

'I think before you ink

TATTOOS CAN LEAVE AN INDELIBLE IMPRESSION OF THE WRONG SORT

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Teens can't fathom life after high school, yet



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Watch your back - parlors that bend the age rule may also be relaxed about hygiene.



Jennifer Trujillo likes her spider tattoo she got at age 20, but wishes it was in a less conspicuous spot.

somehow they think they have the ability to foresee that 30 years from now they'll still love that Chinese symbol on their shoulder that means "creativity." For many parents, tattooing ranks high among the most dreaded subjects - right up there with "I'm dropping out of school" or "I need breast implants."

Clinical psychologist Laura Grashow says teens often get tattoos as a show of independence or as a rebellious way of claiming control over their own bodies. "Parents can't, and shouldn't, overlook the fact that the targets of their passion, such as current boyfriend/girlfriend or bands, often change from one month to the next," she says.

Usually, "everyone is getting them" is an exaggeration when it comes to dogs or cars. But in the case of tattoos, the numbers have risen remarkably in the last decade. While two surveys from 2003 suggested just 15% to 16% of Americans had a tattoo, one study last year found that rate had risen to 24%.

The Tattooing of Minors Act 1969 says 18 and sober is the rule but, as with most rules, teens find their way around them. Less professional tattoo parlors will turn a blind eye to age, and in these unscrupulous places there is a higher risk of infection and inferior work. If all else fails, teens find tattoo kits are available online for about \$100. Some parents grudgingly give consent

to 16- to 18-year-olds, usually under pressure, thinking that helping in the process is the lesser of two evils.

Stand firm, recommends editor-in-chief of Inked magazine Hawaii Salman to parents. "Young people should make the carefully thought-out decision to get a tattoo when the decision is all theirs to make, not by guiltting a parent to give consent or doing it secretly," Salman says. Nationally recognized tattoo artist Mike Bellamy, of Red Rocket on W. 36th St. says, "The worst possible thing a kid can do is get a tattoo somewhere that can't be covered by a dress shirt." Your tattoo choice and placement could affect your livelihood. "You could end up closing doors for yourself at a really important time in your life - say you are doing everything right, then you try to get a loan. They don't see grades, that you are going to church, all they see is the ink on your neck. It isn't fair but it's reality, especially outside of New York City. It's a really big commitment."

Jennifer Trujillo got her first tattoo, of a fairy, at 19, then a year later covered it with a spider. "Most people think it's ugly. I still like it, though," she says. "But I do wish I had put it somewhere where I could cover it."

There is, of course, the temporary solution. Spurred by the fact that there didn't seem to be any temporary tattoos that weren't "cheesy and obviously stickers," Megan Kingsbury and Krista Finne started a temp tattoo company in Brooklyn (Kingfintattoo.com). "We wanted to give people an alternative to actual ink, since it is such a big commitment. Now they can have a huge colorful Virgin Mary or bright orange oriental fish that you usually only see on people with real tattoos."

Removal options like expensive laser, grafting or surgery can leave scars or discoloration - Kingfin's extra-large bright temporaries last longer than most and are often mistaken for the real thing.