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Boundaries and Adolescents

By: Daniel Gowan

This fall I entrust another child to PISD as she moves to middle school. As a parent, I would prefer to continue with Indian Princess. As a counselor I recognize that adolescence has begun, and my task as parent is to provide safe boundaries in which she can grow. Not always an easy task. I remember her *and see her* as a smaller child but am constantly challenged to see her as a young adult. Boundaries, I know, are to be tested. It is difficult for me to hold the line at times, and will admit that it is easier to do ahead of time, rather than in the thick of the battle. Having done this once already, I see some of the pitfalls that lie ahead. First when you are told by your adolescent (it doesn't matter if they are 13 or 17....) that no one else has a curfew, it is not true. When you are told that no one else's parents call to check if there is a parent at the party, it is not true. When you are told that no one else has to call if their plans change, it is not true. When you are told that there is always beer and pot at the party, it is not true. When you are told that no one else has to work, it is not true. When you are told that no one else has to pay for their auto insurance and gas, it is not true. When you are told that everyone is having sex, it is not true. When you are told that no one else has to spend time with their family, it is not true.

If these are true for your child's friends, then your child needs new friends, because the parents of these friends do not know how to set boundaries for their children, and they are hurting them far more than helping them.

The rough guidelines that we begin with include curfew with acknowledgement that nothing begins until school work is addressed. Once plans are made, we expect them to remain

constant unless we are asked about it ahead of time. (Phone calls to ask to change plans at 11:40 pm with a midnight curfew don't get approved). We expect to know where our kids are and who they are with. At younger ages, I demand to know who is providing the supervision. Even at older ages it is not safe to turn our kids loose to just drive around town with their friends, and come and go wherever and whenever they please.

Growth from adolescence to young adulthood is a big jump. The risk is to allow a child the freedoms of adulthood without the responsibility. I see many parents try to avoid the conflict of having to set appropriate boundaries (and natural consequences when violated), but the cost in abandoning your child is their emotional and social retardation. Once on their own, the child has little else to do but fail. The workforce, college, and the real world in general does not take on the task to provide a responsibility-free lifestyle. Boundaries at their best, keep everybody safe. When responsibility is shown, it is appropriate to move the boundary. It is a fluid process, and one with which I am not always comfortable. I do believe that the struggle is worth it however, our children are too important to simply hand over to the world without equipping them.

P.S. – If your adolescent is female, you need to read [Reviving Ophelia](#), by Mary Pipher.

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