

"Difficult Teens: Suggestions for Parents"

If you, or someone you know is experiencing difficulty with a teen, take a few moments and answer the following questionnaire. This can serve as a point of reference for you in understanding the severity of the problems your teen is currently facing. Sometimes the problems are so severe that they can only be properly addressed by getting professional help in a controlled environment, such as a residential center, treatment program or specialty school. Other times problems can be resolved right in the home by setting better limits and tightening up the basic family rules and structure.

After completing the questionnaire refer to the scoring guide which will offer suggestions, and recommendations based on the results of your own responses.

Answer Yes or No to each question.

1. Does your teen struggle with basic family rules and expectations?
2. Has your teen ever been suspended, expelled, truant, or had a drop in school grades?
3. Is your teen verbally abusive?
4. Does your teen associate with a bad peer group?
5. Has your teen lost interest in former productive activities, hobbies or sports?
6. Do you have difficulty getting your teen to do simple household chores or homework?
7. Has your teen had problems with the law?
8. Do you find yourself picking your words carefully when speaking to your teen, so as not to elicit a verbal attack or rage from them?
9. Are you worried that your teen may not finish high school?
10. Does your teen seem depressed/withdrawn?
11. Has your teen's appearance and/or personal hygiene changed?
12. Does your teen ever display violent behavior?
13. Is your teen manipulative and/or deceitful?
14. Does your teen seem to demonstrate a lack of motivation?
15. Do you suspect that your teen sometimes lies or is dishonest with you?
16. Are you concerned that your teen may be sexually promiscuous?
17. Has your teen ever displayed any evidence of suicide ideation?
18. Do you suspect at times you have had money or other valuables from your home?
19. Does your teen's behavior concern you for their safety?
20. Is your teen angry or display temper outbursts?
21. Does your teen seem to lack self-esteem and self-worth?
22. Do you have a lack of trust with your teen?
23. Does your teen have problems with authority?
24. Does your teen engage in activities you don't approve of?
25. Do you think your teen is possibly using or experimenting with drugs/alcohol?

26. Are you concerned about your child's well being and their future?
27. Does your teen seem to constantly be in opposition to your family values?
28. No matter what rules and consequences are established, do you feel that your teen will defy them?
29. Are you exhausted and worn out from your teen's defiant and/or destructive behavior and choices?
30. When dealing with your teen, do you often feel that you are powerless?
- Tally your yes responses. Based on the number of your 'yes' responses, our recommendations would be as follows:

18+: High risk. Get help! A residential center, treatment program or specialty school is strongly recommended.

9-17: Borderline risk. It is possible that the problems can be resolved by tightening up the family rules and structure. However, it may be that a residential center, treatment program or specialty school needs to be considered.

Up to 8: Moderate risk. Tighten up family rules/understandings, and be consistent with your monitoring and follow through.

We offer the following suggestions for families that need to tighten up their family rules and structure.

SETTING BETTER LIMITS

Limits and rules are necessary to create order and productivity, the lack of which create chaos and confusion. Rules provide the basis of understanding for what is expected, whether in the workplace, classroom, community or family. If a classroom had no rules, very little learning would occur. If a community operated without rules it would cease to be a safe place to live. Likewise, if harmony is to be maintained within the family, there must be a proper set of family rules, understandings or expectations that are based on your family values. If your teen is compliant and responsible you will probably only need to have a few rules. However, if you are dealing with a difficult or defiant teen you are already familiar with the need for more defined structure.

When setting rules you want to create several layers of safeguards to assist your teen. For example:

If you want to protect your teen from substance abuse you must set some very clear rules with your teen as to who they may associate with, what types of activities they are allowed to attend and/or participate, where they are allowed to go, and when they may go, as well as expected to return. It would be foolish to think your teen could frequently party with drug using friends and expect your teen to stay drug free.

