



By Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

## Tethered teens

Technology allows parents the unprecedented ability to supervise their children. A teen's exact location can be determined by a GPS unit on their cell phone. Software permits children's every computer keystroke to be monitored. Phone records can be accessed to review calling patterns, and new technology now exists for parents to recover deleted text messages from cell phones.

Cell phone texting is the most popular way for parents to supervise their children. "I expect my 16-year-old to keep me informed of his whereabouts, so he texts me as he goes from place to place," one mom recently told me. "The world is just too dangerous for our kids. It is my job to do whatever it takes to keep them safe," said another mom.

The existence of these technologies doesn't mean that we should always use them. The world feels like a scary place to many parents, and hyper vigilance of our kids is a normal reaction. However, are we raising a generation of tethered teens who are becoming overly dependent on their parents?

### Here are the two key questions that parents should answer:

1. **What's an appropriate level of supervision?** While younger children need our close supervision, teens need the freedom to deal with the world without feeling like their every action is being monitored by someone else. I've read that ethics is the way you act when someone isn't watching. How will our kids handle situations when we are not supervising their every behavior? We should allow teens to make mistakes and even get in trouble. They need to experience life without our constant presence to protect them from failure. Except in very special circumstances, teens should expect privacy in their emails and texts. The key is for parents to gradually reduce their level of supervision consistent with their children's behavior.

Be careful about overreacting when your teen messes up. Implement a reasonable penalty but recognize that mistakes and misjudgments are all a part of growing up.

2. **What's the right level of parental support?** Cell phones and texting have dramatically transformed parent-child relationships. Many parents feel uneasy if their kids have not texted them about what's going on throughout the day. This dependency can go both ways. Teens become used to contacting their parents to deal with a myriad of minor issues. This isn't good for parents or kids. Our goal as parents is to make ourselves unnecessary, equipping our children with the problem-solving skills to deal with real world situations. There are times we should be telling our teens to stop texting or calling us, and figure out for themselves how to deal with an issue. How can teens develop the self confidence to deal with life if they frequently look at their cell phone for a solution to every problem?

Your goal as a parent is to promote independence and problem solving skills. Excessive supervision and too much communication inhibit rather than help achieve those goals. Lighten up on your teens.

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