the Power of Choice

Setting Boundaries--Saying "no" can be a positive thing!

PARENTS USE YOUR POWER

Saying "no" can be a positive thing

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A project of 360 Youth Services, Naperville School District #203, Indian Prairie School District #204, Naperville Police Department, Linden Oaks at Edward, Gateway Drug and Alcohol Treatment, KidsMatter, Aurora Police Department and District 203 & 204 parents. Funded in part by IDHS.

Every parent wants to keep their children safe. Setting safe and reasonable boundaries is the most important way a parent can do that. Remember the "good old days" when you told your toddler "no" and he/she obeyed immediately? It may have been one of the first words your child learned. "No" was the word that kept them from touching something or going somewhere dangerous. As they enter the preteen years, our children begin to explore new situations and become more independent. Knowing when to say "no" becomes more difficult. But it is just as important as when they were toddlers.

"They're going to try on new identities and so they're going to challenge you more," said Dr. Sharon Hirsch, director of adolescent and child psychiatry at the University of Chicago Medical Center. "Typically you hear about battles over clothing, makeup, staying out late, which people they date, do they get to text."

Sometimes the battles are over material possessions; sometimes it's about boundaries that you have set for your child. Parents find that it can be difficult to say no to their preteen or teenager. Parents often hear their child say, "Everyone has one, so why can't I?" or "Everybody is doing it, why are you so strict?" Whatever battle you're facing with your child, it's never easy. However, parents are responsible for raising and teaching their children. Parents have the wisdom and life experience that their teens don't yet have. Lots of parents are afraid to set limits. They think it will build a wall between them and their child. In reality, limits actually show your child that you care. The tricky part is finding a balance between your need for control and your child's need for independence. It's not always easy to lay down the law, but your child's future depends on you making those tough decisions. And sometimes that requires you to tell your child "no". It isn't popular and it isn't fun, but it *is* necessary.

A University of California (Berkeley) study found that parents who set clear consistent rules, but also give their children some freedom are definitely doing something right. Their children score higher on tests; are more mature, positive and skilled in social situations; and are much less likely to use alcohol and drugs than other teens. *(Diana Baumrind, "the Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use," Journal of Early Adolescence 11(1), 1991, 56-95)*

Parenting Power Tips from Dr. Hirsch and the Power of Choice:

➢ **No means no.** When you say *no*, you have to mean *no.* Don't even allow your child to question a "no." Be very specific: "If you ask me again, you will lose your phone and you will lose your phone for the rest of the week."

➢ **You must follow through.** If your child senses that you will change your mind or "cave" if they pressure you, they won't be deterred. And they will be much more persistent the next time you try to say no.

➢ **Be reasonable**: Grounding for two weeks is a lot. Maybe two a weekend is a better idea and much easier to enforce.

➢ **Compromise and find ways to do so productively**. Teens do need some independence. For example, if your child wants to go to the mall with friends, maybe you let them, with the agreement that someone older tags along. Compromise teaches your child negotiating skills that will be useful as they enter adulthood. However, they must understand that some situations are not negotiable and that since their well- being is your top priority, you will *always* have the final word. Find positive activities on the Power of Choice Student Resource Page that both you and your child can agree on.

➢ **Remember you are _not_ your child's friend**. Stay calm when you are saying no but stand strong and remember you are the parent and they *need* your guidance. It's your job to guide them safely to adulthood.

Watch for the March newsletter: Building Resiliency

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