If you want your teen to maintain good grades, you may need to have some clear rules in areas such as: School attendance, completing daily homework, and obtaining weekly progress reports. The key is that rather than waiting until the end of the semester to see if your teen receives good grades, you set rules and create a structure that will help your teen along the way; and maximize their chances for success. When you create several layers of safeguards it provides your teen with the greatest amount of protection. It also allows you to be involved so that you can be aware of problems early and resolve them, before they overwhelming.

Conflict is inevitable with difficult or defiant teens.

Consistently addressing and resolving conflicts over small issues such as homework, dress, grooming and curfew, is your best preventative measure to avoid the large, devastating issues such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse and failing grades. Take care of the small things, and the big things will take care of themselves," really applies when it comes to administrating rules.

Compliance

Once you have an established set of rules, compliance with those rules depends on four things:

1. The rules are clearly understood.

- 2.The rules are monitored.
- 3.The rules are consistently enforced.
- 4.The consequences used are effective as deterrents.

If any of these four things are not in place it will drastically affect the compliance with the rules. With this in mind, let us address each area.

Clearly Understanding the Rules

If your rules are not clearly understood, it leaves a lot of room for misunderstandings, conflicts and even manipulations. Many times parents assume that their teen understands the rules the same way they are intended. For example, if you tell your teen to be home early, their interpretation of 'early', and yours, may be drastically different. If you tell your teen to clean their room, their idea of a "clean room" and yours may be miles apart. For these reasons, rules need to be very specific. To avoid misunderstanding, it is a good policy to have your teen write down or repeat back their understanding of any rule or expectation.

Monitoring

Monitoring is essential in the administration of any rules. Imagine for instance, if our highways were not monitored by law enforcement? What if a business did not monitor production and quality? As parents, we must provide a safety net for our children by monitoring their behavior. How much we have to monitor depends on how much monitoring is needed. Some teens require very little monitoring; difficult teens require intensive monitoring. Let your teen know that you will be monitoring their behavior. This will do a couple of things: First, they will not be offended if, or when, they discover you are monitoring, and second, if they know they are going to be monitored, it tends to give them added incentive to follow the rules.

Monitoring may occur in many ways. For instance, in regard to academics, most schools will assist you in providing daily or weekly reports, or you may choose to occasionally drop into your child's classroom and talk to their teacher. Random drug tests can assure compliance with sobriety. Use of a vehicle may be monitored through odometer checks. As a means of 'cross-checking' such things as activities or curfews you could communicate with the parents of your teen's friends, or even drive by to assure they are where they said they were going to be.

Consistency

The hardest, yet most important thing a parent can do is to be consistent. A rule, or understanding, that is not enforced can be the same as having no rule at all, and can undermine the well being of a family. In order for our teens to feel safe, they need to know they can count on us to be consistent and dependable.

If a violation occurs, we need to consistently enforce the previously established consequence. A difficult teen will test the boundaries to see what their limits will truly be. That is why consistency is so critical. Letting small things slide until they become large things will create chaos, confusion and resentment.

While most of us do this from time to time, it is a very ineffective approach. Consistency is the key. Follow through on what you said you would do. Sporadic enforcement does not work. Only those parents who consistently enforce their rules will have their rules consistently followed.

Consequences

Consequences will vary dependent on the violation as well as the teen's response to the consequence. Some teens may respond to the loss of the privilege of going out on Friday night, while others may not be bothered by it at all. The key is: (1) to use consequences that have significant meaning and/or deterrent value to your teen, and (2) the severity of the consequences should match the severity of the violation.

Research has shown that immediate consequences are the most effective. However, some behaviors are so severe that an immediate consequence would not be strong enough by itself. That is why a combination of immediate consequences with some follow-up consequences is often needed. Immediate consequences might include such things as writing essays, time-out, room restriction, or a work project. Immediate

consequences refer to those consequences done immediately and on the spot, before the teen can resume any of their normal activities. Follow-up consequences are those applied over a period of time such as loss of driving privileges, book reports, a major work project, being grounded, additional household chores, or loss of a planned upcoming activity. Again, follow-up consequences are sometimes needed to provide an additional deterrent.

