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A mom's letter to a teen looking to fly

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Article Text:

Both parents and teen-agers go through a process of letting go as teens move toward adulthood. I offer this letter to all embattled parents of teens who may be in need of a little validation for the way most of us let go slowly, in measured increments.

My Dear Son:

You say you need more freedom. You want us to trust you more. You want us to let go and not require those phone calls telling us where you are.

Sometimes you feel smothered. You, and most other teen-agers, call us parents paranoid.

It's interesting, isn't it — that fine line between a mother's intuition and paranoia.

In my case, I'd say about 80 percent of the time I'm right, and 20 percent of the time I was just being paranoid. Pretty good stats to continue going with the ol' mother's intuition, wouldn't you say?

I really will apologize if I express a concern that's completely unfounded and it's just one of those paranoid times.

As your mom, I simply want the consideration any person in any relationship would want. I want to be told where you are going when you drive off and when I can expect you back. I'd like you to call if you think you'll be late.

I'd like to be reasonably sure you're substance-free. I realize experimentation is tempting and, you would say, nothing to freak out about.

But the possibility of you slipping into habitual use of alcohol or any kind of drug, even those seemingly benign, worries me.

Yeah, I can get paranoid about it, and I deal with that by trying to keep talking. Sometimes that gets old for you and can feel intrusive.

But, those of us who grew up in the '60s and early '70s have seen a lot. We're not naive.

What may seem normal, especially in this town, can turn out to be deadly before you even suspect it.

And the truth is, I will not fully know, nor do I even really want to know, all of what you're doing.

I just want to know that you have a good head on your shoulders and that you'd never get into a car with someone at all under the influence, let alone drive that way.

Eighty percent of me believes that. Then there's that 20 percent paranoid side. Or should we say, the side that was a teen-ager in the early '70s.

Instead of obsessively caring about every little thing you're doing, I do pay close attention to how you relate to me. I pay close attention to how considerate you are and how clear you are in what you say.

That tells me volumes about what and how you're doing. Then I let go and rely on all the love and affection and values we've poured into you all these years to guide you along your path.

Now here's where the stats change. I actually have about 99 percent faith and confidence in myself as a parent and in you as an amazingly wise teen-ager to let go a whole lot.

But, yeah, you'll still have to call and let us know how responsible you still are to keep it at 99 percent.

If you think about it, I bet you'll agree there really is an appropriate emotional distance between mother and 16-year-old son and you're really not smothered. It just feels like that when I'm in that occasional paranoid place.

Having painfully unraveled just enough of that rope that has bound you so tightly to my heart, I remain what I see as an attentive, caring and responsible parent.

Sometimes I sense the need to hold the rope more tightly, and sometimes it's so loose that you have tons of room.

Sorry, there's no formula for that. It's just that old mother's intuition that talks to me so clearly when I pay attention to you.

I think we're both doing a pretty good job. You are busy with flight practice as you get ready to fly,

once and for all, from the nest. Your Dad and I do a bit of coaching. You've had only a few minor crashes. Most of the time, I'd say they're perfect flights.

With love,

Mom

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