ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Session 1

Competition for Kids

Every Child Is Influenced by Many Voices

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to invest in one of the most important callings God has given you. Whether you are a parent, grandparent, guardian, mentor, or other caring adult, you have a powerful opportunity to influence the life of a child. Most adults underestimate just how much they matter.

This course begins with a simple but important reality: parents have competition. That competition is not always obvious, nor does it always come from bad people. In fact, many of the people and sources that influence our children are caring, well-intentioned adults or normal everyday media. These competing influences include:

Teachers	Coaches	Friends
Media	Technology	Social networks

The core question is not whether children will be influenced—the question is: **Who will have the greatest influence?**

A Changed World

Fifty years ago, most children received their values, beliefs, and understanding of life from a relatively small group of people, with family usually serving as the strongest influence. Today, children are exposed to an extraordinary number of voices, many reaching them through digital technology. While many of those voices are helpful, some are confusing, others are unhealthy, and many are actively competing for a child's attention, trust, loyalty, and identity. As parents and grandparents, we cannot control every influence our children encounter, but we can make sure our influence remains strong.

In their 1998 book, The War Against Parents, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West argued that parents were facing increasing competition from economic and cultural forces that undermined their ability to guide and nurture their children. They observed that many children were growing up without the protective armor that had once been provided by parents and communities. They

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argued that parents had not stopped loving their children; rather, the world around them had become increasingly competitive for their children's attention, loyalty, and identity. Whether we agree with every part of their analysis or not, their observation remains deeply relevant today.

> *Parents are not facing a lack of love—they are facing a growing number of competing influences.*

Why Children Look Elsewhere

Every child has a deep need to belong: they want to be known, accepted, and valued, and they want to know who they are and where they fit. When these needs are met in healthy ways through family, faith, friendships, and community, children develop confidence and stability. When healthy belonging is missing, children often look elsewhere to meet that need—sometimes finding healthy influences, and sometimes not. Not every influence in a child's life has their best interests at heart, which is precisely why parents matter so much.

Christian physician and counselor Paul Tournier wrote that the ideal place for a child is the family. When children cannot find a secure place to belong within the family, they often begin looking elsewhere for identity, acceptance, and connection. His observation highlights an important truth: children are always looking for a place to belong. When that need is met in healthy ways, they are more likely to thrive; when it is not, they may seek belonging in places that do not have their best interests at heart.

The Power of Feeling Seen

Parents often assume their children know they are loved, and while many children do know they are loved, they also need to know they are seen. They need to know that someone is paying close attention to their world.

Through the years, I have observed parents who paid close attention to what was happening in the lives of their children. One mother told me that whenever one of her children suddenly became quieter, more withdrawn, more irritable, or less interested in talking, she paid attention. Sometimes those changes appeared after school, sometimes after spending time with friends, or sometimes after interacting with a new adult. She learned that children do not always tell us when something is wrong—often they show us first.

There was a season when peer relationships became especially difficult for one of her daughters. Every evening before bed, she invited her daughter to tell her about her day. They talked about friendships, disappointments, worries, and the things weighing on her heart. Many evenings the mother did very little talking; she simply listened. Looking back, she realized those conversations were doing more than helping her daughter process difficult experiences. They were communicating vital truths:

> *"You matter."*
>
> *"Your thoughts matter."*
>
> *"Your feelings matter."*
>
> *"You do not have to carry this alone."*

Children who feel heard are more likely to bring future concerns, questions, and struggles back to the adults who love them.

Strong Roots

Healthy families are the bedrock of healthy communities, schools, and churches. Redwood trees provide a powerful picture of this strength: redwoods can survive storms for centuries because their roots intertwine with the roots of other trees, deriving their strength through connection. Parents and grandparents were never meant to carry their responsibilities alone; we need encouragement, wisdom, and support from other caring adults. Strong children usually grow from strong roots.

> SCRIPTURE
>
> *"Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace."*
>
> **Psalm 144:12**

Parents Still Matter

What Parents See That Others Miss

With all the competing voices in our culture, some parents wonder whether their influence still matters. It does—in fact, it may matter more than ever. No coach, teacher, pastor, friend, influencer, or online personality has the same opportunity to shape a child as a caring parent or grandparent who is intentionally engaged in that child's life.

Why? Because parents and grandparents are present over time. They see the day-to-day realities of a child's life, notice mood changes, new interests, new friendships, and emerging concerns. They have continuous opportunities to ask questions, start conversations, provide guidance, and help children process what they are experiencing. A coach may see a child a few hours each week, a teacher may see them for a school year, and an online influencer may have only minutes of a child's attention at a time. Parents and grandparents have something far more powerful: a long-term relationship built through thousands of ordinary interactions over many years.

When family leaders stay engaged, those daily conversations, shared experiences, and moments of guidance become one of the strongest influences in a child's life. Often the first sign that something is wrong is not what a child says, but a subtle change in behavior, attitude, mood, or relationships.

> *Your presence matters, your attention matters, your conversations matter, and your example matters.*

What God Entrusts to Parents

There is another reason parents and grandparents matter: God has entrusted children to them. Jesus said, *"To whom much is given, much is required."* (Luke 12:48). Children are one of God's greatest gifts, but they are also one of our greatest responsibilities.

No one else occupies quite the same place in a child's life. Teachers, coaches, pastors, and friends all matter, but parents and grandparents have a unique calling. They are the primary guides, teachers, and examples in a child's life, helping children understand right and wrong, develop wisdom, build character, and learn what it means to follow God. The goal is not simply to get children safely through childhood, but to prepare them for a lifetime of wise decisions, healthy relationships, and faithful living. This calling is both a privilege and a profound responsibility.

THIS WEEK

One Thing to Try This Week

Choose one of the following practical action steps to implement this week:

- Spend fifteen uninterrupted minutes listening to your child.
- Ask your child who influences them most and why.
- Identify one recent change in your child's mood or behavior and consider what might be behind it.

LOOKING AHEAD

Digging Deeper

As Jesus stated in Luke 12:48, *To whom much is given, much is required*. Children are one of God's greatest gifts and one of our greatest responsibilities. The next session will explore an important reality: not every influence in a child's life is working for their good. Some influences help children grow, while others seek to use, manipulate, or mislead them. Parents need to understand the difference.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to think honestly about the following questions:

- Who currently has the strongest influence in my child's life?
- If my child is struggling with something difficult, would I likely be one of the first people they talk to?
- Does my child feel merely loved, or do they also feel seen, heard, and understood?
- Have I noticed any recent changes in my child's mood, friendships, interests, or behavior that deserve closer attention?
- What messages about identity, belonging, and worth are shaping my child's thinking right now?
- Am I intentionally building influence with my child, or am I assuming that influence will happen automatically?
- If my child were looking for belonging, encouragement, or acceptance, would they find it first within our family?

The goal of these questions is not guilt—the goal is awareness.

Children are influenced by many voices. The more engaged we are in their lives, the more likely we are to remain one of the voices they trust most.