



"But Everyone Drinks Mom!"

The Dynamic of Silence

by Anne Hansen

It starts in the nursery: Parents compare notes on their babies. What goes in, what comes out, length, weight and movement are the center of conversation. It carries over to the pre-school years and beyond.

Moms gather outside the kindergarten classroom as they wait for their children to be dismissed. They laugh, talk and share stories.

They brag about their child's giftedness, his or her ability to read or do simple math equations. They share problems about behavior, bedwetting or the social interactions of their children. Some listen patiently, in awe of the children who read and write and do math at such a young age and then there are those who stand silently thanking God for their easy going, completely average youngster.

This scene is played out across the country, probably throughout the world, and continues as children go through grade school. Sometime around junior high age, parents cease their gathering outside the school. The children are more independent and due to this independence parents are free to pursue their own interests.

Another dynamic begins, however, the dynamic of silence. Parents pull inward and do not discuss the behavior of their children as they did when they were younger. A sense of caution settles over conversations as if only the "good stuff" is worth talking about.

Athletic ability, high standardized test scores and grades, invitations to the party or dance are easy to talk about among parents. The goal, the touchdown or the academic awards understandably bring smiles to everyone's face. They are, however, only part of the picture.

Parents need to trust each other enough to include the difficult topics in their telephone, carpool and sports spectator's conversations. For the welfare of all our children parents have to be willing to discuss the poor grades, the speeding ticket or erratic driving and, most importantly, the problems of drugs and alcohol.

At the beginning of the school year my youngest son was close to failing his religion class. There is a bit of irony in this since he was in his eleventh year of Catholic school.

It was a tough class with a demanding teacher and he was having trouble stretching to



Sharing Activities with your friends is the perfect time to talk about the tough parenting issues you share

meet the expectations. Quite by accident, a conversation with another mother whose child was in the same situation was helpful. Her honesty eased my guilt and that, coupled with a meeting with the teacher, pushed my son to work on that level that is necessary to master the material presented in the class.

The above is a simple example of the merit of parent's discussing the behavior of their children. A more serious example is that of sharing information on the use of alcohol.

It is common knowledge, or should be, that alcohol abuse among junior high and high school students is at a frightening level. If my child is involved in a situation that includes drinking, despite the disappointment in his or her judgment and behavior, I want to know. If parents are afraid of getting involved or afraid of hurting each other's feelings it is the children who will ultimately suffer

By definition, teenagers are not adults. They do not have the experience, wisdom or maturity to act like adults. Therefore, they require supervision and guidance and it is up to us, the parents to provide it.

That means talking to your child about the dangers of alcohol and listening to them when they offer their opinions. It means recognizing that just because your high school student says, 'Oh, Mom, *everybody* drinks', that is not the end of the discussion.

Alcohol consumption during the teenage years is illegal. It is also deadly, contributing to a large percentage of the deaths in this age group due to car crashes, homicides, and suicides. Why would we be afraid to discuss our children's abuse of alcohol with other parents? Why would we be afraid to call another parent and gently and respectfully talk about specific information we might have that the children are drinking?

There are foolish, misguided parents who believe that in their home teenagers can consume alcohol. This is not about the occasional bit of wine at dinner; this is about the parents who provide the beer and then think they are acting responsibly by taking the car keys or locking the front gate. They are engaging in illegal behavior and should be reported to authorities.

While it is true that it takes strong families to raise healthy children there is no doubt it also takes a village of families watching out for each other and each other's children.

