



EFFECTIVE MONITORING:

Joining with other Parents to Set Common Rules

In order to keep our children safe as they pass through adolescence, it is important to know whom they are spending time with, where they are going, what they are doing and when they will return. It is also important that we model appropriate behaviors, guide them towards wise choices, and have clear rules to keep them safe.

The challenge is that sometimes our teens don't follow our rules. They may actively rebel against them or just quietly choose to do what they want. This can put them in a risky situation.

Children are more likely to follow our rules if they make sense to them and if they seem fair.



One of the best strategies to protect your child's safety is to get to know the parents of your child's friends and to work together to make common rules. Adolescents may be less likely to rebel against a rule that all of their friends also follow.

● WHY GROUP RULES HELP

- > **Older children and adolescents want to be “normal.”** Because they worry about being different from their peers, they constantly compare themselves to others.
- > **When their own house rules are stricter than those of their friends,** they may believe they are unfair and they may choose to rebel: *“But all my friends’ curfews are at 11:00. It’s not fair I have to come home at 10:30! I’m not a kid anymore!”*
- > **If you work together with other parents to create common rules,** your child will not feel that she is being treated differently than her friends. She’ll see the rules as “normal” or “just the way it is.”
- > **When groups of parents agree on community standards,** your teen will be less likely to take your rules personally (*“You don’t trust me!!”*) and be more likely to accept them.

● TIPS FOR MAKING GROUP RULES

- > **Find ways to meet the parents of your child’s friends.**
 - Reach out to other parents at school, community, religious or other extracurricular events.
 - It’s just as important to meet the parents of your teens’ friends as it was when your children were younger and had play dates.
 - It opens up the chance to get to know each other and begin talking about rules.
- > **Be careful not to have so many rules that they get in the way of young people becoming independent.** Independence is good and rules should be saved for important safety issues. If teens feel they are being “controlled” they will rebel strongly against rules, however, they will appreciate it when adults are looking out for their safety.
- > **Make sure that parent discussions about rules don’t lead the adults in the community to expect adolescents to have problems.** That hype can backfire if teens learn that adults expect for them to be a problem. Instead, send a positive message that says your community expects teens to do the right thing and agrees on safety standards to make it easier for youth to make wise choices.

> **Make a set of common “normal” rules.**

Some topics you might want to address include:

- Curfews
- Unsupervised parties
- Drug and alcohol use
- Cell phones and texting at bedtime
 - > It is recommended that all cell phones be outside the bedroom and placed in a charger overnight.
- No peer passengers for the first 6 months to a year of driving
 - > The distraction caused by even well-behaved peer passengers significantly increases crash risk.

> **When a plan is set between your child and his friends, confirm that the other parents agree with this plan.**

- “I’m just calling to make sure you are picking the girls up from the movies tonight and driving them home.”

> **Create a community where all adults look out for all children.** Many adults today are uncomfortable monitoring community adolescents because they are afraid they will be told they are overstepping their bounds. Children and adolescents will feel protected and cared about when they know that community adults care enough to notice them and to monitor their safety. The key is to notice all of the wonderful things our young people do and not just to focus on problem behaviors.

Teens want to be “normal” and think it is unfair when they are treated differently from their friends. Try to meet the parents of your child’s friends and work together to create common rules about safety. Teens whose friends have the same rules will be less likely to rebel and more likely to see those rules as “just the way it is.”

SOURCES:

Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg with Martha Jablow (2011) *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, American Academy of Pediatrics (www.fosteringresilience.com)

Dr. Judith Smetana (2011) *Adolescents Families and Social Development: How Teens Construct their Worlds*, Wiley-Blackwell (<http://www.amazon.com/Adolescents-Families-Social-Development-Construct/dp/1444332503>)

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