

What's Up with My Family? BOOK 3

MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL™

"An amazing addition to any teen's library, this book brings humor, tact, and insight to a difficult topic."

—Vanessa Van Petten, author of *You're Grounded!*

"WE WERE AT JACK'S HOUSE WAITING FOR JEN, WHEN MATEO'S PHONE RANG. . . . IT WAS JEN WITH SOME BAD NEWS. 'MY DAD GROUNDED ME . . . AGAIN!'"



As Jen, Jack, Michelle, Mateo, Chris, and Abby realize, life in a family isn't perfect. Adults at home often seem overprotective and strict about family rules. Fights with siblings can upset everyone. Other tough situations may come up, too—like divorce, adjusting to life in a stepfamily, or dealing when a family member is absent.

Follow these six teens as they work on challenges at home. Along the way, you'll find ideas for building trust with adults, getting past hurt feelings, and making all family relationships stronger. In the end, while life at home may not be perfect, appreciating family members and working with them can help everyone get along and have better times together.

Annie Fox, M.Ed., is a writer, educator, workshop presenter, and online advisor for teens. Her Web site ([www.heyterra.com](http://www.heyterra.com)) serves as a popular forum for teen and family issues.

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## Chapter 1: I'm Not a Little Kid Anymore!



It's pretty common for teens to feel like adults at home are too strict or controlling. Maybe your parents or other family members also have a way of checking up on you that makes you think they're overprotective. It might seem like they see you as untrustworthy and requiring 24/7 supervision. But more likely, they just aren't used to the fact that you're getting older and becoming more responsible.

It's natural for the people who raise you to have some trouble getting out of the habit of treating you the way they did when you were younger. Back then it was all about protecting you from danger or harm. **And it still is. Only now it can seem like too much because you're more independent and able to figure out a lot of stuff on your own. That's when constant questions and concerns about what you're doing might get on your nerves.**

## From the “Give Me a Break” FILES

“My mom and my stepdad help out at my school on different days so they have lunch with me twice a week. I love them and all, but I think that’s too much.”

—Sasha, 10

“My mom treats me like I’m eight! She thinks I should never be awake past 10:30 and always uses that tired excuse, ‘I don’t care what other parents let their kid do.’”

—Peter, 13

“I caught my grandma in the movie theater lobby asking them to make sure that I was there!”

—Asif, 12

“My dad says, ‘When I was 13 I had biked across most of my town!’ But my mom won’t let me bike one mile!”

—Nicholas, 13

“My parents don’t think I should talk to boys on the phone, so they’re always trying to catch me doing it. How can I get them to understand that I’m too old to be treated like a baby?”

—Dani, 14

“I stayed after school to watch my friend try out for soccer, and I didn’t have access to a phone right away. I called my stepmom later and she yelled at me. When I got home I found out that I was grounded.”

—Julio, 11

“My friend lives with her aunt and uncle. They don’t trust her, even though she’s really responsible. She’s never allowed out and it upsets her.”

—Claudia, 13

## The Inside Scoop About Overprotective Adults

Does having an overprotective parent mean you’re a troublemaker or someone who has to be watched over night and day? Of course not. Sometimes it’s more about them than about you. Knowing *why* adults at home feel the need to be constantly in your business can help you gain more independence. Here are some possible reasons:

- 1. They are worriers.** Some adults worry more than others. An overactive imagination can make it hard for them to relax. If you live with one or more worriers, your safety probably isn’t the only thing they fret about. Try talking through their concerns.
- 2. They aren’t always sure of themselves.** Adults are sometimes more nervous with the first (or only) child in the family. Why? Because for every new phase you reach they are trying to decide what new rules you need to stay safe. Letting them know that you understand where they’re coming from can help them see you’re capable of making good decisions.
- 3. They haven’t yet switched gears.** As a little kid you needed an adult directing your every move. Fast forward to the present: You’re getting older, but the adults who have raised you may not have figured out how to parent the new, more mature version of you. You’re going to have to be patient with them as they learn how to deal with your becoming more independent.
- 4. They need reassurance.** Every time you show the adults in your family that you can make responsible choices you help them calm down, worry less, and feel better about giving you more independence. You might think of every new responsibility as a test of whether you’re ready for more freedom—pass and you can move up to the next level of trust.

