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November 13, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR LISEL LOY

FROM: Bruce Reed

SUBJECT: Parents Matter Brochure

This brochure was created by the White House Council on Youth Violence to be distributed by national education associations to middle schools and secondary schools throughout the country. Included in the brochure is a proposed forward from the President that I am submitting to you for approval. The brochure will be complete and ready to go to print Tuesday, November 14, 2000, pending any comments or edits you may have. We would like to send this to the printer as soon as possible, and preferably by Friday, November 18, 2000.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have much to celebrate about our nation's young people. They are far healthier, more prosperous, and look forward to more promising lives than ever before in our history. Teens of all ethnicities are completing high school and enrolling in college at record rates, and more teenagers than ever before are volunteering to serve through community service. In addition, many harmful behaviors are on the decline, including youth violence and gun-related crime, homicide, suicide, teen pregnancy and, in the last few years, drug use. Nonetheless, the rates of youth violence, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, and unintended pregnancy, are still far too high in our country. Despite a marked decline in teen homicide over the past several years, far too many communities are scarred by violence.

We know that the best approach to the problem of youth violence is a comprehensive one requiring the collaborative efforts of students and parents, teachers, health care providers, law enforcement, judges, counselors, and religious leaders. That is why, among other initiatives, my Administration created the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* Initiative, to support effective, collaborative responses to violence, bringing together school nurses, counselors, teachers, and law enforcement, to promote a healthier future for our children and our communities.

At the same time, we know that young people continue to need support and

guidance from their parents, as they grow into adulthood. In May 2000, the First Lady and I hosted a conference on "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers." At this conference we heard from parents, researchers, professionals who work with teenagers, and from teenagers themselves. The message we heard, loud and clear, and confirmed by recent studies, is that teens view their parents as the best source of information and guidance on serious life issues, and that teenagers rate not having enough time with their parents as their top concern.

That is why I directed my White House Council on Youth Violence to develop information resources for parents. This guide provides parents some helpful communication tips for talking to their teenagers. It suggests ways to discuss difficult issues—such as violence, guns, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs—and helps parents identify the warning signs of harmful behaviors. In some instances, parents may need professional guidance to assist them in dealing with the challenges of raising a teenager, and this guide provides helpful resources.

The great American author and champion of human rights, Pearl Buck, once said, "If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." In our national struggle against youth violence, we must not fail our children. All of us, especially parents, share responsibility to keep our children safe. We've all got to do our part, and this guide should help.

— *President William Jefferson Clinton*

The White House Council on Youth Violence was established by President Clinton in October, 1999, to coordinate the federal government's efforts in the research and prevention of youth violence. The Council is chaired by Bruce Reed, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and the Council members are the Attorney General and the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and Treasury.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals contributed to the development of this document. The White House Council on Youth Violence wishes to thank Dr. Robert Schwebel, the primary author of this guide, and Teddi Fine, Charlotte Gillespie, Anne Mathews-Younes, Bill Modzeleski, Carolyn O'Connor, Louise Peloquin, and Farris Tuma, for their assistance.

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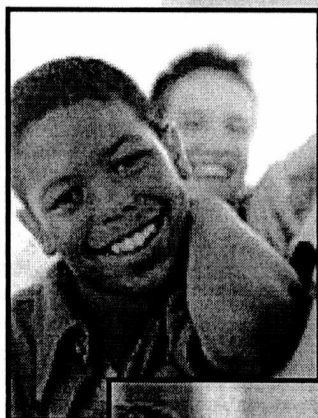
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INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting time to be a teenager in America. Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing society, with hopes for a very promising future. Survey results show that 84% of high-school students plan to attend a four-year college. Teens overwhelmingly share their parents' values of honesty and hard work, and are engaged in positive activities. More than half of all teenagers volunteer with a community organization, attend a house of worship weekly, read the newspaper twice a week or more, and attend cultural events or visit museums.

In spite of this positive outlook, however, adolescence—the transition between childhood and adulthood—is still one of the most difficult times for children and parents alike. Growing up is more than the physical changes that occur, such as

getting taller or more muscular. This passage is a time for establishing independence, testing limits, trying on different roles, exploring new feelings and fostering intellectual growth. Above all, adolescence is a *process* that takes time to happen.



We have all heard the frightening and heart-breaking statistics about youth violence, depression, tobacco and alcohol

and other drug use. Even the best-informed young people are constantly tested by social pressures, emotional needs and their peers. The push and pull between right and wrong can become a tug of war between adolescent and parent.

Being a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or caregiver of a teen is both rewarding and challenging. Caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life.

This guide provides some useful tools to improve your communication with your teenager to help him or her get through adolescence successfully. Read it all or select the sections that help you the most.

- **Getting the Conversation Started**—tips for opening up the dialogue, even after it has been shut down. (Page 2.)
- **Increasing Responsibility and Freedom**—ideas for how to set the limits that protect your teens while still giving them room to grow and develop. (Page 6.)
- **Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours**—anger-management skills that you can use, and that you can share with your adolescent. (Page 8.)
- **Handling Tough Situations**—examples of difficult situations, identification of warning signs of trouble, and advice on how to handle certain problems. (Page 9.)
- **When Parents Need Help First**—helping your spouse, or yourself, deal with issues that are affecting your child. (Page 16.)
- **Getting Help for Your Teen**—suggestions about how to get help for your teen and your family. (Page 19.)

Many parents worry when their teenagers don't want to spend as much time with the family as they did when they were younger. This can be both hurtful and frightening. You worry about their safety and about their future. It is normal for children to want to spend more time with their friends during the teen years, but it shouldn't mean that teens ignore their families. Parents and teens need to take action to stay connected or to reconnect.

I used to be close with my daughter. She would talk with me about everything. Now she's 14 and avoids me. She is quiet at dinner, and then goes to her room or talks with friends on the phone all evening. Sometimes she gets moody and angry. I want to reach her the way I used to, but I don't know how to start.

Sometimes the solution is easy. Spend more time together. Suggest doing things that you both enjoy. Talk more. Dinner-time is an excellent opportunity for that kind of exchange. Talk about your day. Ask your teen about his or her day. Be

with their parents. You may be surprised to learn that a recent study indicated that most teenagers rate "not having enough time together" with parents as their top concern. Many will be glad that their parents care enough to make the effort to spend time with them. Some teens have a hard time expressing anger and upset feelings. They keep their feelings bottled inside. Parents need to draw such children out. Try to start a conversation by saying "I can see you've been upset. Let's talk about what's happening."

Some teens, however, may give parents the cold shoulder. If that happens, be patient, and be persistent until you break

How Do You Get Your Teenager to Start Talking to You Again?

