

# Where Will Your Teenagers Be On Saturday Night?

*By Barrington H. Brennen, November 5, 2009*

This article is for parents and all adults who supervise teenagers. In it, I am hoping to convince parents that they are in charge of their children and show them how to lead with love and firmness. Read with an open mind.

Where will your pre-teen and teenage children be next Saturday night? Is this one of your concerns? Are you having a challenge with providing appropriate entertainment for them? Who decides where they will go and what they will do on a Friday or Saturday night? How involved are you in directing the show? Who is the boss?

If you have no idea where your teens are going next Saturday night and at what time they will come home, then you are the child and they are the parents. Furthermore, if you are not taking them or going with them wherever they are going, you have a real challenge and are setting them up for a disaster.

On the other hand, if you are not comfortable allowing your teenagers to do something or you are unable to go with them, then stick to your guns. It is best to err on the side of caution. Research suggests that parents don't impose sufficient restrictions on their teens after they get their drivers license and often underestimate their teenagers' use of drugs or involvement in sexual behavior.

Teenagers do need supervision not because they are bad, but because they frequently make poor choices. Most of the time poor choices are made because parents or adult supervisors are not available to guide them. Teenagers are oftentimes impulsive and have supercharged energy that dissipates after a rush of adrenaline. Parents, guardians, adults, teenagers are begging for your help and guidance. They may not act that way, but they really need you. They do not want to do bad things. They may act stupidly, but they are not crazy. Let's help them. Oops! I think parents, you must remember that you once did foolish things and wished there were adults to guide you through the thick muddy wastelands of decision making, temptations, self-centeredness, and passion.

## **TEENS ARE GOOD**

Teenagers can make life-long positive decisions. It is during the pre-teen and teen years many make their career choices and stick to the choices throughout their adult lives. It is during the pre-teen and teen years that many Christians make their life-long decisions for Jesus and stick to it the rest of their lives. Many pre-teens and teens choose not to smoke, drink, or use illegal drugs and maintain that wholesome lifestyle through their lives. Here's the catch. Although teens are capable of making life-long wholesome decisions, their ability to stick to them is reinforced or weakened by parental guidance or lack thereof. The ability to make wise choices does not nullify the power of raging hormones, impulsion, and adventurous behavior. This is why at all times toddlers, pre-teens, and teenagers (disciplined or undisciplined) must have supervision. In my article titled "Teenagers, Violence, and Culpability" I shared some interesting facts about teens. I shared that "the age of majority (the legal age of adulthood) should not be 18 but 21. This is why mental health professionals sometimes refer to those 18 to 20 years as emerging adults not full adults. . . . The scientists, to their surprise, discovered that the teenage brain undergoes an intense overproduction of gray matter (the brain tissue that does the "thinking"). Then a period of "pruning" takes over, during which the brain discards gray matter at a rapid rate." This process is similar to pruning a tree: Cutting back branches stimulates health and

growth. This continues into the early 20s. . . Researchers at Harvard Medical School, the National Institute of Mental Health, UCLA and others are collaborating to “map” the development of the brain from childhood to adulthood and examine its implications. The results so far are astonishing. . . Dr. Elizabeth Sowell, a member of UCLA research team states: “The frontal lobe where this change occurs undergoes far more changes during adolescence than any other stage of life. It is also the last part of the brain to develop, which means that even as they become fully capable in other areas, adolescents cannot reason as well as adults: “maturation, particularly in the frontal lobes, has been shown to correlate with measures of cognitive reasoning.” In other words the research is suggesting that the ability for teens to make good choices is high but the ability to stick to them without supervision is weak.

## **CHURCHES AND HOTELS**

What do churches and hotels have in common? They are both used as “babysitters” by parents or guardians who do not want the responsibility of supervising their children. It’s ironic that I am talking about churches and hotels in the same paragraph, especially in a tourist-oriented society. Why? In my conversations with a few pastors, I found that many parents take their children to church on a Saturday or Sunday morning, leave them there, and are not concerned or aware of what will happen during the rest of the day. Sometimes their teenagers return home after midnight when their parents are asleep. The next morning no questions are asked about how their children spent the day or why they came home so late. Often the church leaders are not aware that they are being used as babysitters; therefore the teenagers are left unsupervised. Similarly, many parents drop off their children to large hotels where there is a lot of entertainment or large open spaces for roaming. Hotels provide activities for paying guests’ children only. The hotels are not prepared to provide supervision for non-guest energetic teenagers. Hence, when teenage impulsivity takes over, we can have chaos. There are other large centers of recreation where, if teenagers are left without supervision, there will be trouble.

Occasionally my wife and I visit a wholesome Saturday night spot in town. Often while strolling and enjoying the sites, we would see dozens of teenagers without supervision. These teenagers were not all from the lower class of society. Most of them were from the middle and upper class whites, blacks and mixed nationals. It was amazing as we observed their aggressive behavior. They would sneak in dark corners kissing or rubbing up. A few years ago while at one the wholesome Saturday night spots, I accidentally bumped into two teenagers who were passionately kissing in a dark corner. I was surprised to find out who they were. They were fifteen and sixteen year-olds I knew from well-respected families. Hotels and churches must have guidelines and proper supervision for teenagers and sometimes young adults whose untapped energies leave them restless.

Return next week for the continuation of this article. I will share what parents can do to prevent disaster.

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