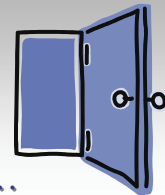


# RACS Prevention Newsletter

a publication of Rockbridge Area Community Services



opening new doors to the schools and community...

edited and published by Kelly D. Shifflett, Ph.D., Director, & Wendy C. Morgan, M.A., Prevention Manager

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## It's not Pestering...It's Parenting!



Back in the “good old days”, whenever that was exactly, parents seemed to have a much better “network” with other parents – a network that helped keep kids safe and out of some of the typical troubles kids can get into.

These parent networks existed not just in small towns, but also in neighborhoods in larger cities. Parents were networked along the lines of the old adage – “it takes a village to raise a child” – with everyone looking out for the neighborhood kids. Not much got past the eagle eyes of old Mrs. Simpson who saw the kids getting off the bus and wandering down the street to their houses. Mr. Clark, the corner store-keeper, had the insider view on the kids hanging out at the shop for a few hours after school – knew who was the ring-leader, who was flirting with whom, and who was getting teased or left out. And if your neighbor, Mrs. Martinez knew the kids were hanging out in your house before you got home in the afternoon, she'd be certain to mention it to you at the mailbox just to be sure you were ok with that.

In most parts of the country, parents have stopped cultivating that network – in fact, participating in that old model is downright shunned and discouraged by many today. It's interesting that while our kids are more and more socially connected through Twitter, Facebook, cell phones and texting, where they stay in touch immediately and constantly, parents seem to be more and more disconnected and out of touch.

Granted, kids work to keep us out of their business – it's their job both culturally and developmentally to maintain some distance from us, but that doesn't mean we have to disconnect, or that we should give up and give in.

When you hear that teens are planning on getting together at Jane's house and you are pretty sure this is the weekend Jane's parents had that anniversary trip planned, do you call them and give them a head's up?

Do your kids know that they have a no-questions-asked, help-only policy with you

if they find themselves, or friends, in trouble or a potentially troublesome situation?

Realistically we all know this approach is not easy, and your kids may not welcome it with open arms. There is sure to be resistance, conflict, and there may even be outright subterfuge at times as kids' wills loom pretty large. Too often the desire to do what they want, and what they really deep down think they can handle, overrides their good judgment. The bottom line for most kids is that they will do what they think they can get away with.

But kids who know their parents are savvy, that their parents do their homework, that their parents have high expectations and will check up to be sure their kids are meeting those expectations, and that there are consequences – swift, clear, predictable, and absolutely expected... those kids tend to walk a better path. Not a perfectly straight and narrow path, but a better path with fewer diversions. Everyone makes mistakes – so parents need to both expect and plan for those situations. And when they happen, remember that you knew they would happen and you planned for them, so you and your child know exactly what's going to happen next. But treat the situation as an “incident” -- a learning experience -- and then both of you move on.

It's important to set limits with clear rules and consequences for breaking them – and remind, remind, remind. Then have your child restate for you what the “rules of the game are” for the night.

Then as parents, we need to confirm, double-check, and check up on them. Call the other parents and make sure everyone has heard the same plan. Verify the level of supervision and check out the parents' “philosophy”.

Don't hesitate to check in and have your kids stay in touch throughout the event. And if you think something seems funny, check it out. Show up if you need to.

Kids can use cell phones and texting to stay in touch, but they can also use the technology to “hide” where they really are. So ask for the land line number of where

they will be – and use it. Have them call you from the landline -- that can't be faked if they are really at another location.

Ask to speak to the supervising parents to check in that “all is cool with them” as the event unfolds.

Have clear communication expectations, such as “if I text or call you, I expect a call back within 5 minutes or I'm heading out”.

Require that you actually speak to your child and confirm that they sound okay.

Stay up – or set your alarm for 10 minutes before curfew and be up -- to greet them, have a short conversation, and always have a hug or kiss goodnight.

Know your kids' friends and make contact with their friends' parents. Even if it's awkward, even if the other parents seem annoyed, stick up for what you know is needed. CREATE a network – let other parents know that you are “one of those” who keeps tabs, that you want to know what they hear or suspect and that you will do the same for them. Sometimes, what's needed most is for us to give each other permission.

