarily change anyone's mind, but at least it makes you think," Debbie O'Connell said.

Johanna added that parents' own life experiences may be precisely what prompts concern about their own children's welfare.

"All parents in general have made mistakes when they were younger, and they try to correct their children's mistakes before the same

thing happens," Johanna said. Sheila Tumminelli said that she, also, strives to identify with the thoughts and feelings of her teenage daughters.

"I try to remember how it was when I was a kid," remarked Sheila, whose family is from St. Ambrose Church in Irondequoit.

Her daughter Lisa, 17, added her family believes in seeing things from all sides as they air their differences.

"On a daily basis there's always at least one thing we have to compromise on. You can't always have things go your own way," Lisa, 17, commented. "We were taught to accept that everyone has their own

opinions, and we should try to understand where each other is coming from."

At the same time, Lisa noted that certain subjects are easier to discuss with an individual parent than with both together.

"There are couple of things you don't come to your father about — guys or fashion advice," she said with a laugh.

Melissa Tumminelli, 13, added that their father, Mike, is a "real over-protective dad." However, she prefers a parent with strong opinions to one with no opinion at all.

"It's better than if he said 'You can go off and do whatever you want,'" Melissa said.

Tom O'Connell hopes that even when teens and parents are at odds with each other, they can remember that part of the conflict arises out of a deep sense of caring.

"Love is there as kind of a binding factor and foundation," he said. "Right or wrong, at least the other person walks away knowing the other person loves them — even though they may not feel that right away."

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(left to right) Melissa, Mike, Sheila and Lisa Tum-

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