

Parenting Teens Just Got Easier
Is a free monthly eZine
For parents of pre-teens and teens
From Saso Seminars by
Patt and Steve Saso

February 2007 Issue
When Parents Snoop— *when it's okay and when not*

This Month's Parenting Tip:

This newsletter focuses on teens' need for privacy and parents' need for knowing what is going on. When is it acceptable for parents to snoop around and invade their teen's space? What happens when trust has been broken? And how can parents get their teen to open up and share honestly?

3 Announcements:

1. Speaking Season Discounted:

To schedule a parenting seminar at a discount for the remainder of this school year see below.

2. Saso High School Prep:

Increase your chances of getting into the Catholic High School of your choice and earn better math & English grades! Summer HSPT programs available:

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/hspt.html>

3. Approx Reading Time:

About 3 minutes

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Sandy called for an appointment insisting that her 14 year old daughter needed counseling.

I asked what made her think so.

"Well, I know I shouldn't have, but I read her diary. She is really depressed and has lots of problems. I don't know how to help her."

Sandy justified herself saying, "I know she left it out so I would read it."

Reading diaries, meddling through emails, and eavesdropping on private conversations is unhealthy behavior. Parents and teens want trust. Sneaking around poking your nose in your teen's business destroys your reliability.

Invading your teen's private space breaks trust.

Many parents rationalize this behavior saying it assists them in staying in touch with their child. It helps keep them safe.

In truth, it destroys trust. It violates personal boundaries and disrespects teens' developing autonomy.

It is never okay to snoop if your teen has not given you a reason to suspect a budding problem. This potential problem might include any compromise in your child's safety, health or well-being.

When is it okay to snoop?

Stephen was checking pockets before loading the wash when he pulled out a half-empty package of cigarettes from his fifteen-year-old son's jeans. His son denied responsibility, saying he was holding them for a friend.

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Most parents give their child the benefit of the doubt. When we aren't sure, we generally want to side with believing them.

Two evenings later, Stephen noticed his son smelled of smoke upon arriving home. Again, his son denied it, asserting that his friend was smoking in the car.

At that point, Stephen and his wife decided to search his room. They went through their son's closet and drawers finding cigarettes and a lighter. Their son was angry and protested loudly at their actions.

Trust is a two-way street.

Parents may respect a teen's privacy, but when a teen lies about important health and safety issues, like smoking, alcohol or drugs, trust has been broken.

Taking a stand

Some parents want to be friends with teens so taking a stand is hard. Adolescents get angry. They can be intimidating and loud. Parents fear their teen will not like them....and they may not for a while.

Get used to teens being mad at you. Standing up is what parents may have to do to keep children safe.

Things to remember when taking a stand:

1. Stay calm and speak with authority.
2. Be mindful of the larger objective – your teen's safety.

3. Avoid knee-jerk reactions. If unsure of an appropriate consequence, delay making a decision out of anger.
4. Focus on rebuilding broken trust, not on trying to change a teen's behavior. Trustful relationships are the glue that holds a family together.

How do I get my teen to talk and be truthful?

First of all – model the behaviors you want and expect from your teen. Be truthful. Be respectful.

Secondly, build trustful relationships. Start early and establish a home environment where you use communication for connection, not correction.

Tell your children that you trust their decision-making abilities. Trust them until they give you a reason not to. Believe in them. When teens experience you as their ally, not an enemy, they are more likely come to you with problems - instead of trying to hide them.

And thirdly, practice approachable communication. Ask open ended questions or make statements that let your child know you are interested in his or her world. This invites connection through conversation.

For example, when teens come home from school a typical conversation might be the parent asking:

“How was school today?”

“Fine.”

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“What’d you do today?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? How could you do nothing?”

“Mom! Would you get off my back? Stop interrogating me!”

Instead you might try:

“Hey! I know your project was due today. You worked hard on it last night. How’d it go?”

“It went okay.”

“Just okay? You worked late getting ready to present.”

“Yeah, but it was a group project.”

“Yikes!”

“Joe didn’t do his part. I think it is going to affect my grade.”

“Geese, that doesn’t seem right...how frustrating.”

“Yeah and” The conversation continues almost effortlessly.

Notice the difference?

One conversation shuts down quickly. The other elicits a positive response.

Open ended questions let your child know that you are interested in trying to understand his or her world. You are an ally.

Now when there’s a problem you may be more approachable.

So parents, stop snooping. Be receptive. Prevent dead end communication by using open ended questions or statements.

Let teens know that you are interested in their reality.

As an ally you may find yourself being much more influential in partnering with teens, keeping them safe while navigating through adolescence.

For additional solutions to your parenting struggles see:

<http://www.sasoseminars.com/tools.html>

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