

**TEEN TALK** (an original column from The Daily Record)

**December 19, 2004**

Dear Teen Talk,

My parents don't like my best friend, and they're not at all subtle about it. They're barely polite. "Mike" dresses kinda goth so they think he's part of the "wrong crowd," as they put it. They've always taught me not to judge people by their appearances, but that's exactly what they're doing to him. They've never even bothered to get to know him—they just decided that he must be a bad kid who does drugs and drinks. But he *doesn't*! (And neither do I!) Mike's got a few problems at home and at school, but he's a good guy, and I think they're being incredibly unfair. I'm going to go on being friends with him, but it would be easier if my parents liked him too. How can I get them to give him a chance?

- Misjudged Friend

Dear Misjudged Friend,

It sounds like you've got a good handle on the situation—now all you need is a way to talk about it with your parents. It might be that just bringing things out in the open will help change their attitude. Find a time to talk to your parents alone, when you're all feeling calm and relaxed. You might start by saying something like, "I get the feeling that you don't like Mike very much. Is it because of the way he looks?" If they criticize him, you can disagree with what they say, but make sure you do so respectfully and calmly. Hopefully your lead will set the tone for a good discussion. Don't expect miracles, though—it may take some time to win them over. Remember that all you're asking is that they give Mike a fair chance. (Make sure they have the opportunity to do so!) You may also want to speak to Mike about how he dresses, and the fact that your parents probably aren't the only ones making snap decisions based on the way he looks. Finally, make sure you're being honest with yourself about his problems at school and at home. If he's really a good guy, then you'll be a true friend if you help him to get help for his problems from an adult who cares about him—maybe someone at school or his church or synagogue?

Dear Teen Talk,

My boyfriend is really possessive and jealous. I know he loves me, but I get tired of always having to make him feel more secure. If I make plans with my BFF (girl stuff, like shopping or a sleepover!), it drives him crazy. He thinks I should spend all my time with him and tell him what I did every minute I'm away from him. He even tells me how to dress! Sometimes I think he doesn't want me to have anything else good in my life. I really care about him—he's so cool when we're together—but his possessiveness is driving me crazy. I tried to talk to my mom about it, but she just about flipped and said that I should break up with him. I can't do that—I love him, plus I know he'd totally go off the deep end if I broke up with him. How can I do to keep him but have my own life too?

- Suffocating

Dear Suffocating,

You're not going to like this much—and we don't want to alarm you—but it sounds like your BF has gone off the deep end already. His jealousy and need to control you are *major* red flags—guys who act like your boyfriend may turn physically abusive. You're right on the money when you say he doesn't seem to want you to have anything else good in your life—he's so insecure that he probably doesn't. True love isn't like that. In a healthy relationship, people trust and support each other and—most of all—want each other's happiness. We know you don't want to hear that we agree with your mom, but the truth is, we think she's got him pegged. She flipped because she recognized that this situation could get really difficult—even dangerous—if you continue seeing him. So, what to do? You can try to talk to him first, but don't do it when you are alone with him. Invite him over when your parents are home. Tell him that you really care about him, but that you also need the freedom to do things with other friends. If he listens and reacts calmly, you can give him a chance to change. But if he doesn't change immediately or if he can't or won't listen, break up with him. To be on the safe side, make sure your parents are home and that they know what you're going to talk to him about. Don't let your emotions cloud your judgment on this one—remember, your first responsibility is to keep yourself safe.