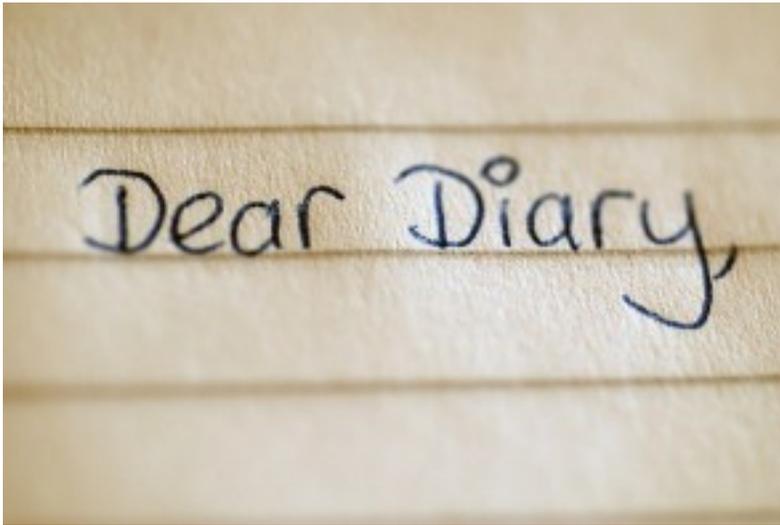


Snooping... Healthy or Harmful??

<http://www.radicalparenting.com/2011/04/10/snooping%E2%80%A6-healthy-or-harmful/>



This guest post is by Dr. Jenny Yip at www.renewedfreedomcenter.com.

It's Tuesday morning... vacuum day. You sweep through your son's room getting the mundane chore done as quickly as possible, when suddenly, an ordinary looking journal falls to the ground. As you shake your head at the disorganization and bend over to pick up the opened journal, you notice "Dear Diary" on the page it landed on. Curious, you fan through the pages to realize that this is not just any average journal. These pages contain your son's most inner kept secrets — his hopes, dreams, and wishes as well as his distresses, angers, and grief. This is your son's diary.

Most parents have had an experience similar to this scenario. Though, unlike the old days where a diary was the one place that held all your child's secrets, today's tech crazed world filled with Facebook and Tweets provides a number of opportunities to snoop on your child. The likelihood is that there is a long and probably permanent digital trail of your child's activities. As such, the reasons for concern are greater than ever. Now the question is... to snoop or not to snoop? To answer this question, let's first determine what "snooping" means.

Miriam Webster defines it as "*to look or pry especially in a sneaking or meddlesome manner*". Given this definition, invading your child's privacy definitely sounds like a

crime. Yet as a parent, you have the conflicting role of protecting your child from the dangers of this world while maintaining appropriate boundaries to promote a healthy, secure development. If you have an open communication and trusting relationship with your child, then snooping may not even be a necessary question. However, if this is not the case, then the uncertainty to snoop or not to snoop may cause you immense anxiety. To ease this pondering anxiety and decide whether snooping is necessary, there are a few questions you may want to ask yourself:

How well do you know your child?

It is important to have clear and open communication in any relationship, and the one with your child is no exception. A lack of honest communication can breed anxiety on both the child and parent. A healthy parent-child relationship is based on trust, communication, and a willingness to work through obstacles. Having open communication channels give you the opportunity to really understand and know your child, so you wouldn't need to snoop.

What is your parenting style?

Do you subscribe to strict *Authoritarian* parenting, democratic *Authoritative* parenting, or indulgent *Permissive* parenting?

(<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/parenting-style.htm>)

Whether you snoop depends on your approach to parenting. If you are an *authoritarian* parent and expect strict rules to be followed without explanation, then you will likely believe snooping under any circumstance is necessary and appropriate. If you are an *authoritative* parent and believe your child has the same right to privacy as you do, then you will likely take evidence into consideration before deciding to snoop... or not. If you are a *permissive* parent and rarely discipline your child... well need I say more?

Is there a change in your child's behaviors?

This is probably the most significant determinant of whether snooping is warranted. Is your child engaged in substance use, unsafe sex, or dangerous restricting eating behaviors? Changes in teenage behaviors are a normal part of development. However, some changes may signal more serious problems that need to be addressed. Here are a few signs that snooping may be necessary if discussing the topic openly with your child does not help.

- Pronounced defiance
- School truancy, tardiness, detention, suspension
- Calls from concerned school teachers, counselors, principal
- Change in school performance, extra-curricular activities
- Loss of interest in social activities
- Change in friends
- Increased or loss of appetite
- Avoidance of certain activities
- Increased secretiveness
- Apparent anxiety or worries

Are you secretive?

If you are secretive yourself, then you may also be encouraging secretive behaviors in your child. Children and even teenagers look to parents to model appropriate behaviors. Of course there are certain things your child need not know, such as the argument with your spouse, or your own past teenage behaviors. If you suspect your child is engaged in unsafe activities or naive to outside predators, you may want to explore this further and monitor your child's behaviors. Certainly, you would want to inform your child of the increased surveillance and explain your justified rationale. Your child may even surprise you and respond by showing you what you wanted to know to decrease your worries and increase your trust.

Are you just nosy?

If you do not have any reason to be suspicious of your child's behaviors, then you do not have any reason to snoop. If you are prying into your child's activities without due evidence, the problem may be your own anxiety. Snooping on any relatively well-adjusted child may create unnecessary challenges in the child's development. Like adults, teenagers need to know that they can be trusted to make sound decisions. Your faith builds this confidence in your child to take necessary risks to grow healthily. When you snoop, you are basically indicating that your child is incapable of making such quality choices. Furthermore, if your child cannot trust you to treat him with respect, he will not likely come to you when he really needs help.

To snoop or not to snoop?

If you have explored all these options and you are determined to snoop, then be warned of the following possible consequences:

- Broken trust
- Loss of respect
- Decreased ability to confide in the parent
- Modeling snooping behavior
- Increased secrecy
- Provoke defiance and acting out behaviors

The temptation to snoop can be overwhelmingly distressing. Keep in mind that it usually won't alleviate your worries, and may rather increase your anxiety. Remember moody teenagers tend to exaggerate and catastrophize. So take what you see and hear with a grain of salt. In conclusion, if you must snoop to keep your child safe, inform your child and explain that you will monitor his activities until he has regained your trust. You will win more parenting points by doing so.

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