**TEEN BRAINOLOBY**

**FEBRUARY 2019**

**WEEK 1**

**Situation:** Mardi Gras is just around the corner and although it is a fun and exciting time, it can become quite stressful and even overwhelming for parents of teenagers who want more independence. Parents want to give their children independence and an ability to make decisions. But … how much freedom is the right or “safe” amount. When “everyone else is able to go to the parade without being with a parent.”

**Fact:** The last part of your child’s brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for planning, for determining actions and consequences of those actions. Basically this is the reasoning part of the brain that says if I do this, then this will happen. For their safety and well-being the adult with a fully developed brain must step in to create limits and rules on their child’s activities and freedom.

**Solution:** Remember the 3 Simple Cs of parenting:

*Clear and consistent boundaries –* set clear boundaries at a time that is calm, well before emotions escalate due to challenging situations. Be consistent in your message; remember your child’s undeveloped mind will register black and white – grey areas like it “might be ok” will be perceived as “ok.”

*Communication* – never assume your child understands. Communicate with productive conversations in which you outline expectations and consequences. Using real situations often helps with understanding.

*Consequences* – be sure the consequences you set, are ones that you are willing and able to enforce. Nothing will undermine respect and authority quicker than empty promises.

**WEEK 2**

**Situation:** In an effort to educate and encourage responsibility, you give your child a credit card, with a small monthly allowance and explain the importance of paying the bill in full each month. You are delighted that after several months, your child is paying off this bill completely. Upon reviewing the monthly statement, you discover your child has been buying Juuls, (a vape device) and selling them to students at school for a profit.

**Fact:** Vaping devices are illegal for anyone under the age of 19 to buy, possess, use or sell. There is no federal/health regulation for the device or the e-juice, meaning what is on the label is not necessarily in the bottle. All Juul pods contain as much nicotine as in a pack of cigarettes. The undeveloped brain registers nicotine stronger than the developed brain. The flavored vape juice thought to be only water is actually primarily propylene glycol, a synthetic compound used to de-ice airplanes and make polyurethane and even found in some antifreeze.

**Solution:** Vaping is not safe for any teenager. Educate yourself about vaping and the inherent dangers. Have a productive, factual conversation. Set and enforce rules and consequences for these products, just as you do for other drugs.

**WEEK 3**

**Situation:** Everyone is going to the basketball game Friday then spending the night at Mike’s house. It is common knowledge among parents that kids are able to drink at Mike’s house. The parents may be around but they never check, which makes sneaking alcohol very easy. You are ok with the basketball game but not so sure about spending the night. You don’t feel good about letting him go but you also don’t feel good about keeping him from hanging with his friends. He has asked you why you are punishing him for being a good kid by keeping him away from his friends. What to do….

**Fact:** Your parent radar for potential dangers is right**.** A recent study found that teens who get alcohol from their parents may be more likely to binge drink. The younger a child starts to drink alcohol, the more likely he is to have serious social problems later in life: difficulty holding a job, alcohol and other drug abuse dependency, and commission of criminal or violent acts. Alcohol and other drugs compromise the perfect growth of the brain – often described as the engine for life.

**Solution:** Have the productive conversations with your child using some of the above facts, explaining that it is not a matter of trust, but more of protecting his developing brain. Set clear expectations and rules, accompanied by consequences if they are not obeyed. Strengthen his refusal skills by purchasing a breathalyzer and using it.

**WEEK 4**

**Situation:** As you are silently cleaning up after lunch, 6 teenagers are at the kitchen table talking about what happened to their friend last night. This is what you hear. Tommy rode to the party with Billy. Everyone saw Billy smoking marijuana at the party. After the party, Tommy was a little scared to ride home with Billy and said, “Go on without me. I’ll get another ride.” Billy made fun of Tommy, saying, “What’s up with this? Think you are too good to ride with the rest of us?” Your heart breaks for Tommy but…you know he did the right thing. What should you say to your child?

**Fact:** Driving under the influence is very risky. Marijuana alters the perception of time and distance, and impairs coordination and reflexes; making car crashes more likely. It is also illegal. If the car is stopped, even for a routine traffic violation and marijuana is found in the car, everyone could be charged with a minor in possession of marijuana.

**Solution:** After everyone leaves and it is quiet and calm, take the opportunity to have a conversation with your child.Set expectations and provide some solutions such as, “Please know you can always call me or let’s set up a plan for you to text if you get in a challenging situation.” Ask if your child knew there would be marijuana at the party. If so this is another conversation about the serious consequences of being in a place (car, room, house) with marijuana, such as a minor in possession.