

**# 100 10/01/01 What if teen is abusing privileges?**

Someone recently asked the question, “What should I do if my teenager makes long distance phone calls without my permission?” I have heard this question many times. This and many other behaviors are very difficult to control. Aware of this fact, teens often abuse privileges.

Other behaviors that are difficult to control are using the Internet inappropriately, writing hot checks, charging items to parents’ accounts at local stores and using too much gasoline.

Ideally, the relationship between a parent and a teen would be such that the teen could be trusted to use credit, telephone and the Internet within the limits allowed by the parents. When a teen proves to be untrustworthy, parents must take steps that prevent the teen from having any access to the privileges he is abusing.

Long distance telephone companies offer a service that restricts usage to those persons who have an access code. With some companies, there is a charge. That charge may seem very small if the teen has been incurring large monthly bills. Another option would be to drop long distance service on the home phone and use a cellular phone for all long distance calls. That cellular phone would be kept away from the teen.

Passwords can be used to deny a teen access to computer use. Charge accounts in town can be restricted to the parents. Teens can be required to take you along to fill their vehicle with gasoline. Checking accounts can be closed.

These strategies seem burdensome. They may even embarrass your teen. Your son may not like the fact that he must take mom along when he needs a new shirt. Your daughter may find it very inconvenient to stop by the house to get dad when she is running low on gasoline. I would hope that it would be so embarrassing that the teen would rethink the whole trust issue.

As parents we do not like to put rigid limits on our teens’ behavior. We would rather be able to trust them. If, however, they will not keep that trust, it is our right and responsibility to restrict access to the privileges they are abusing. Then we must pray daily that they will learn from the experience.