YEAH, DAD.  
BIKE'S  
LOCKED.

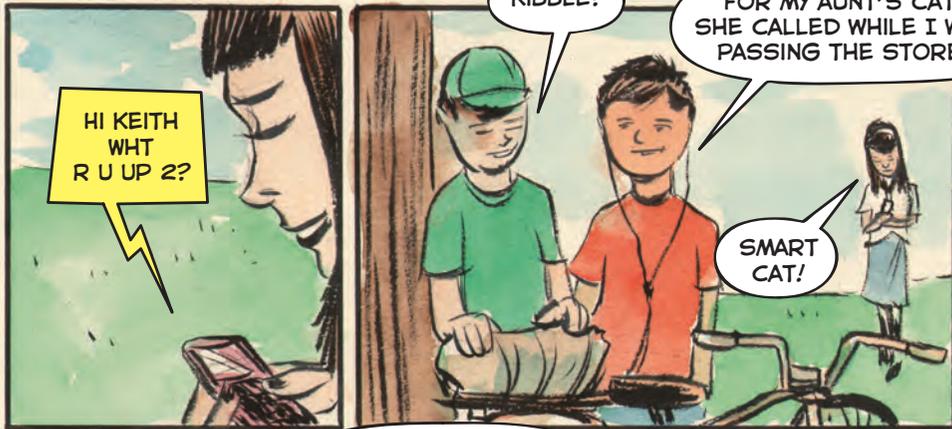


KIBBLE?

FOR MY AUNT'S CAT.  
SHE CALLED WHILE I WAS  
PASSING THE STORE.

SMART  
CAT!

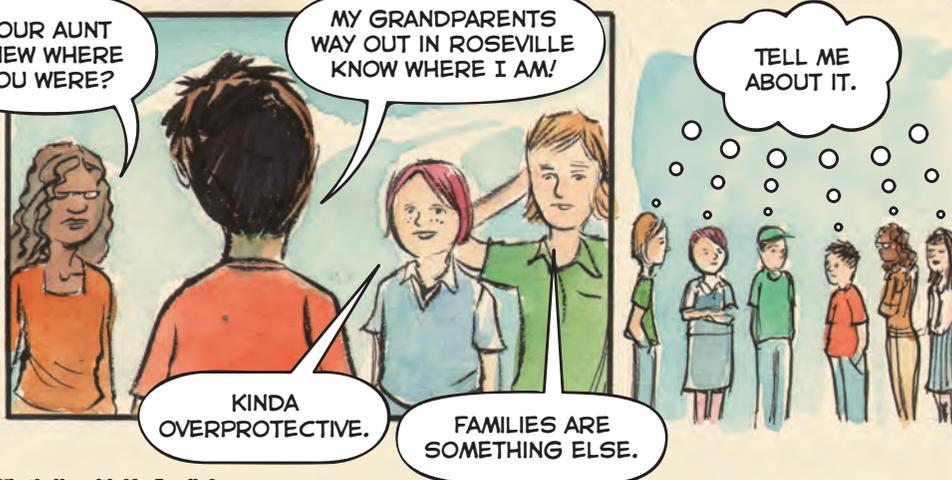
HI KEITH  
WHT  
R U UP 2?



YOUR AUNT  
KNEW WHERE  
YOU WERE?

MY GRANDPARENTS  
WAY OUT IN ROSEVILLE  
KNOW WHERE I AM!

TELL ME  
ABOUT IT.



KINDA  
OVERPROTECTIVE.

FAMILIES ARE  
SOMETHING ELSE.

**Parents are hardwired to protect their kids. And that's a good thing.** If animals didn't care for their young and keep them away from predators, those babies wouldn't survive long enough to reproduce. If that happened across an entire species, we're talking about extinction!

