

Do We Let Them Go, or Not? Part 1

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Our teens want to go out with friends. Do we let them go, or not? How will we know that they will be safe? What are the factors we need to consider?

I work a lot with immigrant parents, grandparents and guardians. Often parents decide that the way to keep their children safe is to withhold permission and to keep them at home.

Many immigrant and first generation parents were raised around an extended family that provided safety, nurturing and entertainment to the children as they grew up. Although these parents may no longer live in those extended family environments, many feel that restricting their children's independence is the only way to protect them.

Adolescence is the time when children develop independence from their parents. In preparation for adulthood, preteens and teens must learn to make responsible decisions when their parents are not around.

Denying teenagers and even preteens a level of independence puts them at a disadvantage later in life. If not prepared, they will have to experience the consequences of poor decision-making when they are adults. Yet, giving them too much independence before they are ready can have disastrous results as well.

Often teens, who live in restrictive homes, find ways to work around their parent's restrictions either by lying or sneaking out. This puts parents at a disadvantage because they don't know where their children are and have not had the opportunity to prepare them for what they may face. These teens or preteens are out in the world without the needed direction and guidance. Worst of all, the relationship of trust between parents and children is lost when lying becomes common practice. Although it is a challenge, guiding our children to be independent and providing consequences for positive and negative decisions, can be a more effective way to prepare our children for adulthood.

We set the foundation for providing this guidance by being engaged in our children's interests and activities when they are young. When we are involved at school, with their sports teams, and their hobbies, we create opportunities to be with them in their social world. Our relationships with our kids are expanded, we meet their friends and their friends' families. When the time comes that they ask us to go out, we will have more knowledge on which to base our decision.

Here are some questions that can guide us as we consider whether to let them go out or not:

Who will they be with? Do you know these friends? Do you know their parents?
Where will they be? Have you been there? Is it a safe place for them?
When are they going? When will they be back?
What will they be doing? Is it an appropriate activity for their age?
Why do they want to go? Is it because they really want to, or are they being pressured by peers?

As we consider these questions, we realize that they are not only for our children to answer. Our prior involvement with our children has set the groundwork for making informed decisions.

In my next blog I will talk about the negotiation that needs to take place when preparing our kids to go out on their own.

With love and affection,

Rosemarie

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