Using Consequences that are effective deterrents

The consequences you use must be strong enough to be deterrents. Otherwise, not only will consequences be ineffective, they will most likely be ignored. Some teens will not respond, no matter what consequences are used. Other teens defiantly refuse to complete their consequences. In either of these situations, parents are forced to look at getting outside help, such as a residential center, treatment program, or specialty school.

Nothing is more destructive to a teen and/or their family than the use of drugs. Consequently the earlier the intervention the better. The problem is that in most cases teens are using drugs for several months or even years before parents become aware of it. Even when parents do become aware of drug use, they often underestimate the extent of their child's involvement.

34 WARNING Signs of Drug Use

If you are suspicious your child may be using drugs, don't ignore the warning signs. Children seldom grasp the concepts of addiction. Most view themselves as imperious to peril. For some teens, the stress of adolescence and pressure from their peers is overwhelming, and drugs become an enticing escape from their real world.

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| 1. Neglected appearance/hygiene | 18. Stealing/borrowing money |
| 2. Poor self image | 19. Change in friends |
| 3. Grades dropping | 20. Depression |
| 4. Violent outbursts at home | 21. Withdrawal |
| 5. Frequent use of Eye Wash | 22. Apathy |
| 6. Unexplained weight drop | 23. Reckless Behavior |
| 7. Drug Paraphernalia | 24. No Concern about future |
| 8. Slurred speech | 25. Defiles Family Values |
| 9. Curfew violations | 26. Disrespectful to parents |
| 10. Running away | 27. Lying/Deception |
| 11. Skin abrasions | 28. Sneaky behavior |
| 12. Hostility towards family members | 29. Disregards Consequences |
| 13. Chemical breath | 30. Loss of Interest in healthy activities |
| 14. Glassy eyes | 31. Verbally abusive |
| 15. Red eyes | 32. Manipulative/Self-Centered |
| 16. Valuables Missing | 33. Lack of Motivation |
| 17. Possessing unexplained valuables | 34. Truancy |

If many of these signs seem applicable to your child, and their behavior, do not despair. Denial and shame in response to drug abuse, for the user or their family, will only serve to be additional obstacles to overcome. Know that many young people can be helped, and there is effective help available.

Parental Awareness

Parents often say they want to know everything that is going on in their children's lives. But is that really true? Parents need to be aware that drug use generally begins months, or even years, before parents actually do become aware of their teens drug use. Certain topics, such as children's sexual behavior, underage drinking, and gang violence are subjects so uncomfortable parents often choose to ignore them, or perhaps only lightly approach them, often cloaked in denial, hoping these issues will not affect their family. Parents recognize consequences of these issues can be frightening. However, silently clinging to the denial and hope that these issues will not be part of their children's lives can create an equally devastating consequence. And no topic is any more frightening to a parent than teen substance abuse.

Parenting presents continuing challenges. Putting on blinders will never create resolutions. The subject of teenage drug abuse is very wide and multifaceted, involving many drugs and their variations. It will not be possible to cover all information regarding teenage drug abuse here, but rather it is our desire to broaden your information so that you may feel more confident about parenting decisions surrounding teenage drug

use as it pertains to your children. For even when a parent does become aware of drug use, they often underestimate the extent of their child's involvement.

Why do kids use drugs?

