



NEWSLETTER

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Teen Proof Your Home

Teen-proof my home? What does that even mean? Why would I need to teen-proof my home? This is the reaction I get when I bring up the subject to parents about protecting their teen from the temptations and dangers that are lurking in the home.

When we bring baby home from the hospital shortly after being born, most of us take great care in baby-proofing our homes. We go around and move fragile objects up high out of reach, we cover sharp corners of furniture with soft foam pads, and we plug up electrical outlets with those funny plastic covers. Then we go further and purchase and install cabinet latches, toilet seat locks, and door handle covers. Certainly we remove and lock up cleaning supplies as well as any firearms that may be in the home. That is a lot of work to protect a small child. It is also the smart thing to do, because little kids are very curious and are known for getting into all the wrong stuff when our back is turned even for a few moments. It is just smart insurance.

As children grow and learn, we become for comfortable with knowing that we have taught our children well and they know the dangers of electricity and household cleaners. But by the time they reach adolescence, new dangers appear. The teen years are a new chapter in curiosity that can easily turn very dangerous and have dire consequences. Curiosity can be a dangerous thing and temptation can be too much to handle. By teen-proofing your home, you give your child a better chance to make it through this difficult period with fewer scars, blemishes, and hurts.

Here are my top items to help prevent trouble and too often parents completely overlook:

1. Lock up, put away, or eliminate all alcohol. I know, you think you have already done this, perhaps even measuring the levels in the bottles. Kids are clever, they will substitute water or other liquid to bring the levels back in line. Some parents just don't realize how tempting those few beers in the back of the refrigerator are. Those unlocked bottles of wine you are saving for a special occasion can call out to a teen, "drink me now, your parents have forgotten about me."
2. Hide or lock up the spare car keys. Kids have a burning desire to drive. The thrill of taking the car out for a spin around the block is pure intoxication. Even just going up and down the driveway can be fun, but without appropriate adult supervision, it can be dangerous to the unskilled driver. I have had a very large

percentage of my teen clients over the years confess to taking the car without their parents permission.

3. Lock up all medications, prescription or otherwise. With the current statistics showing that most teens do at least experiment with drugs at one time or another, it is just too much temptation for them to have availability of drugs. Many parents have sleeping pills, leftover pain medication, etc. that they don't even think about. But in the hands of a teen, these can be big trouble. Even if you think, "well it's only my cholesterol or blood pressure medication..." teens will take anything in the attempt to get high. Don't trust their sound thinking and logic, lock it up, all of it.
4. Avoid leaving cash around. It is very frustrating to hear a parent tell me how devastated and betrayed they feel that their teenager has stolen money from them. I do understand but one must take personal responsibility for not presenting overwhelming temptation to their child. Teen want, need, and consume dollars like water. Everything is expensive and the money just goes and goes. Also, the opportunity of money gives rise to opportunity to fund drug use and other poor choices.
5. While we are speaking of money...hide your credit cards and checkbook. Keep track of your bills and spending and secure your financial records. I had one mother report to me over \$20,000 in credit card use by their child before the bank caught on. It seems insane but it is possible and accountability is the only defense. That also means that you cannot just leave your purse or wallet around where your teen can have access.
6. In some unfortunate cases, a teen is so hooked on drugs or other problems that they will even resort to stealing jewelry. With the high prices of gold and silver these days, jewelry is very easy to pawn or sell. Jewelry is much safer in your home safe or safety deposit box. Out of site, out of mind.
7. Not a problem for all households, but those of you who own firearms...lock them up in a gun safe or remove them entirely from the home. When it comes to guns, there are tragic consequences and very final outcomes. It is also the law; you could be prosecuted for failing to prevent access to your guns.
8. Electronics. You need to protect your privacy and private information from you kids. In this electronic data age, it is possible for your child or a friend of your child to engage in identity theft. Hide your passwords, protect your financial information even from your kids. I have dealt with the betrayal of a daughter assuming the mother's identity online only to cost tens of thousands of dollars and untold damage to reputations and credit scores.

The overall theme here is removing temptation. All people have their strong days and their weak days. When weakness meets opportunity is when the real trouble starts. You may not be able to control the relative strength or weakness of your child and their friends, but you can remove temptation and opportunity.

The most common form of denial I typically have to deal with is: "Not my child!" Yes, your child. Your precious, smart, funny, outgoing, adorable bundle of joy is now a teenager. And that means trouble. Not every teen will have the same opportunities nor

the same desires for trouble. But are the risks and outcomes really worth it? Certainly there are many good and decent teenagers out there and perhaps your child will not do these things, but how well do you know their friends? Many times a teen is pressured to look cool or join the crowd and will submit to breaking their own moral code in a moment of weakness.

I speak from experience here and the smart move is to teen-proof your home. If you think it is too much trouble, remember that poor decisions happen in an instant and can have tragic consequences. How much risk is acceptable? It is smart parenting to remove as much risk and temptation as you can. We cannot rely on willpower and stated morals alone to keep our kids safe. It is our job and responsibility.

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