

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 12 June 2018 15:57



Teen Talk

Dear Aunt Bossy,

My daughter just graduated from high school, is taking a gap year, and is boy crazy. She has so much going for her, but it worries me sick that her boyfriend sets the parameters of her life.

□□□□□□□□□□ *She used to be so independent, always seeing friends and doing things. Now, she limits herself to him and a couple of his friends. Everything is about him. She adjusts her dress, her eating habits, her friends, and her looks, according to what he wants. She no longer has time for her old friends and activities she once loved.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *He is not going to go to college, and I fear he will keep her from going, too. She is the only thing he has going for himself, and is desperate to keep her. It is almost as though she is a status symbol for him. I think he uses her to prove how cool he is.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *I hate to see her limit herself like that. What can I do so she moves beyond him and doesn't reach adulthood with the idea that a man defines her?*

Teen Mom

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Dear Teen Mom,

In short, she is a teenager. That is how some of them behave. There is little you can do about it.

I am hoping that in the years since she was born until now, you set an example of strength, good values and independence. If not, you don't have a chance of getting her on the right track.

Take every opportunity to praise her whenever she is acting independently. Don't draw attention to the fact that the praise is in reaction to her limiting herself the rest of the time, and never, ever blame him, unless you want her to elope.

Teens are emotionally immature, and time is your best hope. Encourage her to do something challenging and worthwhile during this gap year, and take her to look at colleges that are too dreamy to resist, preferably in a foreign country (whether they are a real possibility or not). Invite her old friends over for a girl's night. If she has cousins whom she admires, (and whose values are not the same as hers), include them any time you can.

Praise the girls and women you know and see who are self-confident and independent. Find books and movies illustrating those personality traits. And, once again, never, ever let on that you are doing that in reaction to him.

As her parent and an adult, you do have some authority, and you should use it. Plan a mother-daughter vacation that you know she will love and give her no choice about going. You might even invite one of her old friends and her mother to join you. Do all the things you know she enjoys, especially the things she has given up to stay on the boyfriend plantation.

Showing always works better than telling, especially with teens. Treat her in a way that increases her sense of self-worth, since a lack of confidence is probably a factor in her turning her life over to someone else.

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By the way, none of this, even the vacation, is dependent upon your financial situation. By vacation, I don't mean a trip to Paris. A car trip to an exciting destination, or, if she is active, a camping or hiking trip, should do the job, especially if this is something he does not enjoy. Visiting a foreign campus might be financially prohibitive, but don't write it off until you explore all the options. You might be surprised at how inexpensively you can go places and do things.

And, although I hate to mention such a volatile issue, take into consideration hormones. Be certain she knows what she needs to know so that she doesn't get trapped into a relationship she might not have chosen if she were older, more secure, and wiser. You might also mention that sex makes people stupid, but that is more for the fun of saying it than any hope that it will make sense to a teenage brain.

Good luck, this is difficult, and you must make clear every step along whichever way she chooses, that she knows you love her.

Best, Aunt Bossy