

PORTLAND

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PARENTING / RELATIONSHIPS / JULY 1, 2015

Ask Ariel: The Neighborhood Hooligans



by Ariel Frager

Dear Ariel,

We have some neighborhood kids who play in ways I don't particularly like: they sometimes bully younger kids; they pretend to smoke; they egg each other on to do unsafe things like jump off tree branches. I want to tell them that their behavior is inappropriate, but I also think it's none of my business. How can I approach this in a way that will make the kids think twice, but not offend their parents?

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Signed,
Neighborhood Watch

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Dear NW,

When I was a kid, I led the local gang of pint-sized hooligans. We weren't really hooligans but we did create mischief and a little mayhem in our suburban wonderland. We taunted boys, we rode our bikes as a swarm, and once I hit a boy over the head with an enormous tree branch. We felt like we knew everything and it was a powerful, almost intoxicating feeling. Being able to play freely was also one of the great joys of my childhood.

I think you are right, Neighborhood Watch, that the activities of the kids who live around you is none of your business. Your letter does not indicate that your own children are harmed by their shenanigans. Your letter does not indicate that you have children at all. Sure, these kids might get hurt jumping out of trees and that would be what I like to call a natural behavioral consequence. If you do stupid stuff, you can get hurt. Children learn best through experimentation and I believe it is important for children to play on the edges of their comfort zones. Sometimes they will get hurt and that's okay. If you are really concerned about these children, try befriending one or all of them. Talk to them about school, about their extracurricular activities, about what they like to do in the neighborhood. Once you have established a relationship with your neighborhood kids, then you can start talking to them about the dangers of smoking or about how being kind is better than bullying younger kids. If you come right out and tell the kids that their play is inappropriate, you might be laughed at and more importantly, your important message will likely be ignored.

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SHARES

Ariel Frager

Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that



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