

## **GOOD KIDS, TOUGH CHOICES AN EVENING WITH DR. RUSH KIDDER**

When faced with a moral dilemma what tools do we have to explore and examine our situation and what moves us forward with our thinking to an outcome that feels solid, just and settled? These are some of the ideas discussed at The Safe Community Coalition's presentation of Good Kids, Tough Choices, by Dr. Rush Kidder.

Rush began our session with observations about the crisis of our economy. He observed that quickly the national conversation has turned away from monetary policy towards values-laden discussions about greed and corruption and morality. He also added the notion of "creating a culture of integrity" which needs to start in our homes, in our communities and venture out to our state and federal government.

Dr. Kidder is a journalist, and educator and the Director/Founder of the Institute for Global Ethics which focuses on how ethical decisions are made in everyday aspects of life whether at work or in our private lives. Through 17 years of research around the world the Institute has discovered that people world-wide tend to agree on 5 shared core values: honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness and compassion. With this basis as a jumping off point to the evening Dr. Kidder shared with tools to help us move forward when faced with ethical and moral dilemmas.

Dr. Kidder stated that with moral reasoning there is usually a tension between "right vs. wrong" and he feels this is limiting and not accurate. More often than not both sides have very valid points and positions and that what really causes the dilemma is that both sides are "right". This leads him to advocate for exploring the "right vs. right" concept. This concept helps build a conversation which, in theory leads to more options, possibilities and an expansion of possible compromises and outcomes.

Most dilemmas can be broken down into 4 categories or "entrée-ways" into conversations where "right vs. right" is a valid point of view.

1. Truth vs. Loyalty
2. Individual vs. Community
3. Short term vs. Long term
4. Justice vs. Mercy

Seeing these distinctions enables us to understand why it is so difficult sometimes to come down on one side or the other because both positions have something valid to offer. Or, the flip side is that it gives us a way of not having to make a quick judgment or decision without the benefit of exploring the issue from all sides. As a parent understanding the pull of right vs. wrong in us and our children, having the language, framework and confidence to move the conversation forward and not thwart the give and take process is very important. We can help ourselves and our kids explore options, build a conversation, explore what values are being challenged and have the "moral courage" to move forward.

Another concept which helps frame our decisions that was discussed by Dr. Kidder is “Moral Courage”. Moral Courage is the intersection between a high principle/value, the danger or risk involved by following through and the endurance/perseverance of sticking to the belief or action being taken. An example would be seeing your friend bullied, knowing that if you interfere there may be danger to you or you might get in trouble interfering yet you go to their rescue anyway because you feel loyalty and doing the “right thing” is more important than worrying about the consequences and you are willing to deal with the consequences because it feels right to you to do so. Dr. Kidder feels that there are many acts of moral courage around us all of the time which we need to acknowledge and learn from.

Dr. Kidder’s message to us as parents is to develop the language and confidence to encourage conversations that lead to “right vs. right” discussion and to preserve the sanctity of the process by acknowledging both sides. He wants us to help our children explore what is important to them within the framework of these core values and why, thus giving them tools to help better explore the dilemmas that life challenges us with on a daily basis.

In our mission statement the Safe Community Coalition vision is “a community where youth learn to make responsible decisions...”. We believe that providing events such as Dr. Kidder’s discussion allows for the whole community to learn and develop new tools to better achieve our goals.