The best way to help teens open up—and stay open—with parents and other adults in their lives, is by showing your acceptance of them. When they

make a mistake or misbehave, you can lovingly help them learn from their experience. Make sure they know that you love them, even when you may be deeply troubled by their behavior.



Why Do Teens Stop Talking?

Sometimes they're trying to be independent. Sometimes they're embarrassed about their own thoughts and feelings, such as anger, or their sexual desires. Sometimes, teens shut down because of pressures they feel at home, at school, or in the community. One of the most important reasons teens stop talking to you is that they're afraid to speak honestly with their parents. They believe if they talk openly about things they have done that might be wrong, they'll be given a lecture, punished, or criticized.



through. If you can't break through, there could be a more serious problem than embarrassment or a difficulty communicating.

sure the television is turned off and you and your teen are tuned in. Most teens agree that they want to spend more time

Getting the Conversation Started

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

LISTENING TO YOUR TEEN

Let teens know you will listen and try to understand their point of view, without putting them down or trying to control them. Being open-minded sometimes can be difficult for adults. But to communicate with teens, parents need to do more than just talk; they need to listen, and really hear what their teens are saying. They also need to notice which issues are not being discussed and have the courage to start a dialogue about those issues.

When disagreements arise, listening does not mean that you give up your authority as a parent. It *does* mean giving teens a voice in matters that concern them. Through family dialogue, parents get to know what their teens are thinking and feeling, and teens get to know where their parents stand. Sometimes parents and teens can reach agreements when none seemed possible. Even when agreement cannot be reached, teens are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.



PRESSURES ON

TODAY'S TEENS

The pressures you felt as an adolescent have been magnified for teens today. You will recognize some of these issues that make it difficult for youth today as issues that concerned you during your youth. Others are unique to today's teens.

- Wanting to be part of a group
- HIV/AIDS
- Changing family structures
- Gangs and violence
- Insecurity about the future
- Money pressures
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy
- Media influences
- Concern about body image
- School pressures
- Easy access to alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and guns

TOUGH TOPICS

Parents can become frustrated when they try to start a conversation with their teenager and he or she just isn't interested.

There are tough topics, however, that need to be discussed. Teenagers face pressures and temptations about alcohol and other drugs, sex, tobacco, guns and violence.

They need and deserve adult support. Don't wait for a crisis. Ideally, parents should find times and ways to talk with their teens *before* serious problems occur, preferably early in the lives of their children. But it is never too late to start.

Sometimes, you can simply begin a dialogue about these issues as part of normal conversation. Often, "teachable moments" happen during day-to-day activities. For example, you could discuss underage drinking when

someone gets intoxicated in the presence of your family, or in a movie, or when you see a newspaper story about an accident caused by teenage drinking. You could discuss violence, and better ways of solving problems, after watching a TV



Breaking the Ice

Why can't I get a discussion started with my son about alcohol, drugs or other tough issues? He just tells me "Everything is fine" or "It's my life" and walks away.

Below is an example of one good way to open a dialogue about a tough issue, and some roadblocks that you might encounter:

You: As a family, we've never talked about alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. I'd like to know what you think and feel about drugs—and I want to tell you what I think. I promise I won't punish you for what you think, or have done. I just want us to talk.

Teen: It's my life; I'm old enough to make my own decisions.

You: You're right. This is your life and you have to make your own decisions about what you do. I don't want to control you. But we do need to talk. I want to hear your thoughts, and I want to tell you mine. I promise to listen with an open mind, and ask that you do the same. We may disagree, but at least we will understand each other.

Teen: Forget it. You always end up lecturing me.

You: If our discussions have ended with me lecturing you, then I'm sorry. But, I won't lecture you now. I want to talk *with* you, not *at* you, and I want to hear what you have to say. I'm willing to hear your complaints, too. How do you feel about talking with me? Even someone as old as I am can change.

Teen: I don't know, but maybe we can talk later. Just not now.

You: OK, I can wait a little. Today is Monday. Let's both think about it for now, and we'll talk again on Thursday, because we do need to discuss these issues together.

Being Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Teens in minority ethnic and racial groups may face particular pressures related to their status as minorities. Parents of these teens should be especially sensitive to these pressures, as well as any cultural and language differences that may affect your teen's interactions at school, with peers, and with others.

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show or movie that portrays violence as a solution to a disagreement.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, try to be clear that your purpose is to build understanding and to be supportive, certainly not to find fault or to punish. If you can't nudge your child into a dialogue, back off for awhile. This strategy can be disarming. Then, give your son or daughter some time to think it over. A few days later, you can try again to start the discussion. Parents can be flexible in getting the dialogue going, but should not give up on the need for this discussion to eventually begin. Although it may be harder to get boys to open up, parents should engage in dialogue with their sons and daughters alike.

Today's teens, more than ever before, need to connect with adults—if not a parent, then a coach or teacher, grandparent or foster

parent, clergy member, or other trusted adult in their lives. Teens need at least one adult with whom they can talk openly. They should not be left to rely solely on other teens for important information, conversation, and help with problem solving about how to grow up wisely.

FIND

SOMEONE YOUR TEENS CAN TALK TO

Try to establish strong communication with your teen, but remember that some teens may talk more openly about sensitive topics with someone who is not their parent or guardian. If you are a parent, try not to let this hurt your feelings; remember that your child will respect you more in the long run if you encourage him or her to talk with someone else, if that is what works best. Single parents,

and other parents, may want to find a mentoring program that can be a source of support, and can provide someone with whom your teen can talk. Your teen's school guidance counselor may know about such programs.



**You don't trust me . . .
But they're my friends . . .
Everyone else is doing it . . .**

Teens need their independence, but how do you make sure they are safe? It's tough to decide when to give your teen more freedom. Do you hang on to the kite string for as long as you possibly can, or give the kite free air? The decision isn't easy. One parent's decision for his or her teen may not be right for other parents and their teens.

Although every adolescent is different, there are many experiences common to the teenage years. The most common may be the pull and push between dependence and independence.

Teens, at younger and younger ages, are putting themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—and for pregnancy. And some teens, and even younger children, smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, use other drugs, or commit acts of violence and other crimes. No wonder so many parents are concerned, even frightened; no wonder so many try to control the behavior of their teenage children.

It is important for parents to make rules for their young children. As children get older, however, they need to learn to make some of their own decisions and life choices. Teens need the chance to practice good decision-making skills, and to manage

new life experiences. Parents need to give teens the freedom to do just that. But there is a catch; teens must be ready. They need to agree to behave in responsible ways and show that they can handle the freedom. They also need to keep their parents informed. That way, parents know when to lend guidance and supervision, and how to support their teen's progress.

