

The Challenge of the Teenage Years....

If adolescence can be viewed as a journey from childhood to adulthood, parenting adolescents can also be thought of as a journey.

Much of the behaviors associated with adolescence – wanting more freedom, challenging authority and taking risks can be overwhelming for parents. The teenage years are fraught with all kinds of challenging behaviors – from low self-esteem and peer pressure, to low motivation and chronic untidiness. With a bit of foresight, you can help your teen navigate the hard times and relieve some of the parenting stress associated with these turbulent years.

Typical “teenage” behavior, such as trying alcohol or drugs, smoking, having relationships and staying out late, are only parts of the picture. Research shows that many of the negative stereotypes attached to adolescence, such as delinquency and violence, are also quite incorrect. Actually 9 out of 10 teens do not get into trouble. Parents can aspire to build healthy relationships with their teens in a way that might make it more civilized, occasionally enjoyable and even fulfilling.

Many teenagers announce the onset of adolescence with a dramatic change in behavior around their parents. They are starting to separate from the family in an attempt to become more independent. Teens often start “trying on” different looks and identities and they become acutely aware of how they differ from their peers, which can result in episodes of distress and conflict. The adolescent’s emotions can be seen in their high and low “attitudes” which are often aimed at the parent. This is normal developmental behavior that serves the purpose of separating and becoming their own person. Although parenting is difficult during these times, it is a time when the teen needs your guidance and support the most.

Supporting Your Adolescent: Tips for Parenting When Your Child Becomes an Adolescent

While there are no easy answers in parenting, the following strategies may help you support your child during adolescence while reducing the risk of serious harm to your child or another person:

- Educate yourself about adolescent development
- Remember your own adolescence
- Think about taking a course on good parenting
- Listen more than talk
- Use positive reinforcement for positive behavior
- Help your adolescent move toward independence
- Spend quality and quantity time with your adolescent
- Accept that you have feelings, too
- Do not always push for drastic or dramatic solutions
- Build other adult relationships in your teen’s life
- Know your teen’s friends

“Perfectionism or unrealistic notions of life can make stressors into distress.”

Helping Teens with Stress

Some teens become overloaded with stress. When it happens, inadequately managed stress can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, physical illness or poor coping skills such as drug and/or alcohol use. Try these suggestions but seek professional help if the stress persists.

Some sources of stress for teens might include:

- School demands and frustrations
- Taking on too many activities or having too high expectations
- Changes in their bodies
- Problems with friends
- Negative thoughts and feelings about themselves
- Separation or divorce of parents
- Chronic illness or problems in the family

The goal of stress management is to feel enough stress that we are able to get out of bed every morning, but not so much that we fall over dead. It all comes down to focus and control. Focus on what is really important to you and control what you can without sweating the rest.

Teens can learn how to manage their stress in the same ways we educate adults. The following behaviors and techniques can help teens decrease stress:

- Promote physical activity at home and school and eat regularly
- Avoid excess caffeine intake
- Don’t use illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Develop assertiveness training skills
- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress
- Learn practical coping skills
- Decrease negative self-talk
- Learn to feel good about doing a competent job
- Take a break from stressful situations
- Turn off the television



How to Eat Right to Reduce Stress

http://www.pcrn.org/health/Preventive_Medicine/stress.html

During times of stress, we often turn to traditional “comfort” foods such as macaroni and cheese, pizza, and ice cream. Ironically, these high-fat foods are usually the worst possible choices because they can make us feel lethargic and less able to deal with stress.

The best solution would be low-fat, high-fiber, carbohydrate-rich meals with plenty of fruits and vegetables. They soothe us without sapping out energy and give us the nutrients we need to boost our immune system. Here’s a guide to which foods reduce stress and which foods make it worse:

Foods to Include: high fiber / carbohydrate-rich foods / fruits and vegetables

Foods to Avoid: high-fat foods / caffeine / sugar



Emotional Health for Teens and Families

- ▶ People with good emotional health are in control of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- ▶ They feel positive about themselves and have good relationships.
- ▶ They can keep their problems in perspective.
- ▶ They have both self-awareness and self-control.

