

# Teens and Trust

By Susan Wels, Parent, Convent of the Sacred Heart High School

## Understanding and respecting boundaries can be a big challenge for teenagers and parents

Trust and privacy are often at the heart of issues between teenagers and parents. Boundaries shift as teens make their way through adolescence—and when they're violated, communication can easily break down.

To explore teens' sensitivity to these issues, the Parents' Coalition hosted a student forum at San Francisco Day School on January 14. Julie Terraciano and Elsa Rosenberg, MFTs and co-chairs of the Coalition's Issues and Choices Committee, moderated the panel of eleven students from Bay Area schools.

### What kinds of privacy issues come up between teenagers and parents?

- As you grow up, you want more of your separate time and life. It's another step to becoming independent.
- My room is an issue for me. I like to know that it's a place where I can go and be alone, that I can keep it messy and throw my socks on the floor if I want to. I like to trust my parents not to go rummaging through my stuff.
- Teenagers value their privacy and feel they're entitled to it. It's a natural thing for us to want our own space, but parents sometimes feel we're pulling away from them.

### When you're going out, how much do you tell your parents about your plans?

- I'm not 18, so my mom and dad are still responsible for my safety. It's valid for them to ask me where I'm going. But there's a fine line between being concerned and pressing me for details

and being judgmental.

- My parents cross the line when they start asking questions out of the normal routine. That's when it seems like they don't trust me, and I get confused and frustrated.
- It's inappropriate for parents to ask for a list of every single person at a party. But if you build up casual questions as part of your relationship with your kids, it's not as awkward.

**A good place to talk is in the car, not necessarily at the kitchen table.**

- Parents can show concern and be honest about their fears. But they should ultimately be supportive and talk to their teens with understanding.
- My friends whose parents ask the most questions tend to lie the most. Parents have to start with a basic level of trust. Then if they see something change drastically or hear something that worries them, they have a good reason to ask more questions.
- Teens use selective disclosure to allow their parents to maintain trust. I don't feel obligated to tell my mom everything. Parents need to trust that kids can make good judgments on their own.
- We deserve trust until we give parents a reason not to trust us.

- When you know you have your parents' trust, it's something that becomes valuable to you, and you don't want to lose it. Kids who don't have it don't feel like they have anything to maintain. It affects the choices they make and the things they do.

### What types of privacy issues come up between friends?

- I trust some friends with my secrets, but not with my thoughts and feelings. Those can hurt much more.
- Secrets are a much smaller aspect of guys' friendships. I trust all my friends unless I have a good reason not to.
- It's important for parents to know who their kids' good friends are—the people they can turn to if they don't want to disclose everything to their parents.

### How can parents talk to their teens about sensitive issues?

- Timing has a lot to do with it. Teenagers are born with a sixth sense about what parents are trying to get out of them.
- Start by talking about things that are less loaded and build up from there. Ease into it—get to know your kid well in lots of ways.
- A good place to talk is in the car, not necessarily at the kitchen table.

### When trust is broken, how do you bring it back?

- When your kid really screws up, it's hard to build back the trust. Parents wonder, "Will he do the same thing again?" and the kid wonders, "Do my parents trust me?"
- I broke my parents' trust once. What brought it back was time, acknowledging what I did wrong, and proving that I would do what I said I'd do.
- I don't think grounding works. The next time your teen goes out, she'll just do the same thing she got grounded for in the first place.
- Grounding gives kids a sense that once they've done their punishment,

they can move on. If you honestly explain to your teen how you feel about what he or she did, it's more effective.

- Once I got caught in a lie. I could see that my mom was really hurt—not because of what I did, but because I lied to her. That really affected me, but being grounded for a night would not have done anything.

### The Coalition Mission

*To support, educate, and inspire parents of adolescents in order to promote the health and safety of our youth.*

If you or your school would like to be involved or if you have comments or questions, please call Lynne Myers at (415) 668-0895.

### Coalition Representatives

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To subscribe to *Parenteen*, call Victoria Legg at (415) 641-1528.

**To learn more about the Parents' Coalition, check out our web site: [www.ParentsCoalition.net](http://www.ParentsCoalition.net)**

### VERY IMPORTANT DATES

#### Parents' Coalition meetings

The Coalition meets once a month, September–June, from 7:30-9:00 p.m. at San Francisco Day School, 350 Masonic Ave., (at Golden Gate Avenue). All parents are welcome. For more information call 415/389-9441.

**Monday, May 13** – Forum: Lynn Ponton, MD, *Girls Who Risk Their Bodies*





## When Use Turns to Abuse

By Leslie Woodward, Parent, Lowell High School and San Francisco Day School

### Experimentation is normal, but teen drug and alcohol use can quickly spiral out of control

Most teens experiment with drugs and alcohol, but parents may be the last to know when occasional use has become an out-of-control habit.

