

MUSIC

A Parent's Guide to

BILLIE EILISH

axis

A Parent's Guide to **BILLIE EILISH**

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With a middle name like “Pirate,” how could she not be sensational?

Billie Eilish Pirate Baird-O’Connell is not your typical teenage girl. [According to Rolling Stone](#) (*language*), “She had a billion streams on Spotify before her [debut] album had even come out.” That album, titled [When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?](#), released March 2019, was written and recorded by Billie and her brother in their family home, and has become a chart topper. In fact, [she became](#) the “first artist born in the 2000s to have a number one album.”

Yet at the same time, she is a typical teenager. She puts off cleaning her room to scroll through social media and has watched *The Office* in its entirety a dozen times. She still wakes up her mom in the middle of the night after a nightmare—she just so happens to sing to a crowd of 20,000 people the following day.

But above all, she embodies Gen Z mentalities of individuality, nonconformity, and a fear of things remaining the same, which is why teens find her so appealing. In a culture that seems to value perfection, a narrow standard of beauty, and constant positivity, her pronounced emphasis on the bizarre and dark parts of life only adds to the allure. By knowing about her and her music, you will be equipped to talk with your teenager about the heavier subjects, like depression and drug use, found within her music, as well as help them carefully consider what they choose to listen to.

Who is Billie Eilish?

Born in 2001, she’s the daughter of actors [Maggie Baird](#) and [Patrick O’Connell](#). Because of the nature of Baird and O’Connell’s work, they homeschooled Billie and her older brother Finneas in a loosely structured environment where they were allowed to explore their creative interests. Thus Billie began writing songs—an art she and Finneas were taught by their mother—when she was quite young and even joined the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus [at the age of eight](#) (*language*).

Yet she started out [primarily as a dancer](#). She wrote and recorded her first hit song, “Ocean Eyes,” for a dance class when she was 13, posting it on SoundCloud to share with

her dance teacher. Somehow it went viral. (Ultimately Billie had to stop dancing due to a severe hip injury, causing her to focus more on singing.) Then, her song “Bored” was used on the first season of the controversial-yet-popular teen Netflix show *13 Reasons Why*, which only brought her more attention. Since then, her following has continued to grow astronomically, making her what she is today: a pop icon.

Interestingly, in 2018 Eilish revealed on her [Instagram story](#) that she has [Tourette Syndrome](#) manifesting in physical tics, which she largely has under control but can still occur during moments of stress. She also revealed [to Rolling Stone](#) (*language*) that she has [synesthesia](#) (neurosensory wire-crossing in which senses seem to blend together), which she described like this:

“Every person I know has their own color and shape and number in my head, but it’s normal to me,” she says. Finneas, for example, is an orange triangle, although the name “Finneas” is dark green. And her song “Bad Guy” “is yellow, but also red, and the number seven,” she says. “It’s not hot, but warm, like an oven. And it smells like cookies.”

A symbol of Gen Z angst, Eilish is known for her “couldn’t care less about convention” attitude, her androgynous fashion choices, her tough exterior, and her strong conviction to do everything her own way. Eilish revealed that she [hates to smile](#), especially if she feels like it’s within the context of a social obligation because it makes her “feel weak and powerless and small.”

As successful as she already is, it’s important to remember she’s still a teenager. She recently got her driver’s license and lives with her parents in Highland Park, Los Angeles in the home she grew up in. Her parents both go on tour with her and have professional tour-staff positions (for which they’re paid reasonable salaries; they’re not using Billie’s fame to profit for themselves). They’re also trying to keep her as healthy and grounded as possible in the midst of the stress that comes with fame and touring.

A highly strong-willed and sensitive person, Eilish [revealed](#) in an interview that she believes she would have been a bully if she had gone to school, rather than being homeschooled. She comes across as rather aloof, even cocky, but there is conviction behind her music and her persona. She has been open about her own struggles with depression, self-harm, and night terrors. As rough around the edges as she may be, and as dark as her delivery may be, at the core, her message is that it’s okay to be yourself and that everyone deals with fear and difficult situations in their lives.

What does she sing about?

Rolling Stone accurately [described](#) her music as “darker and weirder than that of most teen pop stars, with a gothy, punkish, vaguely sinister edge and nary a hint of bubblegum.” She sings about heavier hitting topics than your typical teen pop star, which is probably a large part of her appeal: She’s authentic, honest, and willing to talk about the tough emotions and situations teens are actually facing. While she has some songs about the usual teenage love and heartbreak, other songs within her repertoire focus on more serious topics like suicide, drugs, or the environment.

