Your Child’s Other Life --- School and Social Influences

Recently I posted my top 10 tips for parenting success. Now, I am elaborating on each item on the list. Parenting Tip #7 is this:

# Be Aware of School and Social Influence

Back in the day, when my kids were young and the dinosaurs roamed, we were friends with the parents of all of our children’s friends. Plus, we all lived within walking and biking distance in a 300-home suburban subdivision. Keeping tabs on our kids and monitoring school and social influence on them was a comforting, community project.

Now? Not so much! Today’s digital children live as much in the cybernetic world as in their real worlds. Their BFFs could live half way around the world, literally! It’s harder, but no less important, for parents to be aware of school and social influence.

“Hey, Son,” Todd’s mom called from the den. “I’m in here. Come see me.”

Todd had just gotten home from afternoon football practice. At 6’2” and 215 lbs., Maggie’s 15 year old son towered over her.

He sauntered into the den, giving her a half head nod, and mumbled, “What’s up?”

“Come sit here,” she patted the seat beside her, “and tell me about your day.”

With an exaggerated eye role, Todd plopped down beside his mom. “Awww, Ma, do we have to do this every day?” he griped.

“Well, let me see,” she gave him an unwanted side hug. “Uhhh, yes,” she teased, smiling broadly. “So,” the ritual began, “How was school?”

“Fine.”

“What new things did you learn today?”

“Stuff.”

“What color stuff?”

“Mom, really?”

The back and forth continued for a few minutes, and Todd lightened up, offering a few tidbits about his actual day.

This kind of seemingly meaningless dialogue is actually a gateway into the life your child has outside of your home and supervision. Other avenues you can use to keep in touch include a GPS app on his phone, permission to troll his Facebook and other social media accounts, and encouraging your children to host some of their social events in your home. Of course, for children under age 10, it’s still important to get the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the parents of your children’s friends, even if you don’t know them personally.

When you are accused of being invasive, agree, make light of it, but stick to it. These avenues into your child’s school and social influences will help you stay connected and informed. Personality psychology research indicates that our child’s personality is 80% formed by age 5, from your interactions with him and within your home. The remaining 15% of personality forms between ages 6 and 18, his school years. The final 5% is unique to your child, as his personal identity is completed through adolescence and his odyssey, from ages 18 to 30.

Make use of the time you have with your children. Be aware of both school and social influences with which he contends daily.