

You and your teen Consequences that work

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A few months ago, a 16-year-old boy, "John," and his parents started therapy. John had been defiant recently and broken curfew two Saturdays in a row. Each time, he'd received a stern lecture and was sent to bed, only to sneak back out as soon as he thought they'd gone to sleep. When his parents caught him sneaking back in the first time, they'd been angry and threatened consequences, which made John very upset. He'd begged them not to ground him, and against their better judgment they'd let him slide. When it all happened again the following week, they didn't know what to do and called me.

As we started talking, his mom turned to John and blurted out, "If you break any rules between now and the end of school, you'll be grounded for the entire summer." Without thinking, I said, "Why would you want to do that to yourself?"

As much as Miss Manners would have frowned upon my lack of finesse, his parents appreciated my straightforward approach, as they realized they didn't want to spend their summer supervising John 24-7. Had they tried, John would likely have blamed them for ruining his summer and made things unpleasant for everybody. Fortunately, they understood my point and were receptive to my suggestions.

As tempting as it might be to react immediately and give harsh, lengthy consequences when your teen breaks rules, it's important to take time to calm down and think about how you feel and what you want to say. When John's parents did this they realized that they were angry, worried, and confused by what he'd done, and they shared this with him.

After you're satisfied that you teen has understood your concerns, encourage him/her to talk about what led him/her to make these choices. When John's parents did this, they learned that he had been having serious problems with his girlfriend, and he'd felt that the only time they could talk was late at night.

After everyone feels heard, consider how to respond. As much as John's parents felt badly about the problems he was having, they concluded that he could have found another time to talk. Had they known he was having problems, they would have helped him figure out an alternative time. Since he'd chosen to sneak out instead, they felt consequences were appropriate. John grudgingly agreed, and he promised to try and be more open about his problems in the future.

As you consider the length of the restriction and what privileges to remove, I suggest starting with brief, rather than lengthy consequences, and removing less rather than more. This helps you focus the conversation on making better choices, rather than your teen's anger and resentment. As John's choices were breaking curfew and sneaking back out for two weekends in a row, his parents decided that he wouldn't be allowed to go out for the next two weekends. They chose not to take away other privileges.

When the initial consequences aren't effective, it's necessary to adjust them by removing additional privileges. John, as with most teenagers, would rather eat nails and drink boiling oil before losing cell phone and/or car privileges. Had John continued defying his parents' rules by sneaking out or making other serious errors in judgment, I would have encouraged his parents to remove them in addition to the weekend restriction.

I realize that parents don't want to give consequences, but there are times that they're appropriate and necessary. Our teens will resist them, and sometimes it can feel easier to give in rather than arguing. However, if you hold firm, I've found that over time teens get tired of losing out on what they want to do and make better choices.

Election results bring Sacramento City Council shake-up

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Since 1992, no incumbent Sacramento City Councilmember has lost a re-election bid; on June 8, that all changed.

The June 8 Primary Election was a defining moment in politics statewide: for the first time, the California Republican Party was running not one, but two women for statewide office, with Meg Whitman as the party's gubernatorial nominee and Carly Fiorina as the GOP pick to run against Barbara Boxer in the U.S. senate race. Adding to this historic development was the local result – Sacramento City Councilmembers Ray Tretheway, from Natomas' District 1, and Robbie Waters, representing Pocket-Greenhaven's District 7, have apparently lost in their race to serve another four years at City Hall. It's been 18 years since such an upset has occurred in Sacramento City politics.

According to semi-official results released June 9 at 1:48 a.m. by the Sacramento County Registrar of Voters, both incumbents lost to political newcomers, Tretheway falling to Natomas grassroots campaigner Angelique Ashby, and Robbie Waters being edged out by Ryan Chin and Darrell Fong. Tretheway, who claims he was a target because he would not support Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson's strong-mayor initiative, had been recently seen by political watchdogs as very vulnerable, especially as Ashby scored a number of major endorsements and political allies (Johnson being one of them). Waters, who ran twice unopposed (most recently in

2006), faced a tough fight of his own, desperately trying to fend off two candidates that were as equally funded and organized.

The District 7 Race

According to the semi-official results, Chin was the big winner Tuesday night, taking in 38.45 percent of the vote; Fong came in second with 31.41 percent; Waters, the four-term incumbent and only Republican on the City Council, garnered 27.44 percent; and college student Diedre Hobart came in a distant fourth place. With no candidate earning a clear majority, the results set up a likely run-off election this November between the first- and second-place winners, Chin and Fong, respectively.

Waters, who has served on the City Council since 1994 and raised more money and spent more money in this election than any other City Council candidate, was fighting a determined battle in his re-election bid. Challengers Chin, a strategic communications officer with Sacramento State, and Fong, a retired Sacramento Police captain, seized early on to the anti-incumbent sentiment sweeping the U.S.

In a special interview prior to the election with Valley Community Newspaper reporter Celia Green, Waters had said that he hoped to serve one more four-year term and then retire from city politics. That retirement, it seems, will come early.

The District 3 Race

Although the Pocket-Greenhaven community saw quite the political upset, the District 3 race was anything

but; Councilmember Steve Cohn, Midtown and East Sacramento's longtime representative on the City Council, will remain in office for another term. The incumbent had faced a strong challenge from local real estate agent Chris Little and Midtown business owner Shawn Eldredge, but the incumbent persevered, winning his bid for a fifth term as the District 3 representative.

Cohn, who will now be one of Sacramento's longest-serving councilmembers, garnered 53.95 of the vote, winning a clear majority and avoiding a run-off election in November. Little and Eldredge scored 37.73 percent and 5.52 percent, respectively, while candidate Jeff Rainforth garnered the remaining votes.

Sacramento County Sheriff's contest

A bruising primary election will likely turn into a bruising general election: candidates Scott Jones and Jim Cooper, both captains with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, did not win a clear majority of votes and will now face one another again in the November General Election.

In what has been one of Sacramento's most hotly contested races, Jones and Cooper threw mud, hurled accusations and laid charges of political impropriety and professional misconduct. The race has also come to represent a battle between two law enforcement legacies, as Cooper, endorsed by former Sheriff Lou Blanas, and Jones, endorsed by outgoing Sheriff John McGinness, attacked one another for their political connections as much as their administrative philosophies.

Jones came out on top in Tuesday's race, but not by much, taking in 46.17 percent of the vote; Cooper came in second and garnered 41.37 percent of the vote; a third candidate, Bret Daniels, drew the remaining votes.

Sacramento County voters can expect the war of words to continue into the fall. The 2010 General Election is Nov. 2.

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