So parenting is about protecting the young ones until they can protect themselves. Of course, not all animal parents protect their kids as intensely or for as long as humans. Some reptiles, for example, don't bother at all. There are snakes, fish, and lizards that actually eat their own babies. (Disgusting, but true!) **And when it comes to people watching over their children, there are differences from family to family.**

HUH! PARENTS  
SOMETIMES GET  
IT RIGHT.

**"I actually needed that . . ."**



"I was feeling depressed about school and stuff with my friends. My grandma tried to get me to talk to her. I wouldn't so she kept bugging me to talk to the counselor. Finally I did and I actually felt better."

—Kaylie, 12

"I was going to have sex with my ex-boyfriend. We were moving really fast. My mom found out and she was so mad and scared, she made me break up with him. But I am glad she did. I would have lost my virginity and regretted it. I could have gotten hurt emotionally, too. I am happier than ever and I am thankful my mom did that."

—Raven, 14

"My youth group was going to Washington, D.C. I didn't really like any of the guys in the group so I decided not to go. My dad talked to me about what a cool opportunity it might be, but he said he'd respect my decision either way. I decided to go and I'm really glad. It was amazing!"

—Reggie, 14

"My mom said I couldn't spend the night at my friend's because she didn't trust one girl who was going. Next day I find out that bad stuff happened. Stuff like people getting drunk and other things that I would never do in my life. I'm thankful my mom said I couldn't go because if I went, I would have regretted hanging out that day."

—Sasha, 13

"I failed a class at school because I spent too much time playing video games with friends. My dad and I had a big and very serious talk. Thanks to him, I fully learned my lesson. Now I am proud of him and myself."

—Zach, 13

# 5 TIPS FOR GETTING MORE RESPONSIBILITY

**1. Keep your promises.** Whenever you make an agreement with your parents, follow through. This shows that you can be counted on. When they trust you, you earn more independence. You also gain self-respect—that's win-win.

**2. Look for more ways to help out at home.** Adults appreciate it when everyone in the family lends a hand. Want to earn bonus points? Do something that's not one of your regular chores just to help out. Parents love that!

**3. Get along with siblings.** Do your part to make the peace with brothers and sisters, and adults may notice something has changed for the better. In their minds, getting along equals maturity. And maturity gets you more responsibility.

**4. Try to have a positive attitude.** It's not like you have to smile and act 100 percent happy all of the time, but cooperating with adults at home will make them more likely to cooperate with you. That's just the way it works.

**5. Show family adults they've done a good job raising you.** When you ask for new freedom and meet your responsibilities head-on, you prove to your parents that you've learned what they taught you. That makes them proud. It should make you proud, too.





People often see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. We're all guilty of getting so caught up in our own thoughts that we miss what's going on with someone else.

For this reason, it can help to remember that parents are hardwired to protect you. (Where have you heard that before?) Instead of feeling frustrated with rules that seem designed to keep you from doing what you want, try talking to adults at home about how they decide what you can and can't do. You might begin to understand their feelings better and be in a better position to work together on a solution that makes everyone happy.

## WE'RE WORKING IT OUT

"My grandparents would get really worried when I went out, but I would always call them so they knew I was okay. Soon they started to feel more trust in me and they didn't worry anymore. You just have to make sure you are always honest, even when it's hard."

—Byron, 11

"At home, go above and beyond what you have to do without being asked (for example, fold the laundry or clean the living space). Don't argue, complain, or act frustrated when asked to do a task. Just these simple steps alone will work wonders when trying to gain parents' trust and respect. It's really not that hard."

—Michael, 12

"When I was 12 I got invited to a party that lasted until 11:00 p.m. I'd never been out that late before without my family, so my mom sat me down and asked me questions like, 'What would you do if someone offered you something and you didn't know what it was?' Then my mom let me go to the party because she believed I would be responsible."

—Katy, 14

"I kept telling my parents, 'I'm growing up,' and they finally got it! Now I'm allowed to go out with my friends as long as I tell my parents in advance. I can also go for a walk whenever I feel like it."

—Angel, 13