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Doctor's Journal

Parenting - Know Your Teenager

To snoop or not to snoop? That is the question I get from parents of teens. And I say, go ahead and snoop! The depth of snooping depends on what you find as you go. If you know your kids well, you won't have to snoop far to know if they are getting into trouble. And, if they know it is your routine to keep tabs on their behavior from early on in their lives, they won't be surprised when you snoop (they'll find it to be a comfort and will just consider it part of the way you care for them). Make it your business to know all about your kid's life. Check routinely as to exactly what media your kids watch/listen to, who they are with, where they hang out, and whether or not a parent is home at their friend's house (don't take their word for it- do surprise checks). Get to know the parents of your kid's friends so you can compare notes. Check your kid's room and their backpack now and then for suspicious items. If you find any, snoop further. Don't be afraid to read a journal or diary if you suspect depression, lying, or illegal activity such as smoking or other substance abuse (we're talking about major danger here- privacy is out the window). Make it your business to visit your kid's personal web space and check out the people who visit the site to see if they are shady or not. I was terrified to read recently that almost half of parents do not even check out what their kids are doing on-line. As far as I'm concerned, that is the equivalent of turning a kid loose in the red-light district of a big city and bidding them farewell. Responsible parents make sure they can keep up with their kids' knowledge of the web and the dangers therein. Don't hesitate to talk plainly with your kid about any suspicious behavior or information you find in your snooping and take action on it. Turning a blind eye to the smaller things you find will only lead to bigger problems later.