That's where respect, responsibility and reliability come in.

Respect: Respect is a two-way street, but it starts with you. Give your teens the respect that you would like to be given. Give them credit for their knowledge and abilities; pay attention and listen to them. That means showing confidence in your teen, and being supportive.

Responsibility: Teens are learning to take care of themselves as they prepare for adulthood. That's what growing up is all about. Give them an appropriate amount of freedom and independence. Encourage and promote responsibility and good decision-making, offering support and gentle help with difficult decisions. Let your teens know they can gain more freedom as they demonstrate increasingly responsible behavior.

Reliability: Part of growing up is learning and adapting to rules—rules about driving and work, rules about drink-



The Challenge

To help teens learn about the world and accept new challenges with the least amount of danger and harm. Parents must walk a fine line between controlling too much and being too relaxed about rules. When parents are too restrictive, they can push teens toward rebellion. When they are too permissive, teens may get out of control. It's a balancing act.



Increasing Responsibility and Freedom

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ing and dating, social rules and family rules. Teens will test the rules, but over time most will make these rules part of their lives. This kind of reliability is worthy of recognition and praise. **When you can rely on your teens behaving responsibly, it may be time to give them more freedom.**

Parents should believe in their teens; set high standards for them, encourage them,

expect them to achieve their goals, and provide consistent love and support—including practical help—so they can achieve the promise that lies within them.



CLOTHING AND HAIR

WHERE DO I DRAW THE LINE?

Jason is doing well in middle school. He's great with his younger brothers and helps around the house, but I'm concerned about some of his new friends. Some have dyed their hair odd colors; they wear baggy jeans with their boxer shorts showing. A few have pierced tongues and tattoos. A while ago, Jason asked about getting those baggy jeans. I said no, because the gang kids wear them. I hoped he'd forget about them, but he has asked again. Between the drugs in our neighborhood, baggy jeans, and new friends, I'm worried. I want to steer him away from problem kids. Should I let him buy the jeans? What should I do about his friends?

Adolescents are striving for independence. As their teens prepare for adulthood, parents should encourage independence, while making sure their teens don't drift too far from a positive course. How should parents react to the choices of their teenage children? In general, extend trust and give children as much freedom of choice as they can handle. Be sure to set limits, too. Your decisions about the baggy jeans and about your son's friends require careful evaluation of all the details. You need to think about your own values, look realistically at where Jason seems to be headed, understand what he is doing or wants to do and determine how best to promote his safety and growth.

Jason is doing well in school and not getting into trouble. Success in school gives children a sense of accomplishment. They can see a positive future for themselves and are less likely to want to join a gang. These facts argue

Get to Know Your Son's Friends

Ask your son to invite his friends to your home so you can meet them. You'll show that you have an open mind. If his friends behave poorly in your presence, your son will notice.

You also need to understand what the baggy jeans mean to Jason. Are they just a style he likes? Or is wearing them a way to identify with the gang types? Sometimes teens dress differently just to harmlessly show some independence from the family. Think back to your own adolescence, and remember the fashion changes. There may be some similarities.

Have a discussion with your son about his friends and about the clothing he likes to wear. Sometimes discussions can bridge differences. Maybe your son will be swayed by what you say about the jeans and gangs, or maybe he will convince you that baggy jeans have become a style that has little to do with belonging to a gang.

A conversation with your teen can help you decide whether there is a real problem or it is just a question of fashion.



for giving him more freedom. When it comes to his friends and his preferences in clothing, you need to gather more information if you're going to make a smart decision. You need to know more about your son's friends: What are they like? Do they use alcohol or other drugs? Are they in gangs? How does your son feel about these kids? How does he feel about drug use? How does he feel about gangs?

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting violently, abusing alcohol and other drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors. But family members—even in the most loving families—get angry at one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without a problem. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes be dangerous and may even become violent.

Some adults see anger as an emotion that should be suppressed, because it leads to trouble. Some grew up in families in which anger generally led to explosive behavior and even violence. Others were taught that it is not “nice” to be angry. Many adults are not good at managing anger, and expressing this emotion in a healthy way. It’s important that parents know how to manage anger successfully in family life, at work and in the community. And that same knowledge needs to be shared with children, so that they learn this important skill.

My teenage son doesn't know how to handle his intense feelings. He talks back to us and even swears at us. He doesn't do what we ask him to do. He seems to be trying to aggravate

us. I get so angry I blow up. We end up screaming at each other and -saying things we regret. I feel like things are out of control.

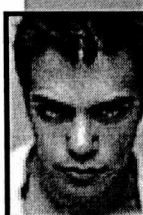
With the many changes that occur during adolescence, it’s not unusual for teenagers to feel anger and resentment toward parents. Adolescents struggle to establish their own independent identities as they prepare for adulthood. Sometimes anger is their way of asserting independence. This can wear thin on parents, who may fight back with their own anger, creating a vicious circle of escalating resentment.

The best solution to out-of-control anger—whether from a parent or from a teen—is to step back, and identify more positive, healthy ways to deal with strong feelings. We do this when we can calm down and respond in a disciplined and thoughtful way. By maintaining composure, parents can be good role models and open the door to constructive communication with their children.

But how do you keep calm when you feel pushed to the limit? Here are some suggestions:

TIPS FOR CALMING DOWN

- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes the issue is not worth the anger, or worth arguing about.
- **Take a deep breath; count to ten.** Think about the issue before a single word comes out of your mouth.
- **Go for a walk.**
- **Use “self-talk” to calm down.** That is, say something soothing to yourself such as: “I need to relax and stay calm. I can’t afford to blow up.”



Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

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- **Reframe the issue.** For example, when your son says something rude to you, it may be less a matter of him disrespecting you than a sign that he has a problem with his anger. "Framing" it this way, you focus on the fact that he needs your help in overcoming this problem.

- **Use humor.** Humor can sometimes be a good way to calm anger, but be sure not to use sarcasm, which can sometimes be hurtful.

Sometimes the hardest part of helping children learn to manage their anger is that parents have to look at their own practices. Parents need to ask:

- "Have I accepted my own anger and the anger of others in the family?"
- Do I express anger in positive and constructive ways?
- Do I resolve conflict well?
- Have I taught my children to accept and express their anger?"

Resolving conflict constructively may be a huge challenge, but it's an absolute necessity for the sake of every member of your family.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Once you are calm, you are in a better position to address the issues that caused the conflict. Here are some tips:

- **Give your point of view.** State the problem as you see it; speak clearly and calmly—don't yell.

