

Staying Out Late



Dr. Ethan Eisen, PhD

The story in this week's parasha of Yaakov being accosted while alone at night provides a nice opportunity

to think about a topic that many olim parents find challenging with kids of all ages: curfews. Should my children have a curfew? If so, what should it be? How do I talk to them about it if they disagree with the rule?

An experience of mine from a couple summers ago highlighted a major cultural difference between Israel and the United States, and helped me gain perspective on why the topic of curfews is so challenging for olim parents. A cousin of ours from the USA was in Israel for a summer camp, and he joined our family for his off-Shabbos. As the summer Friday night meal came to its end after 10 pm, our elementary school-age daughters turned to my wife and me and asked "What time do we have to be home?" Our cousin looked on with some combination of shock and puzzlement. "Wait, they're going out *tonight!*?" In his community in the USA, no one went out late on Friday nights; in our neighborhood, the streets are buzzing every week.

Friday night socializing, by and large, is unsupervised, which understandably makes many parents uncomfortable. Consider how you would complete this sentence: "Nothing good ever happens after ___ p.m. (or a.m.)." Parents typically do not want their children out after that time. Aside from the safety concerns for their children, parents also may not be able to fall asleep until their children are home, which is a substantial inconvenience for parents who want to get a good night's sleep.

On the other side of the argument, many kids feel that these hours are the week's prime social opportunity to spend time with their friends, particularly because motzei Shabbos is a school night. Also, parents may feel that encouraging their kids to have unsupervised time with their friends fosters independence, as well as positive social connections.

From my perspective, the question of curfews is really a question of how to balance these competing interests in a way that

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works for your family. And as with most other aspects of life that require finding a balance, this process typically involves a combination of open communication and boundary setting. The issue of curfews will not likely be solved in a single conversation, but below are a few suggestions for what might be included in an effective discussion.

Clearly articulate your concerns. As a parent, it is your role to be thinking about your child's safety, even if she isn't. You can also be honest with her if there are other reasons you are uncomfortable with her being out so late, like your ability to sleep peacefully.

Listen to and validate your child's perspective. Try to be open to his point of view without immediately knocking it down. Feeling compelled to return home before his friends generates real distress, as he may anticipate feeling left out from his social group. The better understanding that you have of his perspective, the more you will be able to figure out how to achieve the best balance.

Discuss good safety practices. You can ask her who she will be with and where she plans to go, and you can be alert to parts of her plan that seem less safe. Part of this conversation can include general safety habits, like not walking by herself; being in public and well-lit areas when walking around; knowing where other families' homes are in case she needs an adult; making good choices about her own safety; and other important discussions not immediately connected to the curfew issue.

Work out an agreed upon curfew. Your child should walk away knowing exactly what time he needs to be back in the door, whether he should let you know that he's

home if you're sleeping, and what, if any, are consequences for missing curfew.

Olim parents are confronted by many cultural adjustments, which can be sources of tension between them and their children. But these areas of potential conflict can also provide opportunity for conversation and understanding, which ultimately can foster a stronger relationship between you and your child. ■

Dr. Ethan Eisen, PhD is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist (Israel and U.S.) offering Evidence-Based Solutions for Individuals and Couples

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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10 Hillel St., Jerusalem | 36 Dam hamkabim st., Modiin
02-6255592, 050-3202909
Madar@netvision.net.il