

SMELLS LIKE TEEN-PARENTING

A PLACE WHERE BEFUDDLED PARENTS OF
TEENAGERS CAN VENT.
IF YOUR KIDS ARE PERFECT, FIND ANOTHER
BLOG.



ABOUT THE BLOGGER

A proud mom who has managed to keep her teenage daughter safe from the perils of social media, drug & alcohol use, iPhone addiction, and watching the Kardashians. Now, replace the word “proud” with “confused” and insert the word “not” before managed. In order to speak freely I am remaining anonymous. Also, irony prevents me from using social media to call out my kid for revealing everything on social media.

“SPYING” ON YOUR KID

Remember the quaint old days when moms & dads struggled with the issue of their children’s “right to privacy”? They wanted to know if their son was smoking pot, or their daughter was having sex, but they weren’t sure whether it was fair to, say, ransack their dressers for condoms or pick the heart-shaped locks on their diaries to find the answers.

Today’s parents don’t have that problem. In order to “spy” on our kids, we go straight to our own phones. Our children’s deepest, naughtiest secrets can generally be found in totally public platforms that require no passwords, logins or little tin keys to enter. Sure, we’ve told them again and again that everything they post lives forever for everyone to see, but do their tender, new prefrontal cortexes allow them to process this fact? When our parents told us that smoking would kill you, did we all suddenly decide to stop?

For teenagers, posting questionable stuff that could lose them a job one day is the

new drunk driving. My daughter knows that I go on Tumblr and that I check her friends' Tumblrs as well, because I have TOLD HER that I do. But did that stop her from posting a picture of herself french-inhaling god knows what? (It was peach flavored steam, she says, but even if that's true I fear that may be a gateway to the harder stuff, like hemp-flavored smoke.)

If you're not spying on your kids yet, by all means start. At first, of course, you won't tell them you're doing it. You will lurk on their accounts and be mildly shocked at what goes on. Then you'll see something big you can't ignore, like a white friend singing along to a song that uses the N-word or a hand holding a pipe, and you will debate whether to blow your cover and confront your target with the evidence. Don't worry! Unlike in real-life espionage, you can reveal your surveillance with little or no impact on the mission. After a few weeks of muted, parent-friendly posting, your kid will forget all about you and get wreckless again. It's as if Stringer Bell lifted up your shirt and found your wire, then two weeks later forgot you were an undercover cop and sold you a big brick of heroin.

At any rate, here are a few tips I have learned in case you're new to the game:

Instagram profiles are goldmines. Kids usually have links in their bios to other places where they post stuff they shouldn't be posting. Click those links and go to town.

Google is great. Once you have a username for your kid, google it and see what comes up. This could lead to whole conversations they were involved in that you couldn't see on their pages.

Don't just stop at your kid. Spy on their friends, too. In fact, kids are way more likely to post vaguely scandalous pictures of their friends than of themselves (perhaps your nagging is sinking in just ever so slightly?) Plus, it's always good to know which of your kids' friends goes by, say, "F*ckgrl."

Check for double or even triple accounts. So you found their Tumblr. Nice work. Now look for the other ones as well. Try checking their friends' Tumblrs to find links to your kid's second address.

Forget about Facebook. Even the most reckless teenager knows that posting something there is like blurting it out at a church potluck. Even Grandma is on there for god's sake.

Anything I've left out here? I would love to find out more about how to find out more about my precious, "peach steam"-smoking daughter. Share your spy tips in the comments.

INSTA-MANNERS

I used to worry that my daughter would grow up with the manners of an orangutan since we have never really been all that strict about what goes on at the dinner table. I am sure that my mother's generation thinks that teenagers today are grossly lacking in the kinds of niceties that defined character and class back in their day. Perhaps my mom and her friends should take a tour through the world of Instagram selfies.

Among teenage girls, an elaborate and mandatory code of etiquette rules the process of posting, viewing, and commenting upon any kind of selfie.

First, you must always "like" any picture a female friend puts up of herself. Why? Because she is likely to be staring at her phone, willing the number of likes to go up, and worrying if the number isn't going up fast enough. You certainly don't want to crush the fragile ego of your friend when all it takes is a double tap to make everything okay.