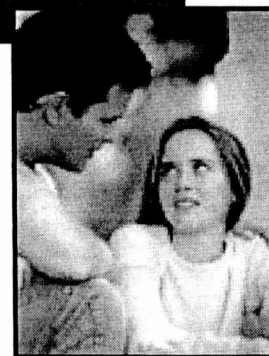
- **Ask to hear your teen's point of view.**

- **Pay attention, listen, and carefully consider what your teen is saying.**

- **Discuss ways to solve the dispute without a battle.**

- **Practice the art of compromise.** Find the middle ground you can both live with comfortably.

- **Assert your authority, when appropriate, but in a calm, yet firm manner.**



WHAT IF THE ANGER DOESN'T STOP?

When anger becomes a chronic problem for someone in the family, the underlying issue may be larger than you or your teen can manage. If you even *think* your family is at this crisis point, or if you even *think* you or any member of your family has a serious problem with anger management, it's time to seek help from a mental health professional. Recognize that this situation necessitates counseling, and sometimes that means the entire family will need help. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19).

Teenagers, like all of us, sometimes need help and guidance, but it can sometimes be difficult for parents to recognize when to intervene in their teenager's life. You know about the challenges that today's teenagers face—some of which are different than those you experienced as a teen. Understanding these challenges, and knowing when and how to intervene to help your child overcome them, is an essential role for parents.

It is also a difficult role. Being able to tell the difference between normal teenage

behavior and self-destructive, hurtful behavior can be difficult. The following examples are designed to help you understand some of the warning signs that your teenager may need help. Read through these examples and see if any sound familiar.

Remember, though, that every teenager is different and there is often no clear answer to your specific situation. If you are concerned, talk to your teenage children. At a minimum, let them know how you feel and tell them that you would like

What If Your Teen Is Being Bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem, affecting many children. A recent study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 students in grades 6 through 12 have been bullied in the past year.

Victims of bullies need help and support in responding to this aggressive behavior. Many parents give their children conflicting messages about how to respond to physical aggression. Should you encourage your teenager to "fight back" or not? We do not want to resort to violence, but we also do not want our children to be victims and to

feel powerless. Most experts agree that children should not hit back, other than for self-defense and survival. Retaliation perpetuates a cycle of violence. It may also lead to escalating physical confrontation, which can be very dangerous,

especially considering the possibility that weapons might be used.

Parents can help their children who have been teased or bullied learn to be powerful, without resorting to violence. You could start by letting your teenager

know that you seriously disapprove of taunting and other types of bullying behavior, and that you think no one should have to put up with this. You can empower teens by asking them if they have any ideas about what might end the bullying.

Parents can teach teens some powerful, non-

violent ways of responding when they are bullied:

- Demonstrate strength by using eye contact and positive self-assured body language, with their head held high and shoulders back.
- Practice "verbal self-defense", using anything from humor to clever comments to de-escalate tension.
- Proudly walk away from provocation, and ignore taunting.

Young people are entitled to a safe learning environment in their school. **Another way to empower your teenagers can be to encourage them to speak with school administrators about the problem.** In part they may want to raise the issue of their own situation, and their own safety fears. Sometimes, it is most empowering to discuss the situation as a school-wide problem, without focus on particular perpetrators. Parents should back up their children by also voicing the same concern. School/community partnerships can lead to effective programs that reduce bullying behavior.

If teenage children have been picked on for a long time, they probably have some intense emotions from that experience, and could benefit from talking about them. **Victims of bullies may experience anger, anxiety and even depression. Being the victim of a bully can also be a risk factor for violent behavior. Your teens need and deserve help coping with these feelings.** You or a mental health professional can give them opportunities to express themselves, and resolve these feelings.



Handling Tough Situations

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to talk. If you are still concerned, or if you think that your teenagers may hurt themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for assistance in finding the right resources.

BULLYING

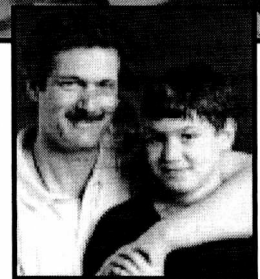
I was called to my 13-year-old son's school today because he stole some money from another boy during lunch. This wasn't the first incident. A few weeks ago, the principal called because Keith made another boy take the blame for graffiti he wrote on the school bus. No matter what we tell him, he constantly seems to get in trouble. What can I do?

You certainly have reason to be concerned about your son's behavior. He is acting like a bully and needs your help to put on the brakes. The principal was right to call. The school can set a clear standard—no bullying—and make sure that your son understands the consequences for violations of this rule. You, too, need to make clear that you disapprove of bullying. You need to help your son develop empathy—which is the ability to understand how other people feel—and to care about others' feelings. You will probably want to impose consequences on your son for his unacceptable behavior. Be firm, but do it in a loving way. Right now your son needs *your* empathy, understanding, and love. By providing this, you can show the power of caring about others in a positive way.

This still leaves the bigger part of the problem—getting to the reason for your son's behavior. You have to talk with him to determine why he is being a bully. What leads your son to behave in such hurtful ways?

With your help, or with the assistance of a professional, your son can understand his own motives for bullying. Some young people are bullies because they are bored and crave excitement; some do it to feel powerful; some engage in this behavior as a response to family problems; some do it for attention and to be popular with acknowledgment by their peer group. You need to ask him very detailed questions:

- Did you plan to take the other boy's lunch money beforehand, or was it a sudden urge?
- Why did you pick on that particular person?
- What were you thinking when you did it? (Ex: I need the money; I'll look cool.)
- How did you feel when you did it? (Ex: Excited, thrilled, frightened, powerful).
- How do you think the other boy felt?
- What's happening in your life or in our family that may be upsetting you?



When you understand the details of what happened, you can determine how to help your child. For example, if your son stole money because he saw it sitting on a lunch tray and had a sudden urge to grab it, he will need to learn to recognize his impulses, and to stop them. If he planned to steal money, pre-selected a victim and stole because he wanted to look important, he will need to learn positive ways to make friends and gain peer acceptance.

We have to help our children learn healthy and socially acceptable ways to cope with urges and anger, and to satisfy their emotional needs appropriately. A big challenge? Yes. But it's part of growing up and becoming a good citizen.

DRUG USE AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL

Our 16-year old daughter, Julia, was caught drinking at a party. We suspect that she has smoked marijuana, too. She's been doing poorly in school—in fact, now she's neglecting her schoolwork and failing one subject. We set up required study time, but it hasn't helped. She misses curfews and hasn't been doing her chores. We've talked with her

about alcohol, drugs and sex, and we've been clear about the rules and given her consequences when she has broken them. Obviously, it hasn't worked. She says I'm a nag. What else can I do?