As we search for solutions that would protect our children from the perils of substance abuse, the questions arises as to why they would ever want to use them at all. From an adult perspective the repeated question is, "Who's to blame?" Often looking to transfer responsibility, the adult population frequently points the finger of blame outward. Depending on who you ask you may hear a range of criticism that includes the media, peer influence, lack of supervision from school officials, drug pushers, law enforcement's lack authority, law enforcement's overreaction, kid's role models, parental indulgence, to lack of parental involvement. There is no denying that these can be contributing factors, as outside influences can be very powerful. But to ascribe blame solely on outside influences would be not only an exaggeration, but would be saying our kids are nothing more than victims of circumstance and thus would remove them from the accountability of their own choices. Where adults tend to look outward for 'the answers', the kid's explanations tend to point more towards themselves. They tend to explain it from a more personal choice, something inside them urging them on; wanting to fit in, a curiosity, or need for excitement.

Understanding the teenage perspective holds important keys. There are many pressures teens deal with on a daily basis. When kids are asked why they began using drugs, they do not look outward to outside influences. Rather their reasons include those similar to the following responses:

They want to fit in, to feel part of the group

To rebel against adult authority

To escape their problems

To hide their feelings of inadequacy, and low self esteem

The thrill and excitement of taking a risk

Wanting to feel grown up

The 'Gateway' Drugs

Most adolescents do not begin with the so-called hard drugs such as cocaine, crystal meth or heroin. Usage generally begins with drugs that are much more easily accessible and, in the adult population, are legal; nicotine and alcohol. Usage frequently begins with easy access to these in the home, be it the home of their family, friend or relative. Tobacco and alcohol are believed, by many experts, to be the gateway or entrance to a path towards drug abuse.

Generally, even teens recognize the serious health risks associated with smoking. Yet, if they are willing to smoke, it's an easy link to drinking alcohol. By this time, they have demonstrated they are risk-takers so the obvious next level is to marijuana. From there it can be a dangerous, even deadly spiral towards other drugs, and the destructive behaviors that go along with them.

Understanding Addictive Behavior

No matter what drug is involved, the disease of addiction appears to follow a predictable course. Typically, the user begins out of some level of curiosity. If the initial experience produces pleasurable results, the individual will more than likely move on to recreational use, such as with friends, at parties or on the weekends. As they come to enjoy the drug more and more, it is inevitable that the usage will increase, such as using during the week on a regular basis. Soon, their lives become more and more centered around getting the drug and finding opportunities to use it. It begins to interfere with relationships, school, work, and other formerly productive areas of interest in their lives. By now the drug-dependency, the addiction, have taken control, and the individual is unable to function without the drug. If there is not a physical addiction, there is most certainly a psychological dependency upon their drug of choice. And if their drug of choice is not easily accessible, they will resort to whatever it takes to obtain that drug.

Marijuana - What You Need to Know

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that marijuana is the illegal drug most often used in this country. Studies show nearly 50% of teenagers try marijuana before they graduate high school. Many parents of teens experimented with marijuana in their college days, and now find it difficult to talk to their kids about the use of marijuana. But today, marijuana use begins at a much younger age and there is a much more potent form of marijuana available to the kids today.

Kids site their use of marijuana as a way for them to cope with life's problems, to deal with anxiety, anger or depression, a way to escape, something to do so as to ease boredom. Long-term studies of high school students appear to demonstrate a pattern that few young people use other drugs without first having tried marijuana. Of itself then, marijuana is a gateway drug.

The Silent Epidemic - Huffing

There are over 1,000 common household and classroom products that can be used as inhalants, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Huffing is a form of drug abuse that is on the rise with our young people at an alarming rate. These products are so common, you most likely would not be alarmed if you saw a teen buying them. After all, would you stop to realize that something as seemingly harmless as hairspray, whipped cream or air freshener could be used as harmful drugs? These products typically contain gases such as butane or toluene, which can harm the liver, kidneys and bone marrow, and also cause brain damage.

