



Curfews – helping keep kids structured

By: Mariko Wiseberg, MA, LCPC

Now that the summer months are here, children and teenagers seek to spend more time with their friends. Comments like “It’s not fair. Everybody gets to stay out later than I do. Don’t you trust me? I have my cell phone on me. I don’t need a curfew” may be heard more frequently by parents now that school is out for the summer. Although children do need to gain more independence as they get older, having structure is just as important to their development and growth. It also helps keep them safe.

Setting and enforcing clear boundaries is a key part to parenting. Curfews provide needed structure for children and adolescents. They help children learn responsibility. Having children and adolescents be a part of the discussion of curfews, including specific expectations and consequences, will help them in their journey towards independence in a safe and structured environment.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind for discussing curfews:

Plan ahead. Discuss curfew expectations, including consequences if curfew is broken ahead of time. Don’t wait until your child or adolescent is begging you to go out.

Be realistic with setting curfews. Take into consideration your child’s age, any individual factors (i.e. do they need more sleep, involved in summer school or camp, safety of the neighborhood), and needs of the family. Keep in mind that there are local laws about curfew.

Have the ability to adjust. There may be situations, like the summer or special events that come up where re-negotiating curfew may be needed. Review and re-negotiate curfews together with your children and/or adolescents.

Confirm plans. When your children are leaving, ask who they will be with, where are they going, how they are getting to and back from where they are going, and what time will they be back.

Provide positive feedback by affirming your child or adolescent when they return home on time. This will make it more likely for them to continue to follow the boundaries set. It is also important to follow through and enforce the decided upon consequences should curfew is broken. Be consistent and use these situations to as teaching opportunities for responsibility.

Mariko Wiseberg, MA, LCPC, is a licensed counselor at The Lighthouse Emotional Wellness Center, located in Arlington Heights, Illinois., and she specializes in working with children and adolescents. The Lighthouse is the only center in the Midwest of its kind, offering a wide variety of emotional wellness services for individuals, couples and families. For more information regarding the services Mariko provides, visit www.lighthouseemotionalwellness.com

