

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam

My oldest son is heading off to college in the fall. As we have gone through the process of applying for schools, visiting campuses, and talking about being at school, I began to realize how little he knows about life.

I am already worried how he will handle being away next year. Will he get up in time for classes; will he keep his finances in order, etc.? Do you have any suggestions about a fast tutorial on growing up before he goes away?

Worrying Mom

A. Dear Worrying Mom,

You and many other parents may not be happy with my answer.

You cannot have it both ways. Parents can't both take care of everything for their children and expect them to learn how to be independent problem solvers.

We do not do our children any favors by giving them enough money so they don't have to work or by excusing them from helping at home because they have a heavy school schedule.

Being good parents isn't only about protecting our children from the real world. It is about teaching them skills to succeed in that world and learning to protect themselves.

Teaching children to take care of themselves is ideally a gradual process over the years our children are at home, but let me outline a few suggestions for now until school starts in August. Sit down with your son and explain your concerns. Work out a plan with him, which involves his being responsible for his schedule, getting up in the morning, meeting deadlines, etc.

As difficult as this may be, you need to find a balance between knowing about everything he is doing and sending the message you trust him to be a responsible adult.

If he isn't already doing it, have him start to do his own laundry. Stress the need to get a job for the summer and budget his money. Make sure his money isn't just for extras. Let him know you expect him to keep track of

materials that come in from school and require action. Work with him to make sure things are happening.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

This may sound crazy, but I am worried because our 16-year-old daughter seems to find it necessary to tell us everything that is going on in her life and getting our approval before she does things. While I am glad she feels comfortable enough to talk to us, I think she should be making her own decisions.

What can we do to encourage her to not to feel she has to check out everything with us?

Knows Too Much

A. Dear Knows Too Much,

Please read my first letter's response. You have another piece of what can happen when we don't balance parenting role between being protectors and encouraging healthy exploration.

Think about the messages you have delivered to your daughter. My guess is that you shared your worry about her ability to handle the world outside of your home.

We need to teach our children not only that the world can be challenging and even dangerous, but also that they need some way to assess each situation and choose appropriate responses.

Start letting your daughter know that you think she can make more of her own decisions. You can act as a sounding board and help her think things through so she learns how to do that. Help her to see and compare the challenges. Deciding on what to wear to school is different than how to react to a difficult friend. Start to bow out of giving your advice and opinions on simpler issues and keep raising the bar.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsnny.org or call 518-482-8856.

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