"It can be incredibly hard to know whether your teen is using," said Dean Blumberg, MFT, director of the Alcohol and Drug Program for Teens at Kaiser Permanente in San Francisco, at a recent Parents' Coalition forum. Often a call from a school counselor, physician or police officer breaks the unwelcome news.

Blumberg counts alcohol as a drug, although it is one that is often talked about separately because society condones its use by adults. The most popular drugs with today's teens are alcohol, marijuana and methamphetamine (speed), according to Blumberg.

#### A five-stage progression

Blumberg described five stages of use and where they fit in the development of addiction. He cautioned that teens can move quickly from one stage to another because they are in such a vulnerable developmental period.

**1. Experimental use.** In this stage, kids try a drug up to three times to "check it out," said Blumberg. That is normal behavior—most kids experiment with alcohol, marijuana and the "gateway" drug, nicotine. Experimentation is not necessarily a harbinger of trouble to come. According to Blumberg, research suggests that kids who don't experiment with alcohol or drugs may be more likely to develop emotional problems as adults.

**2. Social/recreational use.** Kids in this category use drugs more frequently than experimenters, but in no

predictable pattern. Sometimes they partake, sometimes they don't. They are past the experimentation stage, however, and are knowledgeable consumers who understand what effect they will get from using a drug.

**3. Habitual use.** A habitual user has established a regular pattern of drug consumption, whether it be a martini at 6 p.m. lighting up a joint at 4:20 p.m., or having a couple of brews during a football game. The user wants a predictable mood swing at that particular time.

**4. Abuse.** Drug abusers continue to use despite negative consequences or problems. For teens, these might include bad grades, legal trouble, skipping school or promiscuity.

**5. Chemical dependence (addiction).** Addicts, like abusers, continue their drug use despite negative consequences, but they also become preoccupied with drugs and develop problems controlling how often they use them. Their lives become organized around their habit, and they are unable to respect limits that they might set for themselves, such as only using drugs at weekend parties. Approximately 10 percent of the population becomes chemically dependent at some time in their lives, Blumberg said.

#### The role of genetics

Genetic predisposition plays an important, if poorly understood, role in the development of addiction, Blumberg added. If your body does not metabolize a drug efficiently, the negative effects of taking it will outweigh the positive. You

will feel flushed from wine, for example, before you feel any positive "buzz." On the other end of the spectrum are people who are "born addicts," according to Blumberg. They are hard-wired to experience drug use as pleasurable and are vulnerable to addiction once they begin to use drugs.

Family history can be an indicator of genetic predisposition, said Blumberg. If you have several relatives who have problems with alcohol or drugs, there may be a genetic factor at work in your family. In general, he said that chemical dependence develops from a

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# Raising Capable Children

by Holly Shepard, M.A., Parents' Coalition Cofounder

## Parents can increase the influence they have over their teens

Adolescents inevitably pull away from their families as they become independent adults, but parents still play an important role in their teens' lives. Although parents can no longer control their teens' behavior, teens still want their parents' support. They also need kind but firm structure and discipline, said Barbara Hornsleth Croizat, MFT, at a recent meeting of mental health professionals held at the Ann Martin Children's Center.

She invoked the analogy, used by teen consultant and author Mike Riera, that parents need to move from "managers to consultants." She reminded parents, too, that "consultants listen a lot more than they offer advice—and they wait to be sought out before offering advice."

### Consulting tips for parents

Hornsleth Croizat offered parents these tips for becoming successful teen consultants:

- **Respect your child's desire to do things her way.** No one develops a sense of self without being

allowed to experiment with different approaches.

- **Let your child know you believe in his ability** to be in charge of his school assignments. Offer your help, and then stay out of it until asked.

**Nothing helps  
your teen more  
than having to  
face being  
responsible for  
his behavior.**

- **Learn to lower your standards** regarding dress, room, hair and music. Teens need to experiment and try new ways of doing things.

- **Demonstrate personal respect for your own needs** as a parent and hold firm to the expectations for your teen that are most important to you, such as her personal safety or keeping you informed of her whereabouts. Work together with your teenager to find solutions you both can live with.

- **Know that every teen struggles with planning and time management**, although these skills usually improve with age and maturity. Offer to share with your teen organizational skills that have worked for you. Be understanding and compassionate, but allow your teen to experience the consequences of his choices. Nothing helps your teen more than having to face being responsible for his behavior.

### Influencing your teen

Hornsleth Croizat suggests that parents use these tips to increase their influence with teens:

- Maintain a friendly attitude.
- Know your teen's interests.

- Listen to your teen's side of the story first.
- Solve problems jointly.
- Offer information and training.
- Trust in your teen's ability and goodness.
- See mistakes as valuable opportunities to learn.

*Barbara Hornsleth Croizat, MFT, gives "Empowering Teens" workshops for parents, based on the book **Positive Discipline for Teenagers** by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott. For information, call (510) 526-0068.*

### Use or Abuse

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combination of genetics, environmental stresses and learned behavior.

