

SETTING LIMITS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

All adolescents need limits. Even at their most independent, risk-taking and contentious, kids look to their parents for guidance, for establishing a sense of basic boundaries that will keep them safe. As parents, one of the most important things we can do for our children is to assure them that we are engaged, that we care what happens and will continue to provide structured limits to help them grow up safely and securely. In talking with our kids, here are some discussion points to consider:

* **Curfews** – As your child starts to push the limits of when he/she has to come home at night, it can be very helpful to know what other parents are thinking? What’s a safe and reasonable curfew for coming home from someone’s house? From a movie or event? From hanging out with friends in the park, at Coolidge Corner?

* **Hanging out/unstructured time** – While it’s important for kids to have a fair amount of unstructured time, too much freeform “hanging out” can leave kids feeling at loose ends, which can lead to risky behavior. Ask your kids where they are going and what they are planning to do. Ask other parents what their kids are telling them. Checking out the local hot spots. Help kids find and facilitate safe but stimulating activities.

* **Parental supervision at parties/sleepovers** – Parties and sleepovers are prime activities for risky experimentation, from sneaking out of the house late at night to alcohol and marijuana use, which is happening with Brookline middle schoolers. Get to know your child’s friends and their parents, and make sure you are comfortable with the level of parental supervision at other houses.

* **Screen time and content** – TV, video games, Netflix and social media can quickly become addictive. Many parents find it helpful to set limits on combined screen time, whether it’s number of minutes/hours at a time or per day, or perhaps a “screens off” time every evening. And do you know what your kids actually do on the computer? Watch on TV? What kind of video games they play? Ask them to show you. Make sure you’re comfortable with the messages being sent by games and television shows. (Some parents like to watch shows with their kids and discuss some of the questionable content – “Why do you think he did that? What did you think when that happened?”) If you’re child is allowed to have social media accounts like Instagram, ask him/her to show it to you and monitor content. Many sites allow for anonymous postings, which quickly can become vicious and viral – cyber bullying is rampant in middle school. Talk about your values and how you believe people should treat one another.

* **Phone use** – Chatting into the wee hours and chronic texting can also be addictive. Consider limiting minutes for making/receiving phone calls. Discuss content as well, such as sending inappropriate photos.

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B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) helps parents navigate the common social, emotional and developmental challenges of adolescence via parent network meetings, presentations, print/electronic materials, and resource information. For more information on **B-PEN** or for help starting a parent network, visit www.B-PEN.org or contact coordinators:

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