



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Navigating the tricky world of parenting adolescents

'They want to feel cared for. They want to feel love. They want to feel safe.'



By Jane Sutter

Has your formerly sweet adolescent turned into an argumentative rebel practically overnight? Did you smell cigarette smoke on his clothes? Did she get caught skipping school with a posse of girls you don't know? It doesn't mean it's time to lock him or her in a closet and throw away the key, say adults in the know.

These adolescents' behavior simply reflects that they are not all grown up, despite what they think. The part of their brain that helps them control impulses, rationalize, and make good decisions is still developing, and it will be until they are in their 20s, said Stephanie Godleski, associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Rochester Institute of Technology.

"The big struggle really of this period is that adolescents are seeking autonomy

and feeling that they are ready to make all of their choices, and the parents know they're not quite there yet," Godleski said.

The teen years are not the time when parents should disengage from their child's life, but it is a time of delicate balance in the relationship, said both Godleski and John Sarafine, who has been counseling students in high schools for almost 40 years. He worked as head counselor at Fairport High School, logging 34 years. He's now in his fourth year as director of college counseling and student advising at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

Navigating these situations depends on the existing relationship between the parent and the child.

"If you have a good trusting relationship with your kids, a two-way trust where you trust them and they trust you, if you model to them and instill good values in them,

then I think they make the good choices of who to associate with and who not to associate with," Sarafine said.

"If parents are detached from their child, and a bit out of touch about the activities and the whereabouts of their kid, and there's not a lot of trust there, it becomes harder," she added.

Ideally, a loving and trusting relationship begins developing between parent and child when the child is very young, Godleski noted.

"The more you have a stronger relationship to fall back on, the more likely they are to come to you when things go wrong," she said. "It's helpful if a teen believes he or she can talk to a parent about something that's happened even if the parent is not going to be happy about the situation.

It's a delicate balance, Godleski and Sara-

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fine said. There needs to be warmth and involvement in the adolescent's life balanced with expectations and setting limits.

Collaboration and communication

Godleski said some parents and teens even set up a written contract. That works best when it's a collaborative and joint decision-making process. Parents need to explain why a certain behavior, such as smoking cigarettes, is a concern. The "my way or the high-way" approach doesn't work, Godleski said.

Another approach that Godleski suggested is to have a weekly meeting with the adolescent just to talk about whatever's going on in his or her life. This helps set up a pattern of open communication and expectations and allows for time to talk when there's not a big issue going on.

Especially important is having "a positive time with your adolescent on a regular basis," Godleski said.

When a teen does violate expectations, it's important for parents to follow through on enforcing consequences and do so in a consistent way. Godleski also said that once the punishment is over, parents need to not rehash the situation, keep bringing it up or holding a grudge. "Once punishment is over, it's over."

It's also important for parents to acknowledge when they see their teen taking positive steps, when his or her behavior is reflecting what they're trying to teach. "Just like in the workplace, if you feel you're working hard and it's not noticed, and all that's really noticed is when you're not doing something right, that's a hard place to be." Parents should think about what they



would want if they were the teen.

Staying involved

In his nearly four decades of working with teens, Sarafine has noticed that as adolescents grow older, some parents begin to detach from their kid's lives. "This is a natural thing. I think parents detach from their involvement in school, in knowing who their kids' friends are."

He doesn't think that's a good thing. "The mindset is that 'my kid is older, I'm going to let him or her take care of their academics, I'm going to bow out a little bit.' I always tell parents I think you should be more involved but in a different way. You've got to be monitoring their academics; you've got to be monitoring what they're doing outside of school."

With his years of working with students, Sarafine said he's seen a change in parenting styles in the last 10 years, where parents want to be their kids' best friend. "That

sounds good but best friends don't always tell you exactly what you need to hear. Sometimes you need to say, 'I'm not your best friend, I'm your mom or I'm your dad. I need to say things to you that are hard and things your best friend won't say to you.'"

Sarafine recalled that when his four children were teens, if they were going to a party or to spend the night at a friend's home, he would call the parents to make sure an adult would be home. "That's how I got to know people."

Parents should attend their kids' extracurricular activities, whether it be sports, arts, music, etc., Sarafine said. Doing so, parents will meet their teen's friends and perhaps also their parents.

Sarafine is also big on parents inviting their kids' friends over to their home. That's what he did so he could get to know the friends. He would even go so far as to call parents of his kids' friends to let them know what would be going on, such as watching sports on a big-screen TV, playing ping pong, etc.

Being a parent isn't always easy, Sarafine acknowledged. "For some people, parenting is really hard. For some people, it comes easy. Some kids are easier to parent than others, even within the same family."

But the bottom line, Sarafine said, is that all kids want the same thing. "They want to feel cared for. They want to feel love. They want to feel safe."

The job of the parent is to be there to support and coach their adolescents, Godleski said.

A little perspective can go a long way. "If we think back to when we were teens, we probably made decisions that were rash, too" Godleski said, chuckling.

Jane Sutter is a Rochester area freelance writer.

Some tips on parenting

Stephanie Godleski and John Sarafine offer the following advice about parenting adolescents, especially when their behavior is worrisome:

- Stay involved in your child's life and recognize that the part of his or her brain that helps them control impulses and make decisions is still developing.
- Model the behavior and values you want to see in your kids.
- Set up a time to talk regularly with adolescents about what's going on in their lives.
- If their behavior is less than desirable, explain why that is. Make the punishment fit the crime. Once they've fulfilled it, then move on. Don't hold a grudge.
- Be positive and praise your teen when you see the behavior you want to see. Make time to have positive interactions with your teens, perhaps by doing an activity together.
- Encourage your adolescents to invite their friends over so you can meet them. Get to know the parents of your kids' friends, perhaps through a phone call or by attending school events.



5 FIVE WAYS

to protect your children from sexual abuse

Parents play the primary role in educating their children about sexual abuse. Here are 5 tips for teaching safety to the little ones God has entrusted to you.

1

Keep it practical. Teach your children the differences between safe touches and unsafe touches.

2

Tell your children that saying “no” is okay. Empower your children to say “no” if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or touches them inappropriately.

3

Give your children a way to alert you. Tell your children they can use an excuse or share a special “code-word” with you to alert you about an unsafe person or situation.

4

Tell your children to report an unsafe touch.

Let your children know they should tell you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe around any adult or peer. You can also identify other adults they can tell about unsafe touches.

5

Tell your children you trust them. If your child makes a report to you, believe him or her. Tell them it is not their fault and that you love them. Immediately bring the allegation to the attention of public authorities.



Promise to Protect

Pledge to Heal



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:
Tammy Sylvester

Diocesan Coordinator of Safe Environment Education and Compliance
585-328-3228
Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimsassistance@dor.org.

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ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>
A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>
A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
www.BivonaCAC.org
585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8449
www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795
www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
www.cacfingerlakes.org
315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization:
www.d2l.org

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org
716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:
585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6