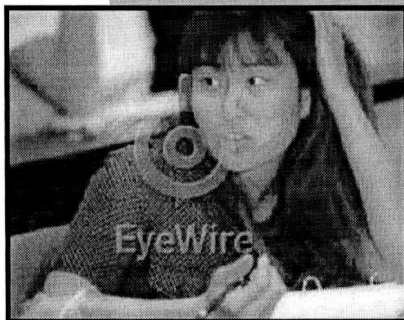
ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Julia's drinking and possible drug use may be the tip of the iceberg. Alcohol and drug use often occur along with other serious problems.

First, you need to talk to Julia about her alcohol and drug use, and find out what drugs she is using and how often she is using them. Don't confront her when she seems to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Wait until she is straight and sober. Then discuss your suspicions with her calmly and objectively, as you begin a dialogue about alcohol and other drugs. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules, and stick to it. Don't relent because she promises never to do it again. Make sure that she knows that her use of alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem and that she is harming herself.

If Julia has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you should get immediate help. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose chil-

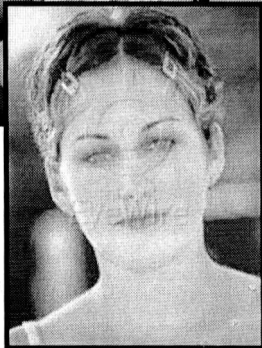
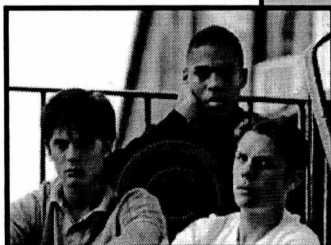


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dren have been through treatment programs can also provide information.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think Julia is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have her evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for information about how to find someone who can help.

Listed in the box at right are signs that may indicate problems with alcohol or other drugs. They could also indicate other problems, not related to drugs. In either case, if you observe significant changes in your teen's behavior, something is wrong. Start a dialogue with your teen about the problems. If you are still confused about whether alcohol or other drugs are part of the problem, or if you recognize that a substance abuse problem exists, get professional help.



SIGNS OF

POSSIBLE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Research has shown that there are a number of factors that make individuals more likely to initiate drug use and to progress to drug abuse and or addiction. Many of these could be identified early by family members and friends. It is important to note that many people may exhibit one or more of these signs, but not necessarily use drugs. These signs may occur in the following areas:

Family: deteriorating relationships with family; behavior changes, such as withdrawal or hostility

School: truancy; drop in grades; behavior problems

Social life: deteriorating relationships with old friends; developing a network of friends who are using alcohol or other drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities

Emotional life: basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy

Physical: memory problems, fatigue or hyper behavior; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming

Physical evidence: disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes or alcohol; signs of drug paraphernalia; use of incense; excess money or missing money

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 13, 2000

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MEMORANDUM FOR LISEL LOY

FROM: Bruce Reed

SUBJECT: Parents Matter Brochure

This brochure was created by the White House Council on Youth Violence to be distributed by national education associations to middle schools and secondary schools throughout the country. Included in the brochure is a proposed forward from the President that I am submitting to you for approval. The brochure will be complete and ready to go to print Tuesday, November 14, 2000, pending any comments or edits you may have. We would like to send this to the printer as soon as possible, and preferably by Friday, November 18, 2000.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have much to celebrate about our nation's young people. They are far healthier, more prosperous, and look forward to more promising lives than ever before in our history. Teens of all ethnicities are completing high school and enrolling in college at record rates, and more teenagers than ever before are volunteering to serve through community service. In addition, many harmful behaviors are on the decline, including youth violence and gun-related crime, homicide, suicide, teen pregnancy and, in the last few years, drug use. Nonetheless, the rates of youth violence, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, and unintended pregnancy, are still far too high in our country. Despite a marked decline in teen homicide over the past several years, far too many communities are scarred by violence.

We know that the best approach to the problem of youth violence is a comprehensive one requiring the collaborative efforts of students and parents, teachers, health care providers, law enforcement, judges, counselors, and religious leaders. That is why, among other initiatives, my Administration created the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* Initiative, to support effective, collaborative responses to violence, bringing together school nurses, counselors, teachers, and law enforcement, to promote a healthier future for our children and our communities.

At the same time, we know that young people continue to need support and

guidance from their parents, as they grow into adulthood. In May 2000, the First Lady and I hosted a conference on "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers." At this conference we heard from parents, researchers, professionals who work with teenagers, and from teenagers themselves. The message we heard, loud and clear, and confirmed by recent studies, is that teens view their parents as the best source of information and guidance on serious life issues, and that teenagers rate not having enough time with their parents as their top concern.

That is why I directed my White House Council on Youth Violence to develop information resources for parents. This guide provides parents some helpful communication tips for talking to their teenagers. It suggests ways to discuss difficult issues—such as violence, guns, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs—and helps parents identify the warning signs of harmful behaviors. In some instances, parents may need professional guidance to assist them in dealing with the challenges of raising a teenager, and this guide provides helpful resources.

The great American author and champion of human rights, Pearl Buck, once said, "If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." In our national struggle against youth violence, we must not fail our children. All of us, especially parents, share responsibility to keep our children safe. We've all got to do our part, and this guide should help.

— President William Jefferson Clinton

The White House Council on Youth Violence was established by President Clinton in October, 1999, to coordinate the federal government's efforts in the research and prevention of youth violence. The Council is chaired by Bruce Reed, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and the Council members are the Attorney General and the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and Treasury.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals contributed to the development of this document. The White House Council on Youth Violence wishes to thank Dr. Robert Schwebel, the primary author of this guide, and Teddi Fine, Charlotte Gillespie, Anne Mathews-Younes, Bill Modzeleski, Carolyn O'Connor, Louise Peloquin, and Farris Tuma, for their assistance.

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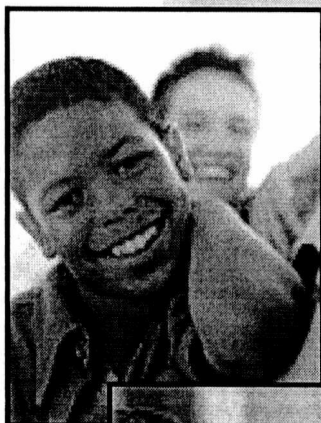
RADM Susan Blumenthal, M.D.
U.S. Assistant Surgeon General
Senior Public Health Advisor and
Scientific Editor

INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting time to be a teenager in America. Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing society, with hopes for a very promising future. Survey results show that 84% of high-school students plan to attend a four-year college. Teens overwhelmingly share their parents' values of honesty and hard work, and are engaged in positive activities. More than half of all teenagers volunteer with a community organization, attend a house of worship weekly, read the newspaper twice a week or more, and attend cultural events or visit museums.