Many of her songs are also purely fictional, written for the explicit purpose of entering the world of a made-up character. She has a pronounced emphasis on the bizarre, taken from her affinity for the horror genre. She’s written songs based around the show *American Horror Story* or about the creatures she’s seen in her night terrors, which she documents. Her lyrics are highly imaginative, a bit grotesque, and tend toward being controversial.

Here’s a sample of some of the topics and lyrics within her music:

Topic: Suicide

Song: Listen Before I Go

Written from the perspective of someone pondering suicide or planning an impending suicide attempt.

*Take me to the rooftop
I wanna see the world when I stop breathing
Turnin’ blue. . .
If you need me, wanna see me
Better hurry ‘cause I’m leavin’ soon.*

Topic: Drug use/addiction

Song: Xanny

About hanging out with friends who are using Xanax (an anti-anxiety medication): “They just keep doing nothing, too intoxicated to be scared.” Other lyrics:

*I’m in their second-hand smoke
Still just drinking canned Coke
I don’t need a Xanny to feel better
On designated drives home*

*Only one who's not stoned
Don't give me a Xanny, now or ever.*

Though she doesn't use drugs, she is not necessarily saying others shouldn't. According to a [tweet from @eilishupdates2](#), Eilish said re: "Xanny": "I have never done drugs, I've never smoked anything in my life, I know people around you doing that s*** makes you want to, but you don't have to, the song's message is less 'don't do drugs'; it's more 'be safe.' I don't want my friends to die any more."

Topic: Climate Change

Song: All the Good Girls Go to Hell

Imagines God and the devil having some solidarity in their shock over how humans are destroying the planet.

*All the good girls go to Hell
'Cause even God herself has enemies
And once the water starts to rise
And Heaven's out of sight
She'll want the Devil on her team*

Finneas has [confirmed](#) that this song was written about climate change.

Topic: Fiction / Darkness

Song: Various

Many of Billie's songs are purely fictional, i.e., storytelling in song form. For example, "Bury a Friend" "[is written from](#) the perspective of the proverbial monster under the bed, who is weary and losing the will to live." In this song, the monster has lost the will to live because he is no longer inducing fear but is being allowed to linger:

*What do you want from me? Why don't you run from me?
What are you wondering? What do you know?
Why aren't you scared of me? Why do you care for me?
When we all fall asleep, where do we go?*

Another example of fiction in Eilish's music is the smash hit "Bad Guy," in which the most jarring lyrics say:

*I'm that bad type
Make your mama sad type
Make your girlfriend mad tight*

*Might seduce your dad type
I'm the bad guy
Duh*

Billie isn't saying she is the bad guy; rather, she and Finneas made up a song that matches what a sort of cartoonish bad guy would be like. In [this interview](#), Eilish explained, "I always wanted to be the bad guy in every game I played. They were the coolest. Obviously, I'm not a bad guy in real life—so let me put on this mask. When you're little, songwriting is the same thing as playing a game. You can be whatever you want."

Finally, her song "Bellyache" is written from the perspective of a person who has just killed her friends and is now experiencing a guilt-induced bellyache. In [this interview](#), she gives this explanation of how imagination impacts her songwriting, specifically with "Bellyache":

Me and my brother write together always. We like to completely make up things and become characters. We like to have songs that are really fictional. That song is about killing people and feeling guilty about it. [It's about] getting a bellyache because you just killed a bunch of people, which you would if you just killed a bunch of people if you were human, but psychopaths don't really have those feelings. We kind of just became this character that knows they're out of their mind, but also doesn't at the same time. We have a bunch of songs that are like that. You don't always have to feel the way you are while singing. You can write songs about being sad and not be sad. You can write songs about being in love with someone and not be in love with anyone. It's fun to become somebody else or become nobody—just your imagination.

She goes on to say:

We try to write what everyone is thinking, but no one says. We try to say stuff that doesn't have to be that deep: it could be something random, like 'I feel sad,' but you say something way deeper in a certain way that makes sense, but you haven't really thought about. We try to be super creative with the lyrics.

Lyrics aside, sonically Eilish's music is rather minimalistic in its production to allow her vocals to shine. She is really into hip-hop music, which is not difficult to ascertain based on the trap-inspired, electronic music she and Finneas create. However, she also has some lovely quiet ballads with piano and guitar. This creativity present within Eilish's music and lyrics has caused young people to really latch on to her music.