Second, the comment. No matter how ghastly or gorgeous the photo might be, you must GUSH about how beautiful the friend is. Acceptable comments include the basics, such as "Perfect much?" (Heart emojis galore must accompany any or all of these comments, by the way.) If you are not one of the first commenters, you should probably upgrade to general statements of disbelief, such as "How can you be this gorgeous??! It's not possible!!!" The final - and highest - level of praise is to express anger and jealousy at the injustice of your friend's beauty. Simple statements that would seem like sour grapes, such as "Ugh " or a poop emoji, are in this case taken as supreme compliments.



kileywhitney u doin it and doin it and doin it bitch

3w Reply



savannah.wand u need to stop

3w Reply

Third, the replies. This is where the work begins for the friend who put up the selfie. She can't just rest on her "perf" laurels and passively soak up the praise like Cleopatra would. She must respond to every girl who has declared or decried her perfection. Acceptable replies include a simple "ily" (I love you), the return compliment, "Awwwww thx, but you are prettier" all the way up to the flat out denial and rejection of the compliment, such as "what r u looking in a mirror?" The selfie poster must never leave anyone hanging for fear of looking haughty or vain, which of course she is not, even though she has just published a photo of herself for the express purpose of receiving lavish praise.

Let's not leave straight boys entirely out of this process. They will occasionally pipe in with tender thoughts such as "Sex panther!" or "ur hot" but these comments are really just icing on the cake. And I probably don't have to tell you that these boys aren't nearly as selfie-obsessed as the girls, though they're not completely out of the game. With boys, it's more about goofy faces and amazing skate moves, or with the more arty ones, pet snake portraits and gritty sunsets with telephone poles as punctuation.

So you see? Our children have manners. If you don't believe me, have your daughter comment on a friend's selfie and then set the timer to see how many seconds elapse before she receives a reply. The last time my daughter and I tried this, it was 20.

TRUE CONFESSIONS: MOM EDITION

There's just something about being the parent of a teenager that causes you to start second-guessing pretty much everything you have ever done with/to/for/against your precious child during their entire lifetime. Conveniently, this usually occurs at about 3:20 AM and lasts until about 5 minutes before your alarm is set to go off. Lying there in the clammy dark, you become painfully

aware that your kid is completely f-ed up, and it's entirely your fault.

Could more piano practice have turned your child into a paragon of discipline and virtue? If you had waited just one more year before allowing your kid onto the slippery slope of Apple devices, would she be sitting in a rocking chair contentedly knitting a cozy for your tea kettle instead of sprawling on the couch snapchatting pictures of her tongue to 50 people at a time?

So let's just get it out there: What are the biggest mistakes you have made and are still making as parents? It's confession time. I will divulge my top 5, and I want you to do the same.

1) We make breakfast for our daughter every damned morning. She's 14, and perfectly capable of feeding herself, and we still do the work for her. Hell, let's be honest, I still make her snacks when she asks me to. A wistful plea for a toasted bagel and cream cheese usually works. Why? Because she's skinny and doesn't eat enough and will probably just not bother to eat if we don't feed her. Well played, daughter.

2) Sometimes we set rules and then just don't follow through. Example: A big declaration that every night between 7 and 9 will be "no phone time" might last for a month or two, and then just slip away. Why? Parental laziness is the only explanation. We're too lazy to monitor and enforce the rules we create to combat our daughter's laziness.

3) We have utterly failed to help her find a hobby. Sports? Nope, though we did force a few on her through the years. Music? We let her quit piano in the 8th grade because she "had so much homework." Reading? The fact that she sees it as a dreaded chore gives me great pain. Hiking? She hates it. Sailing, biking, horses, chess....even movies are not really her bag. When she got hooked on "Breaking Bad" I actually felt elated that she had finally embraced narrative drama rather than worrying about her watching junkies choke to death on their own vomit and whatnot.

4) We allow strangers to follow her on social media. Her Instagram is open, as is her Tumblr. I've even seen semi-creepy comments from strangers on some of her

selfies. Obviously, she and her friends have all been lectured to death on this topic, and I dare say it may have actually sunk in. Also, my daughter is so socially-driven that she would never arrange to meet a stranger, because he/she is not a known “popular” person so what would be the point? But still.

5) I want to be cool in front of some of my kids’ friends. Yep. My desire to be liked can even extend itself to 14 year-old boys and girls, especially the ones I think are smart or funny. I find myself engaging with them in a way that I hope will cause them to tell my daughter, “your mom is so cool!” Just typing that out is so embarrassing that my fingers are cringing.

Wow. That was both cathartic and humiliating. And as tempted as you may be to give me advice right now, why don’t you give this a try instead?