In spite of this positive outlook, however, adolescence—the transition between childhood and adulthood—is still one of the most difficult times for children and parents alike. Growing up is more than the physical changes that occur, such as

getting taller or more muscular. This passage is a time for establishing independence, testing limits, trying on different roles, exploring new feelings and fostering intellectual growth. Above all, adolescence is a *process* that takes time to happen.



We have all heard the frightening and heart-breaking statistics about youth violence, depression, tobacco and alcohol

and other drug use. Even the best-informed young people are constantly tested by social pressures, emotional needs and their peers. The push and pull between right and wrong can become a tug of war between adolescent and parent.

Being a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or caregiver of a teen is both rewarding and challenging. Caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life.

This guide provides some useful tools to improve your communication with your teenager to help him or her get through adolescence successfully. Read it all or select the sections that help you the most.

- **Getting the Conversation Started**—tips for opening up the dialogue, even after it has been shut down. (Page 2.)
- **Increasing Responsibility and Freedom**—ideas for how to set the limits that protect your teens while still giving them room to grow and develop. (Page 6.)
- **Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours**—anger-management skills that you can use, and that you can share with your adolescent. (Page 8.)
- **Handling Tough Situations**—examples of difficult situations, identification of warning signs of trouble, and advice on how to handle certain problems. (Page 9.)
- **When Parents Need Help First**—helping your spouse, or yourself, deal with issues that are affecting your child. (Page 16.)
- **Getting Help for Your Teen**—suggestions about how to get help for your teen and your family. (Page 19.)

Many parents worry when their teenagers don't want to spend as much time with the family as they did when they were younger. This can be both hurtful and frightening. You worry about their safety and about their future. It is normal for children to want to spend more time with their friends during the teen years, but it shouldn't mean that teens ignore their families. Parents and teens need to take action to stay connected or to reconnect.

I used to be close with my daughter. She would talk with me about everything. Now she's 14 and avoids me. She is quiet at dinner, and then goes to her room or talks with friends on the phone all evening. Sometimes she gets moody and angry. I want to reach her the way I used to, but I don't know how to start.

Sometimes the solution is easy. Spend more time together. Suggest doing things that you both enjoy. Talk more. Dinner-time is an excellent opportunity for that kind of exchange. Talk about your day. Ask your teen about his or her day. Be

with their parents. You may be surprised to learn that a recent study indicated that most teenagers rate "not having enough time together" with parents as their top concern. Many will be glad that their parents care enough to make the effort to spend time with them. Some teens have a hard time expressing anger and upset feelings. They keep their feelings bottled inside. Parents need to draw such children out. Try to start a conversation by saying "I can see you've been upset. Let's talk about what's happening."

Some teens, however, may give parents the cold shoulder. If that happens, be patient, and be persistent until you break

How Do You Get Your Teenager to Start Talking to You Again?

The best way to help teens open up—and stay open—with parents and other adults in their lives, is by showing your acceptance of them. When they

make a mistake or misbehave, you can lovingly help them learn from their experience. Make sure they know that you love them, even when you may be deeply troubled by their behavior.



Why Do Teens Stop Talking?

Sometimes they're trying to be independent. Sometimes they're embarrassed about their own thoughts and feelings, such as anger, or their sexual desires. Sometimes, teens shut down because of pressures they feel at home, at school, or in the community. One of the most important reasons teens stop talking to you is that they're afraid to speak honestly with their parents. They believe if they talk openly about things they have done that might be wrong, they'll be given a lecture, punished, or criticized.



through. If you can't break through, there could be a more serious problem than embarrassment or a difficulty communicating.

sure the television is turned off and you and your teen are tuned in. Most teens agree that they want to spend more time

Getting the Conversation Started

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LISTENING TO YOUR TEEN

Let teens know you will listen and try to understand their point of view, without putting them down or trying to control them. Being open-minded sometimes can be difficult for adults. But to communicate with teens, parents need to do more than just talk; they need to listen, and really hear what their teens are saying. They also need to notice which issues are not being discussed and have the courage to start a dialogue about those issues.

When disagreements arise, listening does not mean that you give up your authority as a parent. It *does* mean giving teens a voice in matters that concern them. Through family dialogue, parents get to know what their teens are thinking and feeling, and teens get to know where their parents stand. Sometimes parents and teens can reach agreements when none seemed possible. Even when agreement cannot be reached, teens are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.



PRESSURES ON

TODAY'S TEENS

The pressures you felt as an adolescent have been magnified for teens today. You will recognize some of these issues that make it difficult for youth today as issues that concerned you during your youth. Others are unique to today's teens.

- Wanting to be part of a group
- HIV/AIDS
- Changing family structures
- Gangs and violence
- Insecurity about the future
- Money pressures
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy
- Media influences
- Concern about body image
- School pressures
- Easy access to alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and guns

TOUGH TOPICS

Parents can become frustrated when they try to start a conversation with their teenager and he or she just isn't interested.

There are tough topics, however, that need to be discussed. Teenagers face pressures and temptations about alcohol and other drugs, sex, tobacco, guns and violence.

They need and deserve adult support. Don't wait for a crisis. Ideally, parents should find times and ways to talk with their teens *before* serious problems occur, preferably early in the lives of their children. But it is never too late to start.

Sometimes, you can simply begin a dialogue about these issues as part of normal conversation. Often, "teachable moments" happen during day-to-day activities. For example, you could discuss underage drinking when

someone gets intoxicated in the presence of your family, or in a movie, or when you see a newspaper story about an accident caused by teenage drinking. You could discuss violence, and better ways of solving problems, after watching a TV



Breaking the Ice

Why can't I get a discussion started with my son about alcohol, drugs or other tough issues? He just tells me "Everything is fine" or "It's my life" and walks away.

Below is an example of one good way to open a dialogue about a tough issue, and some roadblocks that you might encounter:

You: As a family, we've never talked about alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. I'd like to know what you think and feel about drugs—and I want to tell you what I think. I promise I won't punish you for what you think, or have done. I just want us to talk.

Teen: It's my life; I'm old enough to make my own decisions.

You: You're right. This is your life and you have to make your own decisions about what you do. I don't want to control you. But we do need to talk. I want to hear your thoughts, and I want to tell you mine. I promise to listen with an open mind, and ask that you do the same. We may disagree, but at least we will understand each other.

Teen: Forget it. You always end up lecturing me.