Why do teens like her so much?

Besides simply having a beautiful voice, teens like her because they feel she is relatable and represents them well. As was briefly highlighted in the previous section, Eilish is writing on emotional and social issues that teens are all dealing with to one degree or another. Sad as it may be, in this day and age, it's normal for teens to have friends who are struggling with things like depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. So Billie takes these kinds of tough issues and bring them into the light, in effect de-stigmatizing them. In addition, Teens look up to her as a role model and respect her as a peer who is pioneering a new version of pop music.

We ran a very unofficial survey on Instagram to assess what Millennial/Gen Z followers had to say about why they love Billie Eilish and her music. Here are some of their responses:

- “It doesn’t sound like anything else out there AND she isn’t afraid to break the rules.”
- “I like that her music is different, not usual or boring.”
- “It’s bold and different from all the music trends out there nowadays.”
- “It pushes the boundaries of comfort. Audibly and visually. She’s haunting yet playful.”
- “She allows me to express the darker side of my personality without fear of judgment.”

Other words that kept popping up included: catchy, edgy, dark, soothing, and relaxing.

Should I be concerned about the darkness of her music?

It’s definitely worth noting. Whether ironic, fantastical, fictional, or literal in nature, what is the trajectory that it points to? Time will tell, but darkness is never something to ignore. Just because Billie and Finneas don’t take the content within their songs too seriously doesn’t mean that the darkness is not real or that listeners will respond in the same casual way to their songs.

Darkness has been a prominent component of Eilish’s life. A longtime horror fan, Eilish

has a history of vivid and recurring nightmares, and she documents the monsters in her dreams in her journal by drawing pictures of them. While the “tortured genius” angle of these night terrors may be something people try to dismiss as something that comes with the territory of being an artist, it’s important for you to consider if this is an influence that should simply be dismissed or if it will affect your kids’ mental wellbeing.

In fact, Billie herself is changing in this regard. With the stress of touring, [Eilish has found](#) that her real life is as much horror as she can handle:

*“I actually had to stop watching horror movies, because everything started flipping me out. I saw creatures outside my windows. I had sleep paralysis. I’m done with the fake s***—real life is way too scary. I’ve loved attention my whole life,” Eilish goes on, “but I don’t think anyone knows what fame actually is. Because if I did want to be famous—it wasn’t this kind.”*

Of course, the clash between light and dark is a huge theme throughout the Bible. [Ephesians 5:8-14](#) speaks to the struggle:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

*“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

We are not to participate in the evil deeds done in darkness, but at the same time, we are also not to shy away from the darkness within us or the difficult emotions we face, pretending they don’t exist. Paul instructs us to expose the darkness for the sake of allowing it to become a light instead. What a beautiful picture of redemption! When we do the hard, vulnerable work of confronting what’s within or exposing darkness in our world, Christ takes it and turns it into light.

When we bring our struggles with the things of darkness into the light, that is when we can truly be healed. It’s through Jesus only that our darkness can be made light. And those of us who have lived long enough know that the areas in which we have struggled the most are usually the areas in which Christ uses us to be a light to others.

[Psalm 27:1](#) also encourages us, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” Ultimately, we know who has won the battle against darkness. We can rest assured that the Lord is powerful and sovereign over any darkness we might face. That being said, darkness does have dominion over this world for this time. When we exalt in the darkness or succumb to dark thoughts, we give that darkness power—power it has no right to hold over our hearts. Talk with your teen about the choices we can make when it comes to light and darkness. Because when we dwell on the things *the enemy* tells us matter, we give those things power over us. But when we recognize the facade, rejecting darkness and embracing what is good and of the Lord, we empower *ourselves* with His goodness. We have no need to fear or fall into darkness inevitably, for the Lord is, and always will be, on our side.

Should I allow my kids to listen to her music?

This is a tough question because, unlike typical teen pop stars’ music, it’s not just sexual innuendos and references to partying we have to consider. Her willingness to confront, embody, and at times embrace the darkness needs to be taken into consideration. But remember that, **more than telling our kids what to think, our goal is to teach them how to think.** By offering them a good framework for filtering through today’s media and art, we’re setting them up to make healthy decisions for themselves throughout their lives about what they should and shouldn’t consume.

