

Parents can use networking to detect harmful behavior

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Self-described "bad girl" and aspiring bikini model Terri Rehm shared her thoughts on MySpace. Before being charged with murder in connection with a June 25 slaying in Oklahoma City, she wrote that drugs set her life awry.

"If I had not been where I was buying drugs then I would not be involved at all," she wrote in reference to the murder investigation.

In describing who she'd like to meet, she wrote that she wants a guy who respects her and her daughter. And continued, "I can't have the whole goody goody thing going on, I'm a bad girl myself."

Can parents point to social networking stories like Rehm's to help steer teens away from drugs and negative influences?

The key is to expose teens to peers who initially went down the wrong path but changed course after a catastrophic event, said Patrick Schwerdtfeger, a Walnut Creek, Calif.-based author and speaker.

"The trend is clear. Trust for establishment-related advice is dropping while trust for peer advice is rising," he said. "Social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook are helping teens find peers with similar views. And that often reinforces their beliefs, good or bad."

Experimenting early

It doesn't hurt for parents to share dramatic Internet stories about drugs destroying people's lives, said Jo Ann Pearce, executive director of the Oklahoma-based A Chance to Change Foundation. But the stories aren't always effective deterrents.

"Many people seem to react with 'That would never happen to me,' because they don't understand the lack of control that comes with the disease of addiction," Pearce said.

Oklahoma children typically start experimenting with drugs and alcohol in seventh grade. So it's wise for parents to begin talking about drugs and alcohol before then, she said.

"Technology and social media can be a godsend and a curse," said Corrine Gregory, founder of Bellevue, Washington-based Social Smarts.

Parents should add their teens to their own Facebook page, Gregory said. She said many people post uplifting messages on social networks that their teens might read.

"The parents also need to have specific consequences if their family expectations are broken," said Jackie Landler, clinical director with A Chance to Change. "Keeping kids accountable for their choices and behavior is the only way I know to provide external motivation to hopefully counter the internal motivation to use what feels good."

Tough love

Gregory said their kids have to share their e-mail user ID and password with her and their dad. The parents don't randomly snoop on their children's accounts. But they do have the right to check the accounts should they suspect something is awry. If the children ever use anonymous e-mail to hide something, their computer access is revoked, Gregory said.

"Ultimately if a teen wants to do something risky and dangerous, they find ways to do it," she said. "But we as parents can do everything we can to try to help them make good choices and protect them as much as is humanly possible."



Recess Rally: Saturday, August 22, 2009

Oklahoma citizens gather to voice their opposition to the president's health care plan during a "recess rally" at the State Capitol in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 22, 2009.



OU students: Wednesday, August 19, 2009

Photos of OU students who have arrived back on campus for the new school year.



Teachers Appreciation Breakfast

Oklahoma teachers were honored at the event Tuesday morning in Oklahoma City.



Jerusalem Community Center: Saturday, August 15, 2009

Photos of the Jerusalem Community Center Saturday, August 15, 2009