You: If our discussions have ended with me lecturing you, then I'm sorry. But, I won't lecture you now. I want to talk *with* you, not *at* you, and I want to hear what you have to say. I'm willing to hear your complaints, too. How do you feel about talking with me? Even someone as old as I am can change.

Teen: I don't know, but maybe we can talk later. Just not now.

You: OK, I can wait a little. Today is Monday. Let's both think about it for now, and we'll talk again on Thursday, because we do need to discuss these issues together.

Being Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Teens in minority ethnic and racial groups may face particular pressures related to their status as minorities. Parents of these teens should be especially sensitive to these pressures, as well as any cultural and language differences that may affect your teen's interactions at school, with peers, and with others.

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show or movie that portrays violence as a solution to a disagreement.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, try to be clear that your purpose is to build understanding and to be supportive, certainly not to find fault or to punish. If you can't nudge your child into a dialogue, back off for awhile. This strategy can be disarming. Then, give your son or daughter some time to think it over. A few days later, you can try again to start the discussion. Parents can be flexible in getting the dialogue going, but should not give up on the need for this discussion to eventually begin. Although it may be harder to get boys to open up, parents should engage in dialogue with their sons and daughters alike.

Today's teens, more than ever before, need to connect with adults—if not a parent, then a coach or teacher, grandparent or foster

parent, clergy member, or other trusted adult in their lives. Teens need at least one adult with whom they can talk openly. They should not be left to rely solely on other teens for important information, conversation, and help with problem solving about how to grow up wisely.

FIND

SOMEONE YOUR TEENS CAN TALK TO

Try to establish strong communication with your teen, but remember that some teens may talk more openly about sensitive topics with someone who is not their parent or guardian. If you are a parent, try not to let this hurt your feelings; remember that your child will respect you more in the long run if you encourage him or her to talk with someone else, if that is what works best. Single parents,

and other parents, may want to find a mentoring program that can be a source of support, and can provide someone with whom your teen can talk. Your teen's school guidance counselor may know about such programs.



**You don't trust me . . .
But they're my friends . . .
Everyone else is doing it . . .**

Teens need their independence, but how do you make sure they are safe? It's tough to decide when to give your teen more freedom. Do you hang on to the kite string for as long as you possibly can, or give the kite free air? The decision isn't easy. One parent's decision for his or her teen may not be right for other parents and their teens.

Although every adolescent is different, there are many experiences common to the teenage years. The most common may be the pull and push between dependence and independence.

Teens, at younger and younger ages, are putting themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—and for pregnancy. And some teens, and even younger children, smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, use other drugs, or commit acts of violence and other crimes. No wonder so many parents are concerned, even frightened; no wonder so many try to control the behavior of their teenage children.

It is important for parents to make rules for their young children. As children get older, however, they need to learn to make some of their own decisions and life choices. Teens need the chance to practice good decision-making skills, and to manage

new life experiences. Parents need to give teens the freedom to do just that. But there is a catch; teens must be ready. They need to agree to behave in responsible ways and show that they can handle the freedom. They also need to keep their parents informed. That way, parents know when to lend guidance and supervision, and how to support their teen's progress.

That's where respect, responsibility and reliability come in.

Respect: Respect is a two-way street, but it starts with you. Give your teens the respect that you would like to be given. Give them credit for their knowledge and abilities; pay attention and listen to them. That means showing confidence in your teen, and being supportive.

Responsibility: Teens are learning to take care of themselves as they prepare for adulthood. That's what growing up is all about. Give them an appropriate amount of freedom and independence. Encourage and promote responsibility and good decision-making, offering support and gentle help with difficult decisions. Let your teens know they can gain more freedom as they demonstrate increasingly responsible behavior.

Reliability: Part of growing up is learning and adapting to rules—rules about driving and work, rules about drink-

The Challenge

To help teens learn about the world and accept new challenges with the least amount of danger and harm. Parents must walk a fine line between controlling too much and being too relaxed about rules. When parents are too restrictive, they can push teens toward rebellion. When they are too permissive, teens may get out of control. It's a balancing act.



Increasing Responsibility and Freedom

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ing and dating, social rules and family rules. Teens will test the rules, but over time most will make these rules part of their lives. This kind of reliability is worthy of recognition and praise. **When you can rely on your teens behaving responsibly, it may be time to give them more freedom.**

Parents should believe in their teens; set high standards for them, encourage them,

expect them to achieve their goals, and provide consistent love and support—including practical help—so they can achieve the promise that lies within them.



CLOTHING AND HAIR

WHERE DO I DRAW THE LINE?

Jason is doing well in middle school. He's great with his younger brothers and helps around the house, but I'm concerned about some of his new friends. Some have dyed their hair odd colors; they wear baggy jeans with their boxer shorts showing. A few have pierced tongues and tattoos. A while ago, Jason asked about getting those baggy jeans. I said no, because the gang kids wear them. I hoped he'd forget about them, but he has asked again. Between the drugs in our neighborhood, baggy jeans, and new friends, I'm worried. I want to steer him away from problem kids. Should I let him buy the jeans? What should I do about his friends?

Adolescents are striving for independence. As their teens prepare for adulthood, parents should encourage independence, while making sure their teens don't drift too far from a positive course. How should parents react to the choices of their teenage children? In general, extend trust and give children as much freedom of choice as they can handle. Be sure to set limits, too. Your decisions about the baggy jeans and about your son's friends require careful evaluation of all the details. You need to think about your own values, look realistically at where Jason seems to be headed, understand what he is doing or wants to do and determine how best to promote his safety and growth.

Jason is doing well in school and not getting into trouble. Success in school gives children a sense of accomplishment. They can see a positive future for themselves and are less likely to want to join a gang. These facts argue

Get to Know Your Son's Friends

Ask your son to invite his friends to your home so you can meet them. You'll show that you have an open mind. If his friends behave poorly in your presence, your son will notice.

You also need to understand what the baggy jeans mean to Jason. Are they just a style he likes? Or is wearing them a way to identify with the gang types? Sometimes teens dress differently just to harmlessly show some independence from the family. Think back to your own adolescence, and remember the fashion changes. There may be some similarities.

Have a discussion with your son about his friends and about the clothing he likes to wear. Sometimes discussions can bridge differences. Maybe your son will be swayed by what you say about the jeans and gangs, or maybe he will convince you that baggy jeans have become a style that has little to do with belonging to a gang.

A conversation with your teen can help you decide whether there is a real problem or it is just a question of fashion.

for giving him more freedom. When it comes to his friends and his preferences in clothing, you need to gather more information if you're going to make a smart decision. You need to know more about your son's friends: What are they like? Do they use alcohol or other drugs? Are they in gangs? How does your son feel about these kids? How does he feel about drug use? How does he feel about gangs?