And let’s be realistic: Children will find a way to listen to Eilish’s music if they want to. (Did you ever sneak around your parents’ wishes? If so, it might be worth telling your kids about how those choices affected you.) So rather than forbidding them to listen to her and having them potentially sneak around you to listen to her, why not listen to and discuss her music with them? In general, it’s wise to have an open dialogue with your kids about any media they are consuming. Is your child at a level of maturity to understand figurative versus literal lyrics? As parents, it’s our job to be tuned in to the individual needs of each of our kids. Are there any noticeable changes in their mood or behavior? Assess what media they have been consuming and if or how it may be affecting them.

Ultimately, the decision of whether your child can listen to Eilish is up to you, your child, and the Holy Spirit, but here are some questions to ponder when deciding (these can also be applied to other artists).

What’s their motive for listening to her music?

Many teenagers simply treat music as entertainment or as a way to fit in with their peers. But others treat it as a way to express what they’re already feeling, and they see the artists who create such music as friends who can empathize with what they’re going through. Either attitude is worth addressing. Those who treat her music as entertainment would benefit from good questions about how constantly putting those ideas into their head are affecting them, how it might impact those who look up to them (like younger siblings), and whether they feel doing so can be glorifying to God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). For those who see it as giving voice to what they already feel, that’s an invitation to ask them what about it resonates with them, why, and how you can come alongside them in that experience. Either way, the goal here is not only to assess how they approach her music, but also get them to analyze their approach and mindset. By asking good questions, you may help them come to a God-honoring conclusion on their own.

How does (or would) listening to her music affect them?

Constantly dwelling on darkness is never healthy, nor is celebrating it. If your teenager already has proclivities toward doing either, then her music will probably reinforce and encourage them. If her music (or anyone else’s) is making your child begin to have consistently negative thoughts, feelings, or behavior, it could be a good idea to eliminate her from their listening rotation and see if it helps, especially for children who may be more prone to struggling with fear. Paralyzing fear is not of God: “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline,” ([2 Timothy 1:7](#)). And when we seek the Lord, He delivers us from our fears ([Psalm 34:4](#)). Take careful note of what fruit you’re seeing in your kid’s life, and seek the Lord for wisdom on what may need to change.

On the other hand, some teenagers have yet to experience struggle, hardship, or even real darkness, so her music—combined with great parental guidance—could help them confront these things in a safe environment, allowing them to ask good questions and empathize with those who struggle with, say, suicidal thoughts or the temptation to use drugs. It could even eventually lead to a desire to join God

in redeeming these dark parts of our world. You know your children best, so consider each one individually when asking this question.

Do they think critically about what they're listening to or mindlessly consume it?

If your teenager has ever said, "I don't listen to the lyrics; I just listen to the music or the beat," trust us, they are not the first to ever say that. But the truth is that the lyrics do impact them, whether they realize it or not. (There's a reason they can sing all the words in a song after listening to it *one time*.) So does your teen approach the music they listen to with a level of thought and discernment? Do they ask questions like, "What is she trying to accomplish here? Why does she say this? Why did she choose that imagery or sound?" If they exhibit a desire to analyze, critique, and learn from her work, there's a good chance they're paying attention and willing to be honest with themselves about how it's impacting them. If they're clueless and get annoyed by questions that get them to look deeper at her work, they may not yet be ready for the maturity of thought her music requires.

Are you (parent) avoiding it simply because you're afraid of it?

It's easy to say no to something because it's confusing, foreign to us, or even scares us a bit. And Eilish's imagery can often be scary. But if we're simply having a knee-jerk reaction to this feeling of fear, we're allowing fear to rule us. Instead, we can rest in the knowledge that the light is much more powerful than the dark! Even if your kids keep listening to her music against your wishes, don't stop pointing them toward the light and praying that God would captivate their hearts and minds in a powerful and real way. Remember, as [one writer put it](#), that "Billie Eilish's dark fantasies may be disturbing, but they can also open doorways into deeper understanding of ourselves and our fallen world, and ultimately into a strength that rests on the one person who can overcome those fears by His presence in our lives."

Overall, Eilish's music exposes the darkness many teens relate to yet feel like older generations often pretend doesn't exist. Obviously, they feel the need for more transparency, honesty, and authenticity *even if it means showing their ugly, sinful sides*. For parents of teens who appreciate Eilish, **her music becomes an opportunity to teach them the difference between *exposing* darkness and *exalting* in it.**

As Christ's followers, we should always be seeking to transform darkness into light through the power of Jesus. Until God eradicates it for good, we will continue to have darkness in our lives, *but we do not have to stay in the dark*. This is something we can never overemphasize with our children. And if the darkness in Eilish's music concerns you or your children, a great thing to do together is pray for her, that one day she, too, can know the true freedom, peace, and love that are found in the light of Jesus Christ.

