

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,

The school year is rapidly coming to an end. My son is 16 and old enough to be on his own for the summer.

He wants to hang out with his friends. I want him to get a job. He says the summer is the only time he can have any fun.

I trust him, but I think a summer of hanging out is asking for trouble and I also feel that he should be earning some of his spending money.

How should I handle this?

Summer Mom

A. Dear Summer Mom,

There are two issues you present. I think that you are correct that a summer of completely unstructured time is inviting potential problems and probably boredom. The second issue is beginning that process of helping your son to be a financially responsible person so that when he goes away to school or elsewhere, he will have had some experience in handling his finances.

I suggest that you think of inviting him to compromise with you. Make him partially responsible in coming up with a plan that incorporates both of your wishes.

If you tell him what he has to do, he might get caught in reacting to your decision instead of thinking through what might actually be best.

Most teens react in a positive way to being asked to help solve a problem or issue. It also helps to establish a model for problem solving which he can use in the future.

Q. Dear Miriam,

We are working parents and the summer is always difficult for us in terms of

childcare. Our two children are 14 and 16. I know we can let the children be at home alone, but we are not comfortable doing this.

We are actually more comfortable letting our 14-year-old stay alone than our 16-year-old who can be impulsive and doesn't always make good decisions.

Do we need to treat them equally in terms of making summer plans or can we go with separate plans?

They are competitive and we don't want to be unfair.

Working Parents

A. Dear Working Parents,

Unless children have some plan for their time at home during the summer, it is probably not wise to have them alone so much. A summer job or internship may be possible for your older child. If a paying job is hard to find, be creative and try to find a volunteer position or something similar.

Your 14-year-old is a little young to get a paid job, but he/she may be able to work as a mother's helper or as a volunteer.

These expectations for both of them send them the message that out of school time does not mean only hanging out. Summer can be a time to investigate interests, earn some money and contribute to the community.

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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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