



THE INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES OF NORTH TEXAS

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IHF Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 7

June 15, 2009

My Teenagers Have Gone Wild!

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After listening to the litany of complaints by parents these days, one would think that our teenagers are never going to grow up and take responsibility by getting an education and a good job to provide for a future family! Our culture reinforces the ideals of freedom, but rarely do we talk about the need for “freedom with responsibility” or do we talk about consequences for our actions or lack of action. So how do we raise today’s youth in a culture that is bombarded with sex, violence, drugs, and financial irresponsibility? I am here to tell you, it isn’t easy! Here are some suggestions to help you get through the difficult times:

1. **Listen** to your children and teens. By keeping at least one meal a day “sacred” with everybody at the table that is a great time to hear what is going on in the life of your teen. It doesn’t matter if it is breakfast or dinner—the important thing is to set aside some quality family time.
2. Make it a priority to attend your teen’s **school functions**. Kids and especially teens won’t admit it, but they love having Mom and/or Dad in the audience at an important game or a concert.
3. Attend **parent-teacher conferences** at your teen’s school. The teachers and/or counselors can give you some great insight in how your teen is performing academically as well as socially.
4. **Encourage your teen to try new experiences**, whether it is an elective course at school, an after-school job, a youth organization, a church youth group, or a volunteer opportunity. New experiences assist with socialization and staying out of trouble.
5. Although you can’t know where your teen is all the time or with whom your teen is with, you can **monitor** where your teen is going and establish a reasonable time when your teen is expected to be back.
6. Understand that your teen needs **more sleep** than you. These are still growing and changing years and your teen is busy academically, socially and physically. So let your teen “sleep in” occasionally on Saturdays to catch up on rest.
7. **Establish clear-cut rules and boundaries** for your teen. Allow your teen to assist the parents with a contract agreement so that he or she knows what is expected. Make sure that discipline is fair and is not overly harsh. You want your teen to learn from the experience, not be crushed by it.
8. **Respect your teen’s need for privacy**. If you suspect your teen is hiding drugs, alcohol, porno, weapons and/or other potentially destructive contraband, you do need to get involved by confronting your teen with solid evidence. However, don’t go on a “fishing expedition” in your teen’s room unless you have a very good reason.
9. **Establish clear guidelines on social networking sites**. Explain to your teen that what they post on My Space or any other networking site on the Internet will stay there forever. In the near future your teen will be applying for college or a job. Do they realize that interviewers may check the Internet to determine if the applicant is trustworthy, emotionally stable, and has good character? For those who posted something in bad taste five years ago, the consequences could be harsh.
10. **Take boy-girl relationships and breakups seriously**. Adolescent boys especially have a hard time dealing with rejection from the opposite sex and they have difficulty expressing their feelings. A wise parent will listen to their heartbreak and provide consolation. If the emotional pain lasts more than 2 or 3 weeks, make an appointment for your teen to talk to a professional counselor.

If you or anyone in your family needs counseling for a career change or personal counseling to address losses or changes in your life, check out our web site at www.texasicounselors.com. Our rates are affordable.