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From: Deputy Head Pastoral; Mark Hindley

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Text of Mr Hindley's talk at the Pastoral Evening for Parents:

ALCOHOL, PARTIES, SLEEPOVERS

So often parents of older boys, when asked for any advice on this subject, react by saying "it was a nightmare, an absolute minefield, so glad it's over!!"

Unfortunately, there is no golden, magic solution. The key thing to remember is that teenagers are wired to push boundaries. We need to let them find things out for themselves so that they can develop their ethics, their moral compass, and yet they do need guiding and they will get it wrong. Remember when they get it wrong, it is not personal!

It is a balancing act. We must let them grow up and become independent but this is weighed against maintaining boundaries.

3 top tips... not a right or wrong but what we would advise after dealing with boys over many years.

1. Make decisions in advance, together, as parents.

You need to decide what is and isn't acceptable. Areas to think about are what are your curfews? Are they allowed to drink? How much? Where on the spectrum will you address an issue? How will you deal with it when he comes home drunk and throws up?

A lot of people want reassurance that it is OK to be a parent, rather than trying to be another friend. Don't be afraid of being giving clear guidance. It is not about popularity! It is only natural to worry about am I getting it right? (especially as they will tell you that you aren't!)

This should be a joint approach, talk to each other.

2. Stick to what you say

Don't be afraid to say no until you know what the ground rules are and stick to what you agree. E.g. if the limit is two beers when you are hosting at party, just be factual and stick to that. If you have said they can't go until you know what rules the host will have, don't let them go until those ground rules have been established. Phone the girl's parents who are hosting and insist on speaking to them, even if your son tells you this is so uncool and no one else ever does!

If you set out your stall on these things it means you are clear when it comes to bigger things. This week it may be alcohol, next week smoking... Young people are exposed to things at a much earlier age – we know

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of plenty of places where there will be drugs at Year 9/10 parties. Soon it will be “Can my boy/girlfriend stay over?” and then the next question will be “Can we share a room?”

Again, you need to be clear on your ground rules and expectations. There is not a right or a wrong answer BUT being clear is paramount.

3. Communication

Sometimes it is about the hard line but as important, if not more so, are the soft skill moments. It is a complex time: one minute teenagers want to be 18 and the next they want to be 10!

You must have time for communication. Not face to face but side by side conversations – teenagers find face to face combative so try to find times when you aren’t looking at each other – in the car, walking the dog, sharing a task etc These won’t crop up when you want them to, but when you least expect them. Take the opportunities, but to do so we all need to create time for the opportunities to crop up...

Boys need role models, so it is a time for Dads to step up, or maybe a cousin, a godfather, a family friend. They need to engage by giving up time but do not expect great heart to hearts. I know of lots of wives who get cross – their husbands will go on Dad’s night out/weekends, and when they get back they will ask what news? And all the men will have spent hours together without discussing anything useful, but will feel better for the shared time.....

DIGITAL

It is important to remember the teenage years have always been difficult and even more so now.

The digital world creates so much pressure. There is huge complexity constantly living up to an online persona. And a lot of this is all alien to us. 13 year olds will feel that they have seen all their mates having just played Fortnite together in separate rooms all over Oxfordshire.

For boys the digital temptations are gaming, and phones, and in this we include sexting, which is frighteningly prevalent.

Again you crucial is the setting of clear lines and sticking to these. Be prepared to fight the battle and be clear about limits - for example, think about no phones at meal times; no gaming on school nights; no phones upstairs; if you pay the bill insist of intermittently checking the phones.

The irony is the boys want lots of screen time but are less happy the more they have....

BUT in the midst of all that, don’t forget the amazing benefits of technology. If we sound like outdated Luddites then we have lost the battle, so accentuate the positives and eliminate the negatives (as the song goes...) A chastening reality is we need to look at ourselves too and our own dependence on technology.....



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Navigating the Teenage Years....



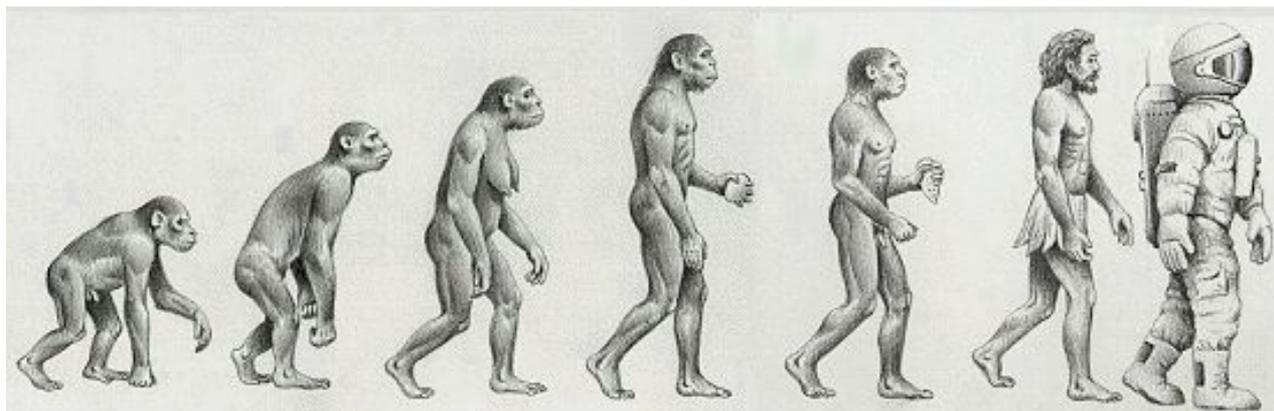


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Where has the little boy gone??



Your son shares this confusion...

Being a teenager has always been complicated....

...and its even more complicated now than ever



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Advice to housemasters - applicable to parenting?

Boys will make mistakes – it isn't personal

They want a role model – they have plenty of friends

Hold them to account – but do it out of love



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Be clear about the ground rules you want to establish:

Screen time: phones, bedrooms, gaming.....

Sleepovers: feral or controlled? Is it all bets off or organised chaos?

Alcohol: decide in advance what your rules are

Sex: have you ever mentioned it? Is it a taboo conversation topic?

Parties: dangerous cocktail of all the above...

Have you chatted these things through with his mates' parents??



Parties

Talk to each other (sons and parents) – decide in advance – stick to your deal...

Curfew?

How are they getting home?

Who's checking they're OK?

Who can you ring if you are worried?

Who can *they* ring?

Who is the responsible adult?

remember.....

Constant rule to

...wherever they are

...whatever time it is

...irrespective of others

...act with **decency**



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Boys will make mistakes – it isn't personal

They want a role model – they have plenty of friends

Hold them to account – but do it out of love

Talk...

share...

encourage....

Remind them that your love is unconditional –

there will times when you don't like them or what they have done...

But you will always love them

and even though they smell and are angular, don't be afraid to hug them, dads included...



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