

DON'T ASSUME YOUR KIDS 'GET IT'

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Think back to the number of occasions you have said to your teenager, "I have told you over and over again not to do that. Don't you get it?" And while you are saying it, you are picking yourself up from the ground, having fallen over junior's skateboard left in the driveway! Now think back to when you were that age! Could this be history repeating itself?

Why don't kids 'get it'? Here are some possible reasons. If we have dozens of rules, it is very hard to remember every one and kids tend to rebel against the feeling of being in a straight jacket. If there are no consequences to breaking the rules, then it is easy to just forget them and take the easy road. After all, "nothing is going to happen anyway". Could it be that the child doesn't know the reason the rule was made in the first place, so she sees no reason to maintain it? Perhaps parents are inconsistent with insisting the rules be kept, or worse, don't follow the rules themselves? You can never get away with, "Do as I say, not as I do". Could a big tough TV, movie or computer game hero who thinks they are above the rules be influencing your child?

As teens become more independent they have to think for themselves without parents being around. Don't assume that they will make the right decision every time. Even if you have told them repeatedly that they cannot have a girlfriend/boyfriend in their room they may obey it at home, but what if they go to their friend's house and those rules don't apply? What will they do then? What if they suddenly find themselves at a party where there is alcohol or no adult present? They know the rule at home, but what should they do when they are unexpectedly faced with the situation somewhere else? Have you discussed it with them so they are prepared?

I saw a Dateline program recently. Hidden cameras were placed strategically in teen's homes and some vehicles. An actor was employed to play the role of a teenager who was obviously drunk. He was selected by a program director to be the driver. To the parents horror their teens got in with him as driver and they drove off. Why did they do that when their parents had told them clearly that it was dangerous to do so? It appeared from their responses that they were afraid to look silly in front of others by refusing. Another scenario showed the response of kids alone in the house when a stranger knocks on the door pretending they have an emergency and need help. The first kids let the stranger in, but the second boy refused, shouting at the man, "Go find an adult!" Good for him and good for those parents who prepared him for such occurrences.

We literally have to act out possibilities to our kids so they recognize the dangers. Don't just tell them not to get in a car with a drunk driver. Tell them that

there may be times when their friends are all drinking and they just want to drive down the road two blocks to get a pizza. Should they get in the car? No! If licensed to drive, and they haven't been drinking, they may offer to get the pizza for their friends. If their friends are calling them a coward for not doing something you have already described as dangerous, tell them they are not being a coward, but being safe. It should be made very clear that when they need a ride home, call Dad or Mom whatever the time of day or night. Act out many different 'stranger at the door' scenarios with your kids. For example, if a woman is standing outside screaming to let her in, say, "No, but I will call 911 if you want me to." Or tell them to find an adult. Explain that as a child it is likely you couldn't help them anyway.

Often kids just don't know what to do because they have no previous example. They end up doing what the adult is demanding of them and this, unfortunately, has resulted in death for many young people.

Think about the rules you make and put them in priority order. What are the biggies and what doesn't really matter? Where safety is an issue, give your children as many practical examples of safety as you can. Ensure they know why you have a rule about it. Tell them the consequences and apply them if necessary. Praise your kids when they make good decisions. Encouragement promotes wisdom.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.