



THE EXPRESS-TIMES

Awful behavior, no-show adults at youth dances

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On Oct. 27 I spent three evening hours at the Forks Township Community Center. I was there because my children play fall sports and I am required to volunteer three hours of my time. Chaperoning the fifth-, sixth- and seventh-grade dance fulfills that volunteer obligation. I thought the purpose of the Forks Township Youth Sports Organization-sponsored dances was to provide a safe and fun environment for our children.

This is what I witnessed:

I spoke with community center employees who told me children were being dropped off at 5:30 p.m. for a 6:30 p.m. dance.

This same community center employee expressed a wish that chaperones were required to stay until 11 p.m. because that's usually when the last person gets picked up for a dance that is over at 9:30.

I was told there were to be 16 adult volunteers at the dance. I never saw more than five adults circulating on the dance floor at any one time.

I saw more chaperones sitting in the bleachers turning a blind eye than there were circulating on the dance floor.

I spent the entire evening separating children (same sex and opposite) who were grinding each other's pelvises and butts together. They told me they were "dancing."

I spoke with a child who didn't even reach my waist. She didn't know her homeroom teacher, what team she was on or the name of her gym teacher – maybe because she wasn't even in fifth grade yet.

I separated a boy and girl simulating sex on the gym floor.

I saw a police officer put a child spread eagle on the wall to frisk him.

At the end of the evening two police officers were kind enough to let me vent my frustrations. They told me my observations and concerns have been their same observations and concerns at every dance prior to this one.

I witnessed adults too intimidated by these pre-teen children to stop them from inappropriate behavior and dance.

I looked at a picture on a police officer's cell phone that showed chaperones at a dance earlier in the year lined up along the back wall of the gym socializing with each other instead of chaperoning.

I saw children dressing and acting like they were 21.

I saw a child talk with a police officer with absolutely no respect for the uniform which he was wearing and a total lack of respect for his authority. The police officer told me there isn't anything they can do because there is no such thing as "kicking" someone out of the dance.

The following morning community center employees told me they were cleaning the building until midnight.

These same employees told me there was not one FTYSO board member at the dance.

I am in favor of the FTYSO-sponsored dances for fifth-, sixth- and seventh-graders. I think they have the potential to accomplish what they set out to do. Unfortunately, the behavior of most children in attendance was appalling and sickening to me. But even more upsetting was the lack of adult participation. If adult chaperones are going to look in the other direction and not stop the groping, inappropriate touching and behavior or the entry of under- and over-aged children, we are, in essence, telling the children their behavior is acceptable.

Due to a variety of activities, my children have been at the community center or park at least once a week, every week for the past eight years. To me and my children, the park and community center constitute a familiar and safe environment. What a shame I cannot allow my fifth-grade daughter to attend a pre-teen dance at the community center within the township where she lives.

Please e-mail me at middleschooldance@verizon.net if you have the same concerns and would support a dance that would enforce a strict code of conduct by both students and chaperones.

Karen Haduck is a resident of Forks Township.

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