

My Child Won't Stay Home

What do I do when my child won't stay home and gets involved with peers who are a negative influence?

The primary aspect involved with this is what's happening or not happening in the family dynamics. If the child has steadily lost relationship with the parent then the peers are offering the support, acceptance and understanding that the child is not getting from the family. It's probably a case of stressed out adolescents getting together and providing soothing for each other. The family is more than likely generating a negative feedback loop that's pushing the child away from the family and towards peers. These peers probably have similar issues and/or family dysfunctions as a child. You have to really look at the family dynamics and relationships first to find out why the child is being attracted away from the family to this peer group. The child is going to the peer group to try to get everything he or she should be getting from the family.

I recommend that the father and the mother start to make special opportunities to be with their child. Here's a formula to follow, it's called 10-20-10. Simply put, this means to spend 10 minutes in the morning, 20 minutes in the afternoon, and 10 minutes in the evening with your child. These are special opportunities to be with your child. These opportunities are to just listen without judging, blaming, or shaming. Validate what ever your child is saying and feeling. Validation does not mean you agree with their opinion. Validation means that you are listening to your child. By doing this families can start to start to repair their broken relationship. This improved relationship then goes towards influencing the child to start making more responsible decisions and demonstrating respect.

The second recommendation is the three phase intervention. Use this to help connect with your child. The three phase intervention consists of reflect, relate, and regulate. Reflect: How am I feeling right now? It not OK for a parent to say to a child "Tell me how you feel" unless the parent has examined his or her own feelings. When you connect to yourself, you can communicate in a secure way. Relate: While you're breathing say "I feel _____ right now, and I need to know how you feel". They may not know, so give them words for what you sense they are feeling. "You look (angry/sad/scare). Are you feeling _____?" Then say "tell me more, I want to hear about it". "Tell me louder". Regulate: Remain regulated and accept all the feelings your child can give you. Your calm, regulated state will help your child become regulated and move into relationship with you.

Thirdly, I recommend that the parents explore what is contributing to the negative neurological feedback loops within the family. The parents need to identify their negative reactions to their child's behavior. They need to understand what in their past triggers this negative reaction. Understanding this is critical in developing secure attachments with children. Parents need to have an understanding of their own childhood attachments. Their own history of attachments and relationships is the blueprint they follow. Until this blueprint is changed they will continue to perpetuate negative neurological feedback loops within the family.

Jesus said in Luke 18:16 to let the children come to me. This is Godly advice for parents. Jesus was a safe place for children. Parent need to strive to be a safe place for their children.

In Christ,

Ken Thom, LPC