

A Real Mom: Where will he sleep tonight?

R.M.
MinnMoms columnist
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"Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

This well-known childhood prayer comes to mind as I wonder where our son is sleeping tonight.

Thinking the grass is greener

He used to say all he wanted was to move out. Ah, independence. It was such a hassle having to put up with our stupid expectations like curfews, putting dirty laundry down the chute and generally being friendly and respectful to others who live in the home. Or, refraining from activities he felt were his right: Smoking in the house. Or drinking. Or bringing drugs and paraphernalia. Gee, we sure had stupid rules.

At this time last year, we were as fed up with our son as he was with us. Nothing had worked and counseling evaluations had been inconclusive on whether he really had a problem and whether "tough love" was advocated.

In our guts, we really doubted that tough love would benefit our son; in fact, we feared it would crumble an already fragile mental state. We sensed he was just barely holding together but for intuitively knowing that he should. We oscillated from whether discipline or kid gloves were needed.

Honestly, we still wonder because sometimes it's the drug side that rears its head and sometimes it's the mental illness side that shows. This co-occurring nature is prevalent and makes a tough diagnosis even tougher and a consistent approach inconsistent.

Life as a stoner

At one point, I was worried enough that he might be flirting with trouble that I contacted the local drug task force to find out about potential consequences for using and dealing and what we should be looking for as parents.

The detective was generous with his time and his wisdom. He left me with an apropos summation that has stuck with me: Life as a stoner isn't as much fun when you aren't living at Mom's and Dad's. Perhaps that was a premonition for the year to come. As much as it broke our hearts, we knew our son couldn't continue living at home.

I think our son would agree that it has been anything but fun trying to find a place to sleep each night.

A Timeline in Transience

December 2010: Still living at home, but counting the days to a belated, second-semester start at college.

January 2011: Moved into college dorms middle of the month. Transported by ambulance to emergency room, then detox six days later. After another week of rule breaking, he was kicked out of the dorms and the school put him up at a local hotel for three nights.

February: Found a sofa to sleep on at a friend's apartment. Dropped out of classes. Mom and Dad picked him up and paid for him to stay one week at a local hotel until he could find a living arrangement in the Twin Cities.

March-May: Lived with family friends. Mom and Dad paid rent for two months. He paid for May. Didn't have money for June.

June: Spent nine nights at a treatment center in the mountains. Ran away. Hitchhiked and stayed a few nights with a convicted felon. Stayed a couple more nights with a medicinal marijuana grower. Was picked up at our request by a private investigator, who took him in for a night and put him on a plane home to Minnesota the next day. Spent a few nights staying with friends.

July-August: His older sister found a friend who was living at a fraternity for the summer, who arranged for him to live in a storage closet at the house.

September-December: Said he was renting an apartment with people he found on Craigslist. Had us pick up and drop him off there many times. Learned in November that he had never lived there. (Later told us he had lived there temporarily but was caught selling drugs in the apartment lobby; the manager on duty didn't call the police but said he couldn't come back.) Another time, had us drop him off at a different place. In December, discovered he's not living there either. Often he has us drop him off at the dorms to "to stay with friends." I found a scribbled poem he wrote that mentioned sleeping in the frost - it seems to support his transience and difficulty in finding people to take him in on a consistent basis.

The Questions Continue

Where is his stuff, what he has left of it? Where does he shower or brush his teeth? Where does he sleep? Why is he so stubborn? Why is he in this predicament? When will he see the possibility of a better life? When will he take the first step away from this and toward that better possibility? When will the answer occur to him? When will he hear the guiding voice of Spirit?

Twelve-step philosophy is based on a spiritual awakening, a surrender, a step at a time. Alternate approaches come at it in other ways. I see merit in both. We just want something, anything. Whatever works is what works. I hope and pray he'll find a way forward, and if he so desires, I'll be right there with him with love and support along with a cheering section - just like his high school sports days.

Nowhere to sleep

Mid-December: Admitted he's without a permanent place to live and said he really wants a place to stay. Asked the heartbreaking question about moving home telling us he's changed, things will be different, that he's not using anymore.

Oh, how we want to believe this is the first step forward but it's too early to tell and there are still numerous signs to the contrary. As much as he needs a place to live, we cannot have him back at home. Not yet, but one day.

Often, when I need to solve a problem, I'll sleep on it, and more often than not, an answer comes to me by morning. Tonight, in addition to hoping he has a warm, safe place to sleep, I hope his magnificent mind will come through with even the tiniest inspiration because one insight can lead to bigger and brighter ones. One idea, one step can lead to the future.

Over the holidays, we toyed with how we'd feel about driving our son to wherever he might be sleeping on Christmas Eve following dinner and festivities with family. It just didn't seem right to let him out somewhere, yet we were hesitant to extend a "room at the inn."

Following a pleasant gathering, we suggested he stay for the night, and to our relief, everyone slept well without the interruptions we'd previously experienced when our son lived at home. In fact, we extended the offer for Christmas night as the siblings were excited to watch a family movie; but, with \$50 Christmas cash in hand from Grandma, he said, "Gosh, I have plans to stay with my friend tonight."

We've experienced this scenario before - cash means choosing the company of druggie friends over family and a warm, clean bed. We were given the gift of clarity.

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