

# MOM RULES

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By Joni M. Fisher

I have learned that teenagers live in the age of forgetting. Simple skills they mastered at age seven disappear at age 14, like closing doors, saying ‘please’ and ‘thank-you’, putting things back where they found them, hanging clothes on hangers, using hampers, carrying dirty dishes to the kitchen. They forget where they put their belongings. They forget their given names and adopt nicknames like Moose, Bucky, Bubba, Skip, and Gator. They forget civilized behavior when it disagrees with what they want to do on the impulse of the moment—like telephoning a friend at midnight.

After studying my daughter and her friends, I found that teens respond quicker to peer-pressure than to a parent’s decrees. To wit, I developed a method for using peer pressure to my advantage—to make Mom’s rules equally memorable and effective.

Teenagers are old enough to understand civilized behavior. They know better; they just don’t care. To make them care, I wait for them to make an egregious error and then name a rule after them. For example, the Emily Rule is that no one is allowed to drive the SeaDoo on the lawn. Doing so causes the loss of driving privileges. Sucking up dirt also damages the motor.

We have a home theater that seats seven and a small exercise room beyond the theater. I’d rather have the darlings at my home where I can watch them than worry about where they are, so we share our toys. Put teenagers in the dark,

however, and anything can happen, so I made it my policy to occasionally open the door, offer to make popcorn and silently count heads. On one evening the count showed two missing. I strode through the movie room to the exercise room and found a pair of teens on the floor groping one another. This enacted the Megan/Scott Rule. Now when teens settle in for a movie, they hear me say, “The Megan/Scott Rule is in effect.” The students familiar with the policy explain it to the others.

Talk about a chilling effect. Teens want to be famous but not for dumb stunts. Fear of having a rule named after them works quite well. When Bucky, an 18-year-old who lives on his own, came to visit he brought over a giant convenience store cup. He’d always behaved wonderfully on previous visits, but this time he tried to smuggle in beer. It became suspicious when these germ-phobic teens passed the drink around. I intercepted it.

Bucky pleaded, “Oh, no. You’re not going to—“

“Pour it out? Yes. Name a new rule? Oh, yes.”

He groaned, apologized and then said, “Are you going to kick me out?”

“You’re welcome here *without* the beer.”

He hugged me. Perhaps he’d been kicked out of homes before. As we say, “Hate the sin, love the sinner.”

We recently held a going-away party for one of my daughter’s close friends. About thirty teens showed up to eat like locusts and sign a giant card. Near the end of the three-hour open house a few older boys showed up. They had accessorized their cars with the latest, most useless and expensive lights to illuminate the undercarriage and the stick shift and the headliner. The party

moved outside where teens ogled the car. Others did flips and cartwheels on the lawn. One of the parents called to speak with her daughter, so I carried the cordless phone outside. That's where I picked up the scent of marijuana.

I handed the phone to the girl and closed my eyes. The wind was blowing from the west, so I pivoted westward and started walking. Like a targeted missile I headed toward the bushes. The bushes suddenly shook and two older teens burst from them.

"We were just smoking," said one who didn't look at me.

"Do you have a note from your doctor?"

"Sorry?" Both looked up.

"Unless you're being treated for cancer you're not allowed to smoke marijuana on my property. It's time for you to go home."

"Who said we were smoking pot?" said the one with spiked hair. He glared at the other teens standing far off.

"I grew up in the sixties."

They mumbled apologies and left. Before they had left the block a group of teens gathered around me and asked what I was going to do.

"I'm going to make a new rule. Since I didn't get names, theirs is the Dope Rule. If this happens again I'll call the police, so spread the word."

And yes, lest the gentle reader imagines that only visiting teenagers earn rules, let me state the Jessica rule. There will be no parties held at the house unless at least one parent is at home. The darlings cleaned up so well we almost didn't detect the party, except for the drained boat tank and the rearrangement of pool furniture. Jessica was in full-denial mode until Bucky visited the next week

and casually asked me if I was proud of how they cleaned up after themselves. The poor dear young man simultaneously received a pat on the back from me, and a kick in the shins under the table from Jessica.

Years from now when these young people graduate from the age of forgetting I hope they will remember the safe haven of my home. Mine won't be the house they remember for the shooting or the Saturday night fights or the liquor closet. I hope they remember my house for the movies, the afternoons on the lake, the pizza parties, and the Rules. Perhaps they will even use my techniques on their own children. Let this be my legacy.

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