

To Rescue or Not, That is the Question

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W., LICSW, LPC

During the high school years, young adults are moving from a state of dependence and total reliance to independence and self-reliance. This transition for many parents and adolescents is fraught with uncertainty and trepidation. This is because there is a negotiation taking place in which both parties are dialoguing about who will do what and when.

“Josh, you’ll do your laundry from now on. It’s time to get in the habit of taking care of your own laundry”

“No way mom! You’ve been doing it all my life! I don’t need practice”

“Julie, just remember that when you are away at college, you cannot overdraft your college account, it costs \$35.00! (4 weeks later)

“Hi dad, I swear I didn’t mean it, but I saw some cute earrings and before I knew it, I used my debit card . Anyway, I see the bank is charging me an overdraft! I need you to take care of it.”

Everyone makes mistakes. Some mistakes cost more than others. The cost of mistakes is not only in financial terms, but also in terms of responsibility and accountability. Parents often have to work through decisions about what they are willing to do and make up for in their adolescents’ lives. It is often unclear as to which way a parent should go. The question is – should I (the parent) take care of this problem, or should I let my son or daughter take care of the problem, or is there some way I can help my adolescent work through the problem? Here are some things to think about as you find yourself in this decision making spot:

1. Is this a minor but irritating event? (Socks on the floor)
2. If yes, then how many times am I willing to take care of the problem, and what does that communicate to my young adult? (That they can’t take care of small things? That they should be a “taker” and not a “giver” in our family?)
3. If no, then is this major event a first time offense? (Bank overdraft, speeding ticket, failing final grade, drinking or drug use) If it is a first time event, how can I stay calm, and talk to my son/daughter about the sequence of thoughts and choices they had before they made that decision? How can I help them understand the seriousness of the event and help them think of ways they can guard against it happening again?
4. If this is a repeated major event, what are the pros and cons of helping my adolescent? Can I seek help from outside resources to join together with me to advocate for my adolescent’s plan of care? Will school officials, or law enforcement, or therapists or physicians or church leaders join together to help my adolescent get back on track? What are all my options? Where can I go to get some help?

As parents, it is very hard to watch our children struggle. It is hard to watch them in pain. If it is unclear, we need to ask for help and talk to others. All in all, we need to make all of our thoughts captive to Christ. We need God's help and His mind as we make decisions, always remembering that we are preparing our children to launch into the world. If we do all the work for them, we create incompetence. Let them work it out. Let them work with you to work it out.

Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.

P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited