

Parent Factor

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Custodial Networking

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Over ten years ago one of the peers of my oldest child showed up at our home with an open can of beer and he had been drinking. He had found a small supply of beer stored in his parents' garage. We took the beer from him and dumped it down the drain. Then my husband and I told him that we would not call his parents, but we would walk him home so he could tell his parents about what happened – and we advised him that we would not leave his house until he did. Our aim was not to punish him; we wanted to help him start the conversation, and assure his parents that we would appreciate the same courtesy were it our own child caught drinking alcohol in their presence. The parents were very appreciative and there was no lingering anxiety about the incident. The right people said the correct things to one another, our children learned a lesson, and we all moved on.

I share this anecdote because this is a type of "custodial networking" among parents is increasingly important with the social norms our children encounter today – and yet it is not widely practiced. When done correctly, sharing information about what is going on with our children can create a safety net desperately needed because they are by design subject to poor choices (their frontal lobe in the brain responsible for good judgment is not yet fully developed). And yet we often explain poor choices, turn our heads, and/or keep secrets for fear that our own child will feel the retribution at school for having a parent that speaks the truth about what is going on once a risky choice has been revealed.

And we are seriously convinced that our own children could never be implicated or involved in any way. Sergeant John Weaver oversees the deputies assigned to juvenile justice services with the Placer County Sheriff. "I often encounter the 'not my kid' syndrome wherein parents vehemently refuse to accept that their children have been involved in risky conduct", said Weaver about one of the challenges of his job. The wise old adage "never say never" is appropriate because so much of what happens with our youth is out of our control especially as they enter into

The social norms have shifted as depicted in Figure A



their teen years.

The first decade, we have a chance to set their "moral compass" – the do's and don'ts of what is right and what is wrong. Then during adolescence teens need parents to inspect what we expect and hold them accountable for their choices. And it is not enough to simply rely upon the mutual trust between you and your child because the social norms that existed when we were children, that our parents relied upon when they were actively parenting – have disappeared. Below are some examples:

| Then (A generation ago) | Now (Popular Culture aided by Internet/Mobile Phones) |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Underage drinking not ok | It's ok to drink if you don't drive – binge on |
| Marijuana – not ok | Marijuana is harmless— heck, doctors prescribe it |
| Pre-marital sex – discouraged | It's ok to have sex just don't get pregnant |
| Honesty = best policy | Lying is ok—just don't get caught |
| Delayed gratification rewarded | Instant gratification is an entitlement |
| Prescription Pills = caution | Prescription pills are harmless and easy to access |

Figure A

In other words, there was a time when limits and expectations for discipline were commonly respected. Today our common culture no longer integrates those limits to support good-decision making. So custodial networking is even more imperative to reinforce the good choices our children make. To access a worksheet on custodial networking see www.bananamoments.com.

