

Changing stations takes some getting used to

SCHOOLS out, and the wonders of summer lie before us. For most families, there will be more time spent together. Whether we find ourselves traveling across the country or just back and forth to camps in town, it's likely that much of this togetherness will occur in the car, and — particularly in families with teenagers — that means plenty of opportunity to disagree about what's on the radio or in the CD player.

Once kids become old enough to sit regularly in the front seat, it's a whole new kind of ride. Much as we might hope that a 13-year-old presence next to us will result in substantial conversations, there is often much more interest on our offspring's part in finding the perfect song.

My own son is, by all accounts, a fine young man: a serious student and athlete, polite to his elders, good company. The rap and hip-hop music he likes, however, is full of lyrics that, shall we say, cause concern. The first station he goes for is 93.7 out of Hartford; 95.7 also out of Hartford is a close second. Put him in that passenger seat, and his hand is constantly on the radio dial.

For some reason, he doesn't do



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*Parent to
Parent*

this in his father's car. I was puzzled by this until my husband told me that HE never dared tried to tune in his music in his father's car, either. He knew his father had an ear only for Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass. His mother, on the other hand, was more flexible and actually wanted to learn something about her son's tastes.

So, now I'm trying to take it as a compliment that my son ventures to share his world with me.

If you have teenagers, you probably already know that once you let them control the radio, you're liable to find yourself on a slippery slope. One minute you could be listening to something with a good beat, actually enjoying it, feeling young even. Then, WHAM! You'll hear words that send your hand to the dial faster than a cowboy goes for his gun. Sometimes, your kid will even beat you to it, suddenly embarrassed by the situation. (This happened in our

car on the way to school recently.)

The tough part is that sometimes it's not so clear when to pull the plug. I've done some informal polling, and many parents agree that they let the music play until their instincts tell them that it's crossed a line. That line is, of course, in a different place for each of us.

In my car, for example, I began to get concerned when my 7-year-old sang along with "Shake that laffy taffy! Shake that laffy taffy!" I wasn't positive what one of those was, but I knew it wasn't first-grade material.

Why, then, go through this at all? Why not just forbid certain stations to begin with? That way we could avoid conflict — and the potentially worse possibility that we might begin to groove to the stuff alongside our kids. I heard about a father who was dutifully driving his teenage daughter and a bunch of friends somewhere when he dared to express his appreciation of a song by tapping his pinky, ever so slightly, on the steering wheel. "DAD!!!" his daughter yelled out immediately, stricken by his brashness.

Instead of shutting down my son's choices, I prefer to even the score

by insisting on playing a good deal of my music in the car, too. In fact, I take it as my responsibility to expose him to the Temptations, Creedence and the Beatles. He may not like most of it, but, hey, no child of mine is going to miss "Ain't Too Proud to Beg," "Down on the Bayou" or "In My Life." It's like passing on my heritage.

A few weeks ago, my son played the cello in a beautiful school orchestra concert. On the way home, he went for the radio and found his current favorite tune, by a rapper called Chamillionaire. The song, "Tryin' to Catch Me Ridin' Dirty," is about a guy the police can't wait to get (though it's not clear he's done anything more than play his music loud). With the sounds of Mozart still in my head, I flicked it off without an explanation. These things are subjective, after all.

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Parent to Parent, which runs monthly, welcomes guest columnists. Email submission of 800 words or less to Debra Scherban, managing editor for features at dscherban@gazettenet.com.