Your child’s teenager years can be a difficult time. The teenage years are a time of transition from childhood into adulthood.

Communicating your love for your child is the single most important thing you can do. Although teens need feedback, they respond better when it is given positively and spoken with love. Praising appropriate behavior can help your teen feel a sense of accomplishment and reinforce your family’s values.

Teens, especially those with low self-esteem or with family problems, are at risk for a number of self-destructive behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol or having unprotected sex.

Here are a few warning signs to watch out for:

- Agitated or restless behavior
- Weight loss or gain
- Drop in grades
- Trouble concentrating
- Ongoing feelings of sadness
- Lack of motivation
- Low self-esteem

Ask your teen what is bothering him or her...and then listen. Don’t ignore a problem. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Suggestions? Start with the guidance counselor, EFAP or family physician may be a place to start.

<http://www.focusas.com/EmotionalHealth.html>



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Contracts for Life

A Foundation for Trust and Caring

(www.state.vt.us/adap)

A Foundation for Trust and Caring

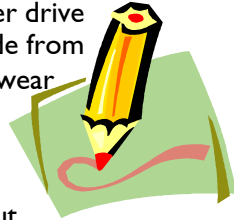
These contracts are designed to facilitate communication between young people and their parents about potentially destructive decisions related to alcohol, drugs, peer pressure and behavior. The issues facing young people today are often too difficult to address alone. SADD believes that effective parent-child communication is critically important in helping young adults to make healthy decisions.

Young Person

I recognize that there are many potentially destructive decisions I face very day and commit to you that I will do everything in my power to avoid making decisions that will jeopardize my health, my safety and overall well being, or you trust I me. I understand the dangers associated with the use of alcohol and drugs and the destructive behaviors often associated with impairments.

By signing below, I pledge my best effort to remain alcohol and drug free. I agree that I will never drive under the influence of either, or accept a ride from someone who is impaired, and I will always wear a seat belt.

Finally, I agree to call you if I am every in a situation that threatens my safety and to communicate with you regularly about issues of importance to us both.



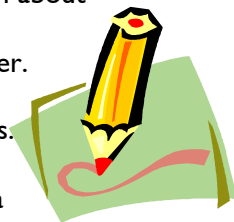
Young Person’s signature

Parent (or Caring Adult)

I am committed to you, and to your health and safety. By signing below, I pledge to do everything in my power to understand and communicate with you about the many difficult and potentially destructive decisions you face.

Further, I agree to provide for you safe, sober transportation home if you are ever in a situation that threatens your safety and to defer discussion about that situation until a time when we can both discuss the issues in a calm and caring manner.

I also pledge to you that I will not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. I will always seek safe, sober transportation home, and I will always remember to wear a seat belt.



Parent/Caring Adult’s signature



Teaching Kids to Say No to Drugs

Forty percent of US teens say they expect to use a drug in the future. One out of every five kids in 8th grade has already tried marijuana.

The most important fact you should know: Kids who learn from their parents about the dangers of underage drinking, drugs and other harmful substances are less likely to use those substances. In other words, you have the power to keep the child you love safe, healthy and drug-free. But, finding the right words and the right approach can be hard.

Kids say their parents are the single most important influence when it comes to drugs. Kids need to know how risky marijuana use can be. The earlier you talk to them, the less likely they will be to use it.

Research has shown that many parents today are ambivalent about marijuana. Some consider it to be relatively risk-free and are more concerned about drugs such as cocaine or ecstasy. The wake-up call for parents, however, is that marijuana is not a harmless drug. It's time to teach your child that the answer to the marijuana question is, "I shouldn't and I won't."