### Talking to your kids

Parents can make a case that any use is abuse in adolescence, said Blumberg. The brain undergoes an incredible spurt of growth that begins in preadolescence and continues through young adulthood. It makes sense not to take chances with drug use during this time period.

Most of the damage caused by drug abuse is repairable with abstinence, said Blumberg, but "keeping clean" can be very difficult. "The recidivism rate is high," he said. About one third of addicts manage to stay clean and sober, one third suffer periodic relapses, and one third never shake their addiction.

## Preventing Teen Drug & Alcohol Abuse

The San Francisco Kaiser Permanente Alcohol and Drug Program for Teens urges parents to take these steps to help prevent abuse:

- **Keep your eyes open.** Watch for signs of drug use in your family.
- **Develop healthy family communication** so your teens know that they can talk to you about anything. Research shows that healthy family bonds are the best prevention.
- **Give a clear message to your teens** that they should not use alcohol and other drugs.
- **Help your teens feel good about themselves.** Build up their self-esteem with support, praise, and love so they respect themselves and want to reach their dreams.
- **Serve as a good role model.** If you have a substance abuse problem, get help for yourself.
- **Help teens make wise decisions** based upon their own beliefs. Encourage them to say "no" and avoid unhealthy situations.
- **Encourage teens to choose positive friendships.**
- **Give teens the support they need** to do their best in school.
- **Help teens deal with failure** so they learn to cope without wanting to escape with drugs.
- **If you have problems knowing what to do,** get help from your school, doctor, counselor or other professional.

*For more information, contact the San Francisco Kaiser Permanente Alcohol and Drug Program for Teens at (415) 292-5030*

# Breaking the Bonds

Reviewed by Victoria Q. Legg, Parent, Lowell High School and Cathedral School for Boys

Book REVIEW

## As daughters grow up, mothers must learn how to reach out while letting go

Lately, have you been feeling a little beleaguered by your loving, charming, wonderful, smart teenage daughter? Have you been asking yourself how she suddenly seems to have you on the defensive?

Personally, I miss those untroubled, earlier times when my daughter and I could both be exactly who we were, neither of us guarded about what we did or said around each other. But despite feeling defensive at times about who I am in relation to my teen, I also love the spark she has as she asserts herself as her own person. I look forward to the future when we can once again be exactly who we are.

### The art of letting go

***Ophelia's Mom*** (Crown Publishers, \$24.00) is a great book for all those moms seeking support while learning the art of letting their daughters grow up and become the next generation of young women. Nina Shandler was inspired to write the book after her own daughter, Sara Shandler, published the bestseller, ***Ophelia Speaks***.

Shandler thoughtfully organized material from the life experiences of mothers of adolescent girls struggling with issues of rejection and separation—emotions related to loss, friendships and love, the power and powerlessness of being female, family influences, and finally, transitions and transformations that mothers themselves go through.

As a reader, you become immersed in the all-too-familiar tales of mothers struggling to love and protect their daughters while their daughters are pushing them away. As a mother, you feel grateful for this collection of personal memoirs that offer recognition, support and the hope that "this too shall pass." As a woman, you

appreciate the honesty of these other women who shared their struggles with their adolescent daughters and the individual meaning they found in this experience.

### Personal stories

Shandler's book is organized around personal memoirs solicited through the World Wide Web, writers' workshops, psychologists and journalists with professional interest in women's issues and parenting. Most of the replies came from women whose

daughters were starting or nearing the end of their adolescent journey. Their stories are selected and organized into four parts:

- **"Into Adolescent Territory"**

addresses universal issues of adolescents and their mothers, who are often experiencing menopause as their daughters blossom into young adulthood.

- **"Disarmed Bodyguards"**

focuses on stories of concerns we mothers share for our daughters' safety and well being while losing influence and power over their activities. One

mother shares her struggle to accept her daughter's attraction to an alternative lifestyle. Her daughter, always a loner, suddenly takes up with a boyfriend who is neither in school nor working. The author chronicles all her resistance to her daughter's choices—and how her daughter makes it clear that those choices were solely hers.

- **"Tied in Family Knots"** is devoted to the complexities and demands of family relationships—from parenting and partnering to outside family, work and social responsibilities—and their effects on mothers and daughters. At best, these roles are confusing; at worst, they can be terribly dysfunctional, yet, somehow we and our daughters make our way.

- **"Transitions and Transformations"** explores the passage of both mothers and daughters toward personal growth through the journey from adolescence to young adulthood. These stories show how mothers come face to face with our own limitations—even as we promise, over and over, to our girls that the world for them is wide open and full of promise.

Still, this book is full of optimism, and its stories remind the reader that in the end, "all comes round right." While reading Shandler's book, I felt that I was in the middle of my own, personal women's support group—and that can be nearly as good a medicine as laughter.

