



ASK AMY

Advice for the real world | By Amy Dickinson

Good manners doesn't apply only to teens

Dear Amy: I just read the letter from "Annoyed in D.C." about teenagers shopping and eating lunch in malls.

I agree with you that there is nothing inherently wrong with kids going to malls, but as the mother of an almost-teenager, I can tell you that many teens seem to be woefully deficient when it comes to good manners in public. Many basically good kids need more concrete guidelines for how to behave, so I suggest the following.

Never smoke in public. If you are under 18, it is illegal, and it makes you look like a "hood."

If you come to shop or eat, do that — don't spend more than a few minutes hanging out around the seating areas in the middle of the mall.

Watch the volume. Conversing or laughing loudly is annoying and rude. And, of course, no profanity or crude talk.

Malls are not recreation centers. Keep your group small — two or three, never more than four people — and don't use the mall as a place to meet people of the opposite sex.

No shoving or physical antics, and don't charge through a crowd without looking where you are going.

If teenagers follow these rules, I very much doubt that anyone will have a problem with their behavior.

What do you think?

— D.C. Mom

Dear Mom: Many of your "rules" sound reasonable. Now if only more adults would follow them, then kids might get an idea of how to behave.

For every single infraction you site, I can think of times in public when any problem behavior I have witnessed has been perpetrated by grown-ups.

I don't know why you feel that teens shouldn't meet people of the opposite sex at the mall or be able to linger in the food court along with the rest of us, and I suggest that if you lay down these sorts of guidelines with your "almost-teenager," he or she will see them as rules that are just begging to be broken.

Dear Amy: I wanted to write in response to "Broke Bridesmaid," who wondered what to do with a bridesmaid's dress for a wedding that never happened.

I volunteer every year for an organization in Chicago called the Glass Slipper Project.

They accept donated dresses, shoes, purses,

makeup and accessories. Then they give them to young women who would not otherwise be able to outfit themselves for the prom.

The Glass Slipper Project sets up a large boutique every year, and volunteers act as personal shoppers, helping girls to choose outfits and accessories.

I know from working in a Chicago public high school that many young women could not otherwise afford to attend their proms without the Glass Slipper Project.

I have donated all of my bridesmaids' dresses to the organization, and every year there are a large number of dresses clearly purchased for a wedding that never took place.

"Broke Bridesmaid" may want to call her local school district and see if similar programs are in her area. She might feel good knowing that something positive came out of what was, I'm sure, a difficult decision for her friend.

— Melissa Trumbull

Dear Melissa: I checked out the Glass Slipper Project (www.glassslipperproject.org), and wow — what a wonderful idea! The "Cinderella stories" cited on the Web site are inspiring. What a great way to banish and recycle unused or gently used formalwear!

I urge readers to research similar organizations in their local area and contribute to — or start — a like-minded outfit.

Dear Amy: I'm responding to "Frustrated Mom," whose mother was feeding her toddler junk food whenever she baby-sat for the child.

As a grandmother with experience, I would suggest that the food-oriented grandmother open up the definition of "treats" to include special projects, storybooks, DVD rentals and so forth.

Some of the best times I have had with my grandchildren have been in sharing art projects and reading stories from picture books.

As the child gets older, sharing pictures from the parents' youth, accompanied by tales of their escapades, have proved to be winners!

— Carole Bergstraesser

Dear Carole: As I pointed out in my answer, caregivers sometimes over-feed children because it's easy and they can't think of a substitute activity. Your suggestions are right on. I would add that very ordinary activities ("Let's go to the mailbox!") can become real adventures with toddlers.

Some readers noted that my suggestion of popcorn as one suitable snack could present a choking hazard for some children. Thank you for the correction.

Amy appears Mondays through Fridays in Tempo, Saturdays in the Weekend section and Sundays in Q. Send questions via e-mail to askamy@tribune.com or by mail to Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. Previous columns are available at chicagotribune.com/amy.