Kids who learn about the risks of drug abuse from their parents are less likely to use drugs than kids who do not. Children look to parents for information about life decisions and choices. Parents who send a clear message of "no drug use" are setting expectations for their kids and this will help them stay away from drugs. Teens who learn anti-drug messages at home are 42% less likely to use



Marijuana Facts

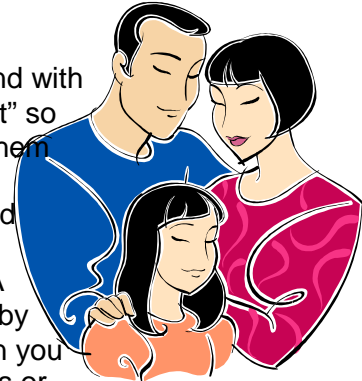
- ✓ More kids use marijuana than any other illicit drug
- ✓ Young teens are trying marijuana at a time when their bodies and brains are still developing
- ✓ In the past decade, the number of 8th graders who have used marijuana has doubled
- ✓ Marijuana can lead to a host of health, social and behavioral problems
- ✓ Adolescent marijuana users show lower academic achievement
- ✓ Short-term use has been linked to memory loss and difficulty with problem-solving

It's Not Pestering, It's Parenting

Conflict sometimes comes with the job of parenting, especially when you are talking about touchy subjects such as drug use. Experts say that to create an environment that combines talking with action, you should:

- Know what your children are doing – their activities and how they spend their time
- Be involved in your kids' lives
- Praise and reward good behavior
- Set limits with clear rules and consequences for breaking them

Work to maintain a *warm* bond with your child. This builds up "credit" so that when you have to punish them or set limits, it's less stressful. With that strong bond, your child will most likely see your rule or punishment as an act of love. A strong bond can be developed by taking advantage of times when you can notice your child's strengths or when you can "catch them being good."



Open the lines of communication:
First, you listen. . .then you talk

A firm rule of no drug use will help your child navigate peer and other pressure to use drugs. Part of what you do as a parent is set limits. Get your kids to think for themselves. Ask them what they would say or do in risky situations.

We all want a peaceful household but conflict will probably arise when your child does not follow the rules. The important rule is not to overreact; however, you should set a punishment that has some impact.

A few suggestions are:

- Restrict television and Internet use
- Have your child read and discuss information about the harmful effects of drugs, tobacco or alcohol
- Temporarily restrict friends come over or allow visit to friend's houses
- Have your child perform a community service

The punishment should not be much longer than three weeks. If it's too long, the teenager will forget why they're being punished.



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Is Your Child Using Drugs?

The mood swings and unpredictable behavior of the teen years often makes it hard to tell if a child is using drugs – but there are warning signs you can watch out for.



If your child exhibits one or more of the following behaviors or moods, drugs may have become a part of his or her life:

- She's withdrawn, depressed, tired, or careless about her personal grooming
- He's hostile, uncooperative, and frequently breaks curfews.
- Her relationships with family members have deteriorated.
- He's hanging around with a new group of friends.
- Her grades have slipped and her school attendance is irregular.
- He's lost interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities.
- Her eating and sleeping patterns have changed, she's up at night and sleeps during the day.
- He has a hard time concentrating.
- Her eyes are red-rimmed and her nose is runny – but she doesn't have allergies or a cold.
- Household money has been disappearing

(www.drugfreeamerica.org)

What To Do

Some of the signs above, such as depression or a decline in school performance, might be explained by other causes. When in doubt, get help. See your family doctor or local clinic to rule out illness or other physical problems.

If you suspect your child is having problems with alcohol or drugs, it is important that you face the problem promptly and get whatever help is needed to stop your child's use.

"Everybody thinks their kid is beyond taking drugs... nobody's beyond it."

Teachable Moments – "When Do I Say It?"

(www.TheAntiDrug.com)

Any moment can be a teachable moment. When you decide to use a moment to teach your child something about drugs, it doesn't have to be a long, serious talk – just a few words can do it. And it's not a talk you have only once. Have it regularly.

Remember – You are your child's most important role model

Feeling Low: There are times that parents should be watchful and that could be turned into teachable moments. The notion that "drugs will make you feel better" can have a lot of appeal during the down times. Tell your kids that drinking alcohol can make them sadder and that smoking marijuana can make them more anxious.

Feeling Good: The other time parents should be careful about is when your child has had a string of good luck – when he or she is feeling on top of the world and everything is going right. These times can trick kids into believing that they can do anything and it will turn out fine. They might be tempted to think that the bad things that happen with drugs couldn't happen to them.

