



June 26, 2007

Parental Wisdom – Emails

Parents are actually bus drivers

Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former.

-Albert Einstein, US (German-born) physicist (1879 - 1955)

Have you noticed how conscientious first time parents are? They research product safety better than Consumer Reports as they parent by the Hippocratic Oath which says, 'First, do no harm.'

When children are little, we understand our job is to keep them safe. But as they grow, we have to remember their safety is still our job. A toddler asking to wear stripes and polka-dots is negotiable, but being safely secured into a carseat is not.

As parents, we get numerous job descriptions but it can be summarized to one title - bus driver. We take our children on a journey from infancy to adulthood. Just like a bus there will be stops along the way in the form of outside influences such as family, friends, teachers, coaches, the media, our children's friends, the list is endless. But the bus will go where the bus driver steers it. Sometimes parents like to put the bus in cruise control and not think for themselves, or take the easy way out.

Children are required by law to sit in carseats, later in booster seats, and wear helmets when riding bikes. There are laws that prohibit teens from drinking until they are 21, but parents take a lackadaisical attitude when they get push back from their kids. "Well, they're going to drink anyway." If they did homework on the effects of teenage drinking they would have a totally different perspective.

Are these the same parents that got down on their hands and knees to look for exposed electrical outlets to protect their toddlers? What we know about teenage drinking is that 40% of the people that drink before age 15 go on to become alcoholics at some point in their lives. What we now know about the teenage brain is that the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for reasoning is the last part of the brain to develop. That is why it is hard for teenagers to distinguish the difference between going home after school to do homework, or going drinking with their friends. In fact that area of the brain isn't fully developed until age 24. Interestingly, you have to be 25 to rent a car.

The best approach to trust and teens is the same theory that Ronald Regan used in foreign policy; **trust but verify**.

An awkward conversation between teen parents may involve one parent verifying with another that their teen is invited over, that an adult will be home, and there will be no alcohol.

A far more awkward conversation begins with a knock on the door, which opens to find a police officer and member of the clergy on the other side.

Parents - please, drive your bus.

Adapted from [Because Kids Don't Come With Manuals](#) by Tina Nocera