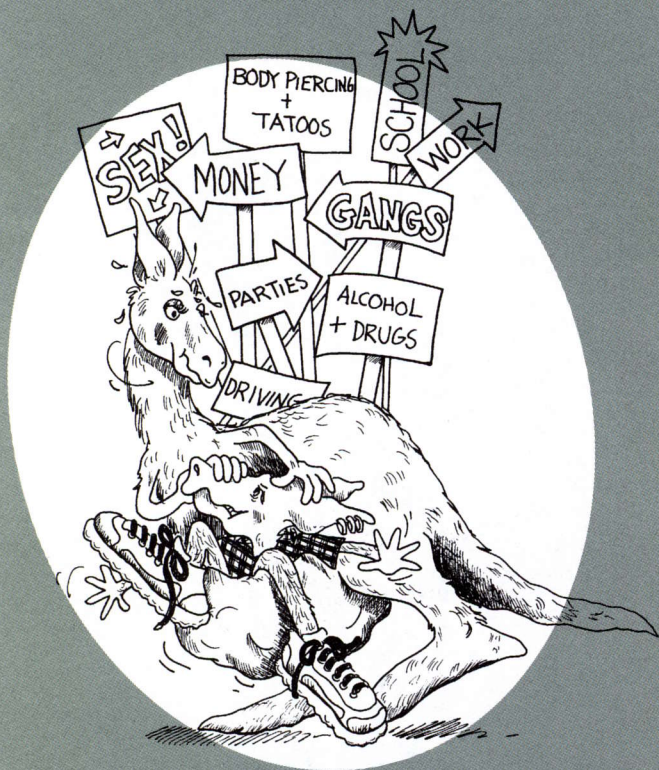


PARENTING teens KEEPING them safe



***Overprotecting them
is the most dangerous thing
we can do to our teens.***

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Overprotecting them is the most dangerous thing we can do to our teens.



The only real protection they have
are their own instincts and the
knowledge that it's up to them to
watch out for danger and make
appropriate decisions about
their own safety.

If your teen has the idea that
worrying about danger is your
job, they are likely to leave it up
to you.

*Example: Jared's parents
have told him that he can't
go downtown, or hang out at the bus station, the
pool hall or certain people's houses. These places,
they've informed him are unsafe.*

*Jared is a "good" kid so he doesn't go to any of these
places. He and his friends hang out at the school.
Since this is an approved (safe) place, Jared isn't
concerned about the knot of tough-looking kids he
sees over at the backstop. When they saunter over,
he's still not concerned.*

With his parents doing all his thinking for him, Jared
has failed to develop the instincts and knowledge
he needs to keep him safe. By relying on his parents'
list of safe/unsafe situations he's operating under a
false sense of security.

Parents cannot accompany their kids everywhere,
making on-the-spot judgements for them about
which situations are safe or unsafe. We must help
them develop their own instincts and decision-mak-
ing abilities. It's the only way to keep them safe.

Developing Responsibility

Some parents think they'll give their teens freedom once they show some responsibility. It doesn't work that way. Responsibility is not something that suddenly arrives when teens get older. In fact, some people never develop it.

Responsibility is learned when teens find themselves in situations for which they know they'll have to take the consequences of their behaviour.

A teen cannot demonstrate responsibility unless he's in situations where he can act responsibly.

Remember though, that mistakes are an important part of the learning process. They are often the best teachers. As parents, we can try to ensure that those mistakes happen in less-than-life-threatening situations.

Responsibility is not something that suddenly arrives when teens get older.

But I'm Scared

And we should be. Our teens cope with more danger on a daily basis than we ever did. Knowing that, also believe that if not stifled by overprotectiveness, a teen's instincts about daily danger can be developed into a sense of responsibility about their personal safety that is their best defense.

Be explicit about what you're afraid of. Teen's often interpret this fear as lack of faith in themselves.

Example: Melissa wants to spend the night at a new friend's house. Her mother has never met this friend and knows nothing about the home. She tells Melissa that, "...this just isn't a good idea." When pressed by Melissa, she says, "I'm just not comfortable with this."

Melissa, by now very upset, says "You never trust me! You think I'm going to go over there and have boys over and smoke dope and who knows what you think I'm going to do. You never trust me!"

In fact, her mother doesn't think Melissa is going to do any of that. However, not knowing the home, she actually fears things like Melissa being exposed to drunkenness, drug use and abusive behaviour that

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