

Dear OU Parenting,

As the summer approaches I am unsure as to how much freedom I should allow my teenager to have. For example, my fifteen-year-old daughter told me that she's planning on going up to the kinneret with a few friends and sleep on the beach. This is so foreign to me! As an olah I would never have allowed my daughter to do something like that in America. My daughter said "everyone here does it and its totally fine". I'm at a loss. How do I know what's normal and acceptable here? -M.R.



Michal Silverstein, MSc

Dear M.R.,

This is an excellent question that I believe every olah parent has grappled with at some point. The gap which exists between American and Israeli culture is vast. Israeli children on a whole are much more independent from a young age, which the society takes pride in and reinforces. This leads cautious parents/children to feel inadequate.

How can parents encourage their children to be socially accepted while making decisions they feel comfortable with?

When deciding if you're ok with the activity your child wants to do, I suggest

you ask yourself the following questions...

Will my child be in a safe environment?

Parents must ask questions and find out where their child is planning to be. For example, saying "the kinneret" is not specific enough. You must know what beach they plan to be at as certain beaches are known to be safer than others.

Feel free to consult with an OLEH VATIK-an olah who has been here for many years with older children and has experience with this. You should ask who she is planning to go with and get phone numbers.

If you decide that your child will be in a safe environment, then make sure you still give her rules. For example, don't go into the water at night. Always swim with a partner. Make sure she has enough drinking water/ sunscreen. Also make sure she has enough money to take busses so that she will not have to rely on tremping. You may want her to call when she gets there or keep her cell phone on. These are just a few rules pertaining to this example but make sure you feel comfortable with the rules you set. If after doing research and consulting with older mothers you trust, you still don't feel comfortable allowing your child to go, then trust your intuition and say no. That is a legitimate part of parenting.

Does this activity align with our values/ halacha?

Even though it is the summer it doesn't mean that halacha becomes irrelevant. If

your family only goes separate swimming, see if your daughter can go to a separate beach. Remind her that if she goes into a restaurant to buy something she should check the kosher certification and that the restaurant is not open on shabbat. Although we live in Israel some well known chains have certain cafes which operate on shabbat. It's important to give them the skills to be a responsible religious adult. Its also important to show how consistent your family is when it comes to values. Hopefully, these experiences will teach them to be more independent, confident and avoid peer pressure. When parents model the confidence of doing only things, they are comfortable doing, then kids tend to exhibit the same resolve when they're around their peers.

Finally, remind your daughter that if she ever gets into a tricky situation, she can call you for help.

The overall message you want to give is that you're interested in her enjoying her summer within certain boundaries.

Although the cultural differences can be hard to navigate, there are ways to encourage your child to be socially accepted without having to go along with everything that everyone else does. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

Feel free to send in any parenting questions you may have to parenting@ouisrael.org (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).



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