COMPARISON PARENTING

Here’s the rub about parenting: We can obsess all we want on whether we’re doing a good job of it, but in reality we will never know. Whether our kid ends up in Oslo accepting a Nobel prize or in our basement accepting another bong hit, we can pat ourselves on the back or blame ourselves endlessly, but how do we know for sure that we had anything to do with it? Thanks to the fact that each of our children is completely, snowflake-ishly unique, being a parent is like participating in an experiment with no control group.

But that doesn’t stop us from comparing our kids to other kids. In my case, the boy who lives next door has always been the control in my parenting experiment. An only child like my daughter, he is being raised along the lines of the Waldorf education philosophy, and his parents have been very committed to limiting his media and screen time. Seriously. This kid did not watch any TV -- ANY -- until he was about 8 and the Olympics came on.

Let me give you a few glimpses back through time to compare and contrast his lifestyle with my kid’s:

Neighbor kid, Age 7: Outside with a butterfly net, catching bees and examining

them.

My kid, Age 7: Inside on the computer, adopting virtual pets by the dozens and then abandoning them for newer, cuter ones. When I admonish her, she harrumphs and reminds me, “mom, they’re not real.”

Neighbor kid, Age 9: Watching his first movie (Buster Keaton, I believe?)

My Kid, Age 9: Getting her first iPod, which makes her want an iPod Touch, which makes her want an iPhone 4, which makes her want an iPhone 5.

Neighbor Kid, Age 12: Taking up archery.

My Kid, Age 12: Taking up irony. As in, “Everyone knows I’m joking when my instagram bio says I’m dating a meth dealer.”

Now they’re 13 and 14, respectively. And interestingly, he now goes to movies, has an iPhone, and watches TV. Yes, his mom feels like the iPhone has taken over his life, which could make one wonder if all of that restriction was for naught. But I still see him outside shooting hoops, managing somehow to entertain himself without using a device that needs a charger. And, he’s the kind of kid who will sit down and watch Downton Abbey with his mom instead of refusing to watch anything except a reality show about the kids who used to break into Paris Hilton’s house.

Do you compare your kids to other peoples’ kids? Maybe it’s time to give yourself a break and remember the conclusion that Pulitzer Prize-winner Lawrence Wright came to in a New Yorker article I read years ago about identical twins: basically the only type of “nurture” that really affects our kids’ personalities is either extreme spoiling or extreme deprivation. Otherwise it’s all nature. So just keep it between those two ditches and you’re doing fine. You can see why I still remember that article from 1995, can’t you? It makes me feel soooo much better...

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT THOSE DAMNED KARDASHIANS?

For years, I was proud to live a Kardashian-free life. As a frequent consumer of

pop culture info (and a non-amish person) this was not easy. It meant skipping past any articles about them in *People*, never clicking on any Kardashian-related links on any of my favorite websites, and forbidding any viewing of “Keeping Up with the Kards” in my household. Up until recently I was proudly oblivious to which K was married to which troubled athlete, which one was especially plagued by camel toe, or even which one had the most annoying voice.

But against my best efforts, they Krept in. (I promise I won’t keep doing that but I had to do it once.) Every time I would turn my back my daughter would be sneaking peeks at that blasted show on Netflix. Then Kim hooked up with Kanye, and lord help me I am a secret Kanye fan. Also? They are not going away. If anything they seem to be multiplying and tightening their clutches on America. The Kardashians have won.

So now that I begrudgingly know more about them, I can’t help but wonder about the influence they are having on my daughter. When women are that absurdly un-idolizable, are they still somehow able to influence young hearts and minds? It’s one thing when your kid, say, likes a rapper or an actress because of what they do and what they look like. But what if your kid is watching a group of people expressly to mock them and hate them? As an astute friend of mine points out, “No one hates the Kardashians more than the people who actually watch the show.”

Earlier on in my kid’s life, I made the mistake of letting her watch certain shows as long as I was at her side to provide a cynical, “real” perspective. Hannah Montana was okay if I was there to point out how cheesy it was. Princess crap was fine since I had provided her with the grim truth of what it’s really like (see Princess Di). Mocking became embedded into our viewing ritual when American Idol’s audition shows morphed into cavalcades of cringeable performances. Then one day, we were driving by an underpass and my then-6 daughter said, of a begging man sitting by his canvas tent home, “Oh yeah, like he’s really poor? Look! He has a tent!” I had to rethink my “snark=enlightenment” parenting strategy.

Now she and everyone else loves a show that is all about hating the stars. And that creeps me out, especially when she still wants to follow their every move and

buy Karshasian mascara at the store. This new rise of anti-idols is something we are going to have to figure out, one Kardashian at a time.