It might not always be an easy job but you've learned by now that parenting can be a rewarding job. One of the biggest hurdles you probably face is finding the time to maintain a strong, loving family relationship that will help protect your kids from drugs.

For more information about drugs and their effects, call, read or visit:

1-800-788-2800

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www.TheAntiDrug.com

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www.health.org

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Growing Up Drug Free, US Dept. of Education (available by calling 1-877-433-7827)

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For a description of effective school and community prevention programs and strategies,
<http://modelprograms.camhsa.gov>

ADD TO YOUR LIBRARY

"Get Out of My Life but First Could You Drive Me & Cheryl to the Mall: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager"

Revised and Updated by Anthony E. Wolf



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HEALTH CARE
*In alliance with
The University of Vermont*

Events & Happenings...

Quit Tobacco Groups!

Join a group for a *freshstart* – a four-week series based on the American Cancer Society program to help you quit smoking. The group will include physical activity, nutrition and relapse prevention planning. This program is targeted toward people who have tried quitting before.

Session 2 – Thursdays, Nov 3, 10, 17, & Dec 1
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.

Location: Community Health Improvement
199 Main Street, Suite 150
(Courthouse Plaza) - Burlington.

Call 847-2278 to Register (\$10 fee)

If your teenager smokes, call your school guidance counselor for a list of tobacco cessation classes.

Youth-focused Event

“Not My Kid”

October 27, 6:30 p.m.

*St. Michael's College, McCarthy Recital Hall
Presentation by Margo Austin, LADC, M.Ed,
Peer Prevention Coordinator*

Parents please join the Chittenden County Substance Abuse Coalition for a discussion on preventing substance use and abuse among youth.

Physical Activity for All Ages

Get Moving Champlain Valley!

Get Moving Champlain Valley! Is a community-wide incentive program for individuals and families. The program encourages everyone to become more physically active. Get Moving Champlain Valley!, an effort support by the Champlain Initiative, to promote a healthy, active lifestyle which includes moderate activity most days of the week. For further information about Get Moving, call the United Way at 802-864-7541, ext. 13.

Co-Ed Volleyball

Free adult intermediate level co-ed volleyball. This fun “pick-up” format is great for experienced players. Co-sponsored by “Get Moving Champlain Valley!” and the YMCA. Time: Fridays, 1:00-3:45 p.m. at YMCA. Call 802-862-9622 for more information or check out the website at www.gbymca.org.

Senior Swim

For adults, 62 years and older, a free recreational swim time in our 86-degree program pool-lifeguard supervised. Fridays, 2-4 pm (pool shared). Call the YMCA at 802-862-9622 for further information.

Fall 2005 HealthSOURCE *A community education series*

Parents Make A Difference

October 19, 26 & November 2, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

*Presented by Kate Maynard, MS, LCMHC, LADC,
Employee & Family Assistance Counselor, Community
Health Improvement, Fletcher Allen*

Parenting adolescents is daunting but take heart! There are some things you can do to reduce the chances that your child (or children) will abuse drugs or alcohol during their teen years. This class is offered in three, 2-hour sessions designed to introduce you to key principles of prevention, and hands-on parenting tips. The format will include brief lectures, handouts, in-class exercises, role-plays, and ways to practice new skills between classes. Attendance at all 3 classes is strongly encouraged.

Register for classes by calling Community Health Improvement at 1-802-847-2278.

SUPPORT GROUPS

A variety of support groups are available to patients, families and support persons in the Greater Chittenden County Area and beyond.

For dates, times, and locations, call the Community Health Resource Center at 802-847-8821 or check out web site:

http://www.fahc.org/Health_Improvement/support.asp

Stress Management Support Group at WERC

This group will meet on a weekly basis. Please contact Neil Jepson, M.S., Licensed Psychologist-Master, at 802-847-0193, for more information.

Some of the topics that will be explored include:

- Awareness of stressors and your emotional and physical reactions to them.
- Recognizing what you can change.
- Reducing the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.
- Learning to moderate your physical reactions to stress.
- Learning how to modify stress-related thoughts and reduce their negative effects.
- Improving time management strategies and combating procrastination.



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