

When I was a kid, curfew was a fact of life. As I think back, it was more like the bane of my existence. I was forever trying to slide out from under the constraints of my 11 o'clock deadline (weekends of course).

I would pursue my mother through the house protesting in a voice that was equal parts whine and hope. "Why do I have a curfew? I am the only one who has to be home that early."

The response was quick and sure. "Because we love you."

That was the worst answer of all. It is easier to hold a grudge when you get an answer like "because I said so."

These days the conversation about curfew is all wrapped up with concerns about law-breaking youth who roam the streets at night looking for trouble. I think this kind of talk misses the point. Kids who want to get into trouble will do so at any time of the day, including well after curfew because they won't pay attention to such a rule if they are motivated in a different direction.

The evidence on this is plentiful. Youth who are in conflict with the law are usually there because of a range of issues that are not necessarily solved by imposing a time that they need to be home.

I think of curfew as much-needed structure for kids who are at an age when decision-making is not always a strong suit. I'd like to reframe the idea of curfew as proactive parenting. Parents want their children home safe at a time that gets them to bed at a decent hour. Weeknights the deadline for getting home is earlier than weekends to accommodate time for dinner with the family and homework.

When I listen to what families have to say about their home routine, these things seem to be left out. Families say they are not eating the evening meal together because "everyone is busy." I

think that is another point for curfew. What are the kids busy doing? With a little structure they could be busy having dinner with their family and then homework and then, if there is time, a little television. I know that parents, especially women, are usually busy doing all the household chores that they can't do during the day when they are working. How about a curfew so kids can get in early enough to help with the chores, and then homework, and so on?

Curfew is about love. That's what my mom was telling me way back when. It is also about good parenting. Kids need guidelines and it is the parent's job to provide them. I think I said this once before so bear with me... I went to a lecture many years ago by a well-known psychologist and I was especially taken by one thing that he said. "The most neglectful thing that you can do to a child is not give him boundaries."