Network with other parents to get a list of everyone's addresses, e-mails, and phone numbers so you can keep in touch – and don't hesitate to activate the network.

Call to say, “Hey, I heard the kids are planning on hanging out after the ball game – whose house?” See if parents have the same story and if that story jives with what the kids are telling you all.

And mostly, keep lines of communication open with your kids. Encourage them to tell you who's hanging out with whom, who's hooking up, who's making bad decisions. DO NOT JUDGE, do not provide commentary, just keep the conversation going and know that this will be valuable info for you in order to know what's going on in the group and also helps your child feel they can tell you what's going on without you freaking out. Remember – it's not pestering...it's parenting!

*Submitted by Kelly Shifflett, PhD,  
Director of Family Youth and Prevention Services,  
with contributions from  
Wendy Morgan, Manager of Prevention Services*

# PEPTalk

## Mythbusting - Parent Education

If you think parenting programs are only for new parents, think again. All parents can learn something of value in parenting programs. They provide practical advice to all parents who want to keep pace with their ever-changing children and teens. And if you think parenting programs are only for parents whose kids are in trouble, definitely think again. Perfect children and perfect families only exist in movies and on TV.

Parenting programs are designed to offer sound advice for the majority of parents. It's never too late to learn new parenting skills to help you with your children at any age!

"One of the things I miss most in my work, but particularly as a parent, is providing workshops in our community," said Kelly Shifflett, PhD, who at one time was a parenting educator at RACS and now serves as the new Director of Family, Youth and Prevention Services. These groups always helped me refocus, question my methods, and work regularly on becoming a better parent myself."

Rockbridge Area Community Services is offering FREE parenting workshops to

parents in the Lexington, Rockbridge, Buena Vista, and Bath areas.

*Supporting School Success* is a program for parents of children in grades K-3, that helps them boost their children's academic performance.

And for parents of kids in upper elementary, middle school and even teens starting high school, there's *Guiding Good Choices*, a program to help keep kids drug free.

If you're interested in more information or would like to sign up for classes, contact LauraJane Wilson at 462-6639 or email her at [ljwilson@racs.org](mailto:ljwilson@racs.org).



## ask dr. mom...

Dear Dr. Mom-

My seven-year old daughter came home from school today crying and upset. Once she calmed down a bit, she said that some of the kids at school were making fun of her clothes and calling her names. She also said that one of the girls told some of the others not to be her friend. Is this bullying? And should I do something about it, or just let her fight her own battles?

- Upset Mom

Dear Upset Mom-

Yes! This is definitely bullying. Bullying is when one or more children make fun of, tease, gang up on, physically hurt, deliberately leave out, embarrass or in any other way purposefully intimidate or upset another child. It is important to take immediate steps to end the bullying. Your daughter should not be left to fight her own battles because it is likely that the bully has intimidated her to the point where she is unable to do so. Your daughter may ask you not to intervene because she may be afraid it will only make things worse for her, but that is just more evidence of the fact that she is being bullied. Below are some steps to take to stop your child from being a victim of bullying:

1. Write down everything your child reports.

2. Call the teacher to discuss the issue.

3. If the teacher doesn't follow-up with you by the next day, call back.

4. After receiving confirmation that your child is being bullied, or with continued reports from your child, request a meeting with the school psychologist/social worker and possibly the principal.

5. Follow-up with your child for two or three days to make sure it has stopped.

Remember: Your daughter may ask you not to become involved. However, she is speaking from fear and intimidation — two signs that she is already experiencing emotional trauma from being bullied. It is important that you protect and advocate for your child — no matter how old she may be.

- Dr. Mom

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RACS Prevention Services  
241 Greenhouse Road  
Lexington, Virginia 24450

## Did You Know...

February

is Children's Dental Health Month... and Responsible Pet Owners Month ... the 1<sup>st</sup> week is Women's Heart Week ... the 2<sup>nd</sup> week is Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week... the 3<sup>rd</sup> week is Random Acts of Kindness Week... and the 4<sup>th</sup> week is Eating Disorders Awareness Week... the 2<sup>nd</sup> is Groundhog Day... and the 14<sup>th</sup> is Valentine's Day .