How do I talk to my kids about her music?

When bringing it up, come from a place of genuinely wanting to listen and hear their thoughts, not one of pre-prepared responses and lectures. Give them a chance to open up, reciprocally hearing and sharing your thoughts. And don't come on too strong! Maybe ask your teen to play a couple songs for you while you're in the car together.

After listening to them, ask what they think they were about or how the songs made them feel. If there's something that bothers you or is concerning, you should definitely talk about, but gauge the situation. If it's gotten heated or it seems like your teen's walls are up, wait till a later time. More often than not, asking them questions that get them thinking will work better than telling them what's wrong with her music or what you don't like. Beyond this, we've included more discussion questions in a section at the end of this Guide for conversation starters.

Anything else I should know?

A scroll through Eilish's [Instagram account](#) is sure to leave many people from older generations perplexed by her rather outrageous fashion choices—neon-everything, multiple chains around her neck, rings on every finger, and long, dagger-like fingernails. [Her look](#) is edgy: “For her core teen-girl fan base, she's like the cool senior in art class who dresses and acts the way they wish they could: stylish, outrageous, maybe a little dangerous.”

As someone who struggled with body insecurity like almost any other teen, Eilish has made it clear that she is not dressing in a way that would allow her to be sexually

objectified by anyone. Her “all-baggy anti-silhouette” serves as “a collective middle finger to the strictures of teen-pop sex appeal,” according to [The New York Times](#). Her wardrobe “[is the precise embodiment](#) of that particular teenaged paradox—notice me, but don’t . . . look at me—taken to its dripped-out extreme.” Eilish wants to be noticed but not objectified. She has a unique style and voice that is not dictated by cultural trends, much like the topics within her music. Because of this, many of her fans will want to adopt similar looks and attitudes.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent’s Guide to Gen Z’s Love of Music](#)
- [A Parent’s Guide to Spotify](#)
- [A Parent’s Guide to Discipling Teenagers](#)
- Check out [axis.org](#) for even more resources!
- If you’d like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low yearly or monthly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass!](#)

Additional Resources

- [“Who’s Afraid of Billie Eilish?”](#) Think Christian
- [“Billie Eilish and the Triumph of the Weird,”](#) *Rolling Stone*

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A Parent's Guide to **BILLIE EILISH**

Recap

- Billie Eilish is a young singer who has captured the attention of teens everywhere with her edginess and head-on approach to dark topics within her music.
- She has an affinity for the macabre, rooted in her love of the horror genre and her longstanding history of night terrors.
- Teens appreciate her authenticity, honesty, and willingness to talk about the tough emotions, fears, and situations they are actually facing. They like that she is different from other popular musicians.
- Many of her songs are fictional in nature, but contain dark content such as murder, suicidal urges, drug use, and depression.
- The darkness in her music is not to be ignored as meaningless, but since your kids will probably listen to her, it's important to have open and honest discussions with them about her and her music. What do they like about her? What does her music stir up within them? What is the spiritual fruit?
- Let the darkness within Billie Eilish's music serve as a catalyst for you to talk with your kids about the darkness they are facing in their own lives. This is an opportunity for you to help your kids bring their darkness into the light so that Christ may shine on it for the purpose of healing and redemption.

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!

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Discussion Questions

- What is it that makes you like Billie Eilish so much? What sets her apart from other musicians or celebrities?
- How do you feel like you relate to her personally or to her songs?
- What do you like about her music?
- What are some of the meditations you hear within the lyrics? How do they make you feel? How would you say your own mental health is? What kind of support could you use from me?
- What do you like about Billie Eilish's imagination present in her music? Do you think it is having an impact on your own imagination? Imagination is good and a gift from God. If the default imagination of Billie Eilish goes in a dark fatalistic direction, it may be easy for you to be tempted to go the same way in your own mind.
- Billie Eilish has a strong emphasis on fear in a lot of her songs. Are there areas in which you can relate to her fear? Are you struggling with any fear right now?
- What do you think listening to Billie Eilish is bringing about in your own mind? What is the fruit you have noticed?

Hint: Screen shot or print this page to refer back to later!