Most huffers begin very young. According to a study by The Cape Cod Islands Partnership to Reduce Substance Abuse it was found that 1 out of 5 students had tried 'huffing' by 7th grade. And inhalants were found to be the 3rd most abused substance, behind tobacco and alcohol, in the 12-14 year old age group, per the National Institute on Drug Abuse. A California physician, who lost his 13 year old son to huffing spray-can propellants said he knew more about inhalants than most parents, yet there were important things he didn't know. "I didn't know about Sudden Sniffing Death. I didn't know about the brain damage." He also said he didn't know it was habituating, and that it wouldn't be easy for his son to stop. Kids can die from abusing inhalants repeatedly, or even just once.

States a Wichita Juvenile Court Judge, ". . . I see a lot of kids coming into court in all kinds of trouble and all kinds of problems. The one group of kids that scares me the most are kids using inhalants, or huffing as they call it." Would you recognize the warning signs of huffing?

- Chemical smell on child or child's clothing**
- Correction fluid on nose, fingers, or clothing**
- Markers in pockets**
- Red eyes, nonsensical talk, irritability**
- 'Drunk' appearance, slurred speech**
- Unusual breath odor**
- Decreased appetite**
- Frequent headaches**
- Sores around mouth**
- Lack of concentration**
- Low grades, school absences**

Meth - The Equal Opportunity Destroyer

Crystal meth, crank, speed, glass, ice . . . meth amphetamine drugs go by many names and have many forms. Typically, it is found in powder or crystallized forms and can be smoked, inhaled, eaten or shot-up intravenously. Users are referred to as 'tweakers'. It's very available and cheap to buy, and produces an extended 'high' making it extremely tempting to the young and foolish.

Meth speeds up the central nervous system causing physical and psychological effects that, at first, seem pleasurable: increased alertness and energy, decreased need for sleep, euphoria and increased sexuality. Meth is highly addictive as users often continue using to avoid the inevitable 'crash' when the drug's euphoric effects begin to wear off. Meth tricks the body and brain into believing it has unlimited energy supplies, which is how meth users are able to stay awake for long periods of time. But these chemical imbalances in the brain and sleep deprivation result in hallucinations, extreme paranoia and often bizarre, violent behavior. Once meth entraps the user it wreaks havoc with their body from weight loss and malnutrition, to welts on the skin known as 'crank bugs', shortness of breath, hyperactivity, severe depression, paranoid delusions and suicidal tendencies.

A Letter from a Teenage Addict

I'm a fifteen year old alcoholic/addict, though I've been clean and sober for seven months now. Right now I want to persuade you not to shoot heroin or anything else. Drugs force us to cross the invisible line of fact and reality. Sometimes so often that you forget where that was, and will have trouble finding where that line used to be. When you first shoot up, you will most likely puke and feel repelled, but soon you'll try it again. It will cling to you like an obsessed lover. The rush of the hit and the way you'll want more, as if you were being deprived of air. That's how it will trap you.

Soon your money will run short and your 'suppliers' will start asking 'favors', Instead of giving you the occasional freebie, all because they know they've got you hooked and they can see the way your body aches for it. All this is part of crossing the line. Finally, when you have humiliated yourself in every way you could possibly think of, the darker side hits; ongoing despair and deep depression.

With me, it was the thrill and the rush that made the need tolerable I felt like there was nothing without it and freedom within it. I would walk with my arms folded up so that people would not see how swollen they were from missing my vein and the with puss bubbles with a black dot on top from me poking through my vein with a needle. I still struggle with thoughts of 'were the hard times really that bad or were they part of what made them so good?' Then I realize that I was just pretending that I enjoyed the mania so that it would not hurt so bad.

Someone once described withdrawals as tiny, evil animals; chewing their way out of your skin, and as if all your pores were opening like a dehydrated plant for just one more drink of toxic water.

I paid dearly for an expensive assassin to still my life, mind and body. I am now glad it did not succeed. So please, for the love of all that is dear to you, just think before you welcome a killer into your body.

Intervention

The goal of this booklet has been to provide an overview of teen drug abuse and to make you keenly aware of the warning signs. Again, if the warning signs indicate that intervention is necessary, Teen Crisis can direct you to a number of effective resources.