

Raising Teens:

Dealing with the Bumps in the Road



When our teenagers act wild, sometimes it's easy to resort to anger or desperately trying to control our children. Instead of trying to control them, we need to deal with the behaviors that are taking place. Controlling our children simply makes them feel more cornered and rebellious, making the situation worse.

Dangers in Cyberspace: Life Wasn't Like This When We Were Kids

Times are definitely changing and with the Internet and the growing amount of wireless advice, it's pretty tough to keep tabs on our kids. We want to know that they're safe, but we also want to ensure they have a sense of privacy.

A recent study conducted by Justin Patchin, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, showed 91% of the profiles viewed for users 18 and under did not include full names and 40% of youth kept their profiles private from public view.

Unfortunately, the same study showed that 5% posted pictures of themselves in bathing suits or underwear. 15% of the profiles showed friends in bathing suits or underwear.



The positive thing to take from this study is that a lot of kids are being safe and just because our kids are online, doesn't mean that they are getting themselves into trouble or are being targeted by predators. The Internet gives our children access to many more people (and gives many more people access to our children), but most children are going to use the same logic and common sense they apply to the offline world and won't become victims to predators.

To ensure your kids are safe online, use the tips we already gave you earlier in this guide. Always:

- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Know who your children are spending time with.
- Respect their privacy, with the guidelines we mentioned earlier.
- Spend time with your children.

If you think your children are spending too much time online, you can speak to them about it. Establish limits, with their input, and encourage other physical activities, spending time with friends and family members.

If you sense there truly is a problem and they may be involved in something dangerous, start a discussion about it. If you think you need to see what they've been doing online, go together. As mentioned earlier, snooping behind their back can just result in bigger problems.

Sex, Drugs & Alcohol: How to Talk to Your Kids



These are topics you'll want to discuss with your kids before there is a problem. As a family, you can establish boundaries and consequences and come to a common understanding of what is expected.

Sex: According to *Advocates for Youth*, studies indicate that kids who talk to their parents about sex are less likely to engage in high-risk behavior, such as having sex without condoms. 70.6% of teenagers who reported they didn't feel close to their parents had sex by age 17-19. That compares to 57.9% of kids who reported a close relationship.

It's true. Not talking to your kids about sex isn't that likely to keep them from doing it. But the reverse is also true. Talking to them about it, isn't more likely to have them engaging in sexual activity. If it means having sexually active children behaving responsibly, talking things out can only help keep our kids safer.

If you think your child is already having sex, talk to them about it. Don't get angry, but approach it in a calm and reasonable manner. Talk to them about your experiences and be honest. If your teenager has a boyfriend/girlfriend and things seem to be getting serious, initiate the conversation if you haven't already. Above all, make sure they are being safe.

Drugs & Alcohol: Many experts agree that when parents talk to their kids about drugs and alcohol, those discussions are very likely to shape the child's attitude about those topics.

Before you talk to your kids – educate yourself. Check with your school, library or online for the straight facts about drugs and alcohol. Simply telling your kids, “Drugs and alcohol are bad,” isn't going to be as effective as truly illustrating the very real dangers of substance abuse. Try not to lecture, listen to what your kids have to say and really discuss the issues.

As always, keep it casual. If you spend time with your teenagers and keep the lines of communication open, bringing up the subject is much easier.

Signs of Drug & Alcohol Use: Look out for these tell-tale signs that your child might be using drugs or alcohol:

- Loss of interest in family and other usual activities.
- Not living up to responsibilities.
- Verbally or physical abusiveness.
- Coming home late.
- Spending even more time in their room.
- More lying.
- Declining grades.
- Change of friends.
- Mood swings.
- Always asking for money.
- Big change in sleeping patterns.
- Other erratic behavior.

Realize that a lot of the above signs, especially near the beginning of the list, could mean different things. Teenagers who are depressed can act in similar ways. When approaching your child, don't be accusatory. Try to connect with them and see what's really happening in their lives.

Angry Teenagers: What Does It Mean?



Anger is a dangerous emotion and can cause teenagers to act out physically and verbally in a very damaging way. The one good thing about a child who expresses his anger is that it is an indication of a deeper problem and you can get to a solution more quickly. Teenagers who are extremely angry could be victims of abuse, suffering from depression, abusing alcohol or drugs, dealing with grief or other problems.

If your child is expressing bouts of anger, take a look at this behavior and try to determine what situations bring out the anger. Don't fuel the anger by elevating your own emotions. Of course, if your child is causing physical harm to someone in your home, you need to take action. Even then – keep it calm - just do what you need to stop the abuse from occurring.

Talk to your teenager when emotions aren't so high. Try to understand where they are coming from and really listen. Ensure they understand that mentally and physically abusive behavior isn't acceptable. If they feel angry, give them the

opportunity to express it or if they feel like they just need a bit of time alone, allow them to get that. Harassing an emotionally-charged youngster isn't going to solve anything.

Depression: If you think your child is depressed, it may not be as easy to sit down and talk to your child about it. In cases where children are abusing drugs or alcohol (which can also be a sign of depression), they are aware that they are participating in forbidden behavior (doing drugs or alcohol). When someone is depressed, they may not be completely aware or may have a harder time talking about it.

As we have stressed all along, keep the lines of communication open with your teenager. If they're feeling down, help them talk about it. In most cases, these feelings are temporary and kids can snap out of it with a bit of compassion and understanding. In other cases, it may be an indication of actual depression that may need professional help.

Signs of Depression: Teenagers get moody, but if these symptoms become persistent it might become problematic.

- Sadness &/or crying.
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of interest in regular activities
- Lack of energy
- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in eating habits
- Not interacting with friends
- Low self-esteem
- Sensitivity to rejection
- Missing a lot of school
- Inability to concentrate

If your child has any of these symptoms on an ongoing basis, talk to your doctor or other trusted professional. They can refer you to a counselor or other professional to get your child the help she needs. When you decide to get your child help, talk to her about it. Give her some say in what steps are taken or she may be resistant to help.

Should You Kick Your Difficult Teen out the Home?

Sometimes parents feel like they have no choice, but to eject a difficult older child from the home. Even some professionals who deal with children recommend it, but is it the right answer? Do these children who are banished from their homes grow up to be responsible adults?

When our kids get out-of-control, it can seem like our only hope is to force our children to leave our home. Even professional counselors often advise that if children don't respect the house rules and all options are exhausted, then children should consequently be removed from the home.

There may be situations where this is required, especially when your teenager is endangering the lives and safety of other family members, but it's important to remember your teenager is still a child and needs your protection. And even more importantly, if you have not identified the underlying problem in your child's behavior and attempted to help them resolve it, you may feel as though you've failed your child.

Throwing a child out of the home really should be a last resort and be reserved for times when family members' lives are in danger. Other instances might include drug abuse or alcohol abuse that has gone so far, parents simply need to stop enabling the dangerous behavior. If you feel you are in any of these types of situations, definitely seek the help of a qualified and appropriate counselor.

In most cases, when a teenager will not listen to or follow the house rules, it is not simply the fault of the teenager. Communication is a two-way street and, as parents, we need to ensure we are able to communicate with our teenagers appropriately.

Parents need to take responsibility for their role in the breakdown of the family relationship. At the beginning of this guide, we talked about the foundations of a well-adjusted family life, but unfortunately, it's not always reality. Add to that, if you wait until your child is already a teenager and when you start having problems, it's not always easy to achieve. Opening the lines of communication and getting to know your child isn't going to happen overnight. You need to dedicate yourself to fixing your relationship and then other things will start to fall into place.