

WHEN KIDS TRY TO SHOCK YOU

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Last night I was watching the TV sitcom 'Frasier'. In this program his marriage had broken up some years before and his son, who lives elsewhere with his mother, appears on the show periodically as a visitor. In this episode particular episode Frasier was anxiously awaiting his son's arrival, but when he opened the door he got the shock of his life. There was his 12 year-old son with black spiky hair, black around his eyes, black teardrops drawn on his cheeks, wearing a big black coat, and a sulky scowl on his face. In other words he was totally 'Goth'. Frasier just stood there dumbstruck, without a clue as to what to do. How could this situation have been different?

I believe that we, as parents, need to be prepared for these situations. We need to be as un-shockable as a battery-operated razor. The whole reason why kids do outrageous things is to create a reaction. Remember? When a kid comes to school with a Mohawk, the effect goes completely flat when the teacher shows no expression as he/she tells the boy to go to the office, call his mother to come and get him, and an administrator tells him not to come back until his hair style meets school rules. End of story.

Parents will be much better prepared for behavioral surprises if they anticipate and discuss with their kids 'shock' possibilities well before their kids become teens. This is a much more productive time to address the potential issues, rather than trying to make up a dress code on the spot when your child is standing there with nose, lip or tongue piercing, a tattoo, or pants sagging down to their knees.

When the expectations have been clearly outlined, reasons have been given for decisions made, boundaries are set, and consequences are presented, then kids will not be so easily swayed by peer pressure to act outside family values. Parents should allow their kids to discuss options and together decide what is acceptable.

Regarding dress code. I understand that kids need to be able to express their individuality, but this should still fit within the boundaries of the family and school dress codes. OK, what dress code? Now may be a good time to think about it. Fashion often dictates the type of clothing we wear. Parents need to decide what is acceptable for girls and boys to wear in any given situation.

There are many other teen shock possibilities. Kids suddenly do things they have never done before like smoking, drinking, answering back, becoming sexually active, trying drugs, and hanging out with friends who negatively influence them. Some kids become sullen, secretive or rude. All of these changes in kids' behavior are common in teen years.

The very best thing you can do, as parents, is to start discussing these issues when your kids are around 10 years old. Talk to your kids about why such changes in behavior may occur. Keep the lines of communication open so that there will be no confrontation due to parental challenge when it happens. Head it off with open discussion beforehand. Many times kids do not know the dangers in drinking, smoking, or wanting to go to another State with teenage friends during Spring break.

Girls don't always realize that dressing scantily gives a message contrary to what they think, and that they may in fact be endangering themselves or their reputations. They don't often realize how dangerous it is to hang out on the street, or that internet chat rooms can endanger them. It is vital that you, as parents, talk openly with your kids about why it is not acceptable for teens of the opposite sex to be in bedrooms behind closed doors, or to be able to go to parties where no parents are present.

So what do you do when your teen shocks your sox off? You look them in the eye and with a poker face you say quietly and firmly, 'you understand that what you are doing or wearing is not acceptable. I would like you to change immediately to where you are within our agreed boundaries. When you come back we will talk about it'.

We are not being 'square' or old fashioned. We are protecting our kids. Teens do not have the wisdom that you may have, but they will appreciate that we are looking after their best interests – if we talk about it long before it is likely to happen.

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.

WHAT A SHOCKER!

One night I was watching the TV sitcom 'Frasier'. Every now and again his teenage son (who lived with Frazier's divorced wife in another State) would appear in an episode. In this particular story, Frazier was looking forward to a great week with the boy and had planned all sorts of 'exiting' activities such as museum tours they could do together. However, when he opened the front door he got the shock of his life. There stood an totally unrecognizable person dressed in gothic attire, complete with black spiky hair and ring in his nose!

What would you do in that situation? What would any self-respecting parent do? What did Frazier do? Freak out, of course! To give Fraz' his due, he hardly every saw his son so, in his mind, Hugo was still that little innocent cherub faced boy of old. Most of us do get warning signs and we should therefore be prepared.

Here is how to get a clue:

- What were you like as a teen? Wind you head back to your teen years. What were you doing? As you look at old photos you will probably laugh at the 'silly' fashions of the day and wonder what on earth you were thinking! What were your parents' responses to your antics?
- Check out the trends. You see the teen fashions every day on the street, in magazines and on TV. You shake your head in amazement at what could possibly be cool about showing your underpants and holding your sagging pants up at the crotch. Now you know the possibilities.
- Check out their friends. If you see your kids' friends are doing some shockable stuff, then talk to them about it. Tell them what is acceptable behavior or clothing.
- Prepare yourselves. Talk over the 'what ifs' with your spouse or a trusted friend. What will your response be to given scenarios?
- Decide what really matters and what doesn't. Make up some guidelines and make sure you start talking to your kids about them when kids are 8 or 9 years old. Does this trend violate your family values – e.g. Create unsafe situations by showing off to much body. Is this action disrespectful
- Talk to your kids early about peer pressure and fashion trends. Tell them about why you have rules about some teen activities and the danger involved in each e.g. drinking and driving, sexual promiscuity, smoking, inappropriate dress, going out at night alone and mixing with kids who get into trouble.
- Praise the good and set consequences for the unacceptable.

Kids only do bizzare or 'out of character things' to get a reaction. Don't give them one. DON'T REACT. Practice your poker face. Keep your voice low and controlled. Say, e.g.

- a) Your top is too revealing and you know that boys could think you are enticing them on purpose. Go and change.
- b) The origin of sagging pants is xxx. You do not want to give that message. Go and put a belt on and pull your pants up. You will not be able to go out until you do.
- c) You understand that scribbling over walls (graffiti) is defacing others' property and against the law. You need to apologize to the owner, clean it off and pay for any damages out of your own money.