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting violently, abusing alcohol and other drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors. But family members—even in the most loving families—get angry at one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without a problem. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes be dangerous and may even become violent.

Some adults see anger as an emotion that should be suppressed, because it leads to trouble. Some grew up in families in which anger generally led to explosive behavior and even violence. Others were taught that it is not “nice” to be angry. Many adults are not good at managing anger, and expressing this emotion in a healthy way. It’s important that parents know how to manage anger successfully in family life, at work and in the community. And that same knowledge needs to be shared with children, so that they learn this important skill.

My teenage son doesn't know how to handle his intense feelings. He talks back to us and even swears at us. He doesn't do what we ask him to do. He seems to be trying to aggravate

us. I get so angry I blow up. We end up screaming at each other and -saying things we regret. I feel like things are out of control.

With the many changes that occur during adolescence, it’s not unusual for teenagers to feel anger and resentment toward parents. Adolescents struggle to establish their own independent identities as they prepare for adulthood. Sometimes anger is their way of asserting independence. This can wear thin on parents, who may fight back with their own anger, creating a vicious circle of escalating resentment.

The best solution to out-of-control anger—whether from a parent or from a teen—is to step back, and identify more positive, healthy ways to deal with strong feelings. We do this when we can calm down and respond in a disciplined and thoughtful way. By maintaining composure, parents can be good role models and open the door to constructive communication with their children.

But how do you keep calm when you feel pushed to the limit? Here are some suggestions:

TIPS FOR CALMING DOWN

- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes the issue is not worth the anger, or worth arguing about.
- **Take a deep breath; count to ten.** Think about the issue before a single word comes out of your mouth.
- **Go for a walk.**
- **Use “self-talk” to calm down.** That is, say something soothing to yourself such as: “I need to relax and stay calm. I can’t afford to blow up.”



Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

- **Reframe the issue.** For example, when your son says something rude to you, it may be less a matter of him disrespecting you than a sign that he has a problem with his anger. "Framing" it this way, you focus on the fact that he needs your help in overcoming this problem.

- **Use humor.** Humor can sometimes be a good way to calm anger, but be sure not to use sarcasm, which can sometimes be hurtful.

Sometimes the hardest part of helping children learn to manage their anger is that parents have to look at their own practices. Parents need to ask:

- "Have I accepted my own anger and the anger of others in the family?"
- Do I express anger in positive and constructive ways?
- Do I resolve conflict well?
- Have I taught my children to accept and express their anger?"

Resolving conflict constructively may be a huge challenge, but it's an absolute necessity for the sake of every member of your family.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Once you are calm, you are in a better position to address the issues that caused the conflict. Here are some tips:

- **Give your point of view.** State the problem as you see it; speak clearly and calmly—don't yell.

- **Ask to hear your teen's point of view.**

- **Pay attention, listen, and carefully consider what your teen is saying.**

- **Discuss ways to solve the dispute without a battle.**

- **Practice the art of compromise.** Find the middle ground you can both live with comfortably.

- **Assert your authority, when appropriate, but in a calm, yet firm manner.**



WHAT IF THE ANGER DOESN'T STOP?

When anger becomes a chronic problem for someone in the family, the underlying issue may be larger than you or your teen can manage. If you even *think* your family is at this crisis point, or if you even *think* you or any member of your family has a serious problem with anger management, it's time to seek help from a mental health professional. Recognize that this situation necessitates counseling, and sometimes that means the entire family will need help. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19).

Teenagers, like all of us, sometimes need help and guidance, but it can sometimes be difficult for parents to recognize when to intervene in their teenager's life. You know about the challenges that today's teenagers face—some of which are different than those you experienced as a teen. Understanding these challenges, and knowing when and how to intervene to help your child overcome them, is an essential role for parents.

It is also a difficult role. Being able to tell the difference between normal teenage

behavior and self-destructive, hurtful behavior can be difficult. The following examples are designed to help you understand some of the warning signs that your teenager may need help. Read through these examples and see if any sound familiar.

Remember, though, that every teenager is different and there is often no clear answer to your specific situation. If you are concerned, talk to your teenage children. At a minimum, let them know how you feel and tell them that you would like

What If Your Teen Is Being Bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem, affecting many children. A recent study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 students in grades 6 through 12 have been bullied in the past year.

Victims of bullies need help and support in responding to this aggressive behavior. Many parents give their children conflicting messages about how to respond to physical aggression. Should you encourage your teenager to "fight back" or not? We do not want to resort to violence, but we also do not want our children to be victims and to

feel powerless. Most experts agree that children should not hit back, other than for self-defense and survival. Retaliation perpetuates a cycle of violence. It may also lead to escalating physical confrontation, which can be very dangerous,

especially considering the possibility that weapons might be used.

Parents can help their children who have been teased or bullied learn to be powerful, without resorting to violence. You could start by letting your teenager

know that you seriously disapprove of taunting and other types of bullying behavior, and that you think no one should have to put up with this. You can empower teens by asking them if they have any ideas about what might end the bullying.

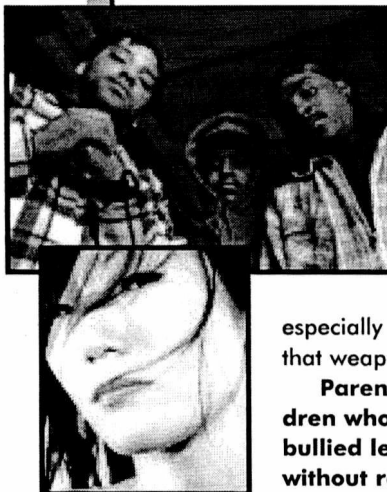
Parents can teach teens some powerful, non-

violent ways of responding when they are bullied:

- Demonstrate strength by using eye contact and positive self-assured body language, with their head held high and shoulders back.
- Practice "verbal self-defense", using anything from humor to clever comments to de-escalate tension.
- Proudly walk away from provocation, and ignore taunting.

Young people are entitled to a safe learning environment in their school. **Another way to empower your teenagers can be to encourage them to speak with school administrators about the problem.** In part they may want to raise the issue of their own situation, and their own safety fears. Sometimes, it is most empowering to discuss the situation as a school-wide problem, without focus on particular perpetrators. Parents should back up their children by also voicing the same concern. School/community partnerships can lead to effective programs that reduce bullying behavior.

If teenage children have been picked on for a long time, they probably have some intense emotions from that experience, and could benefit from talking about them. **Victims of bullies may experience anger, anxiety and even depression. Being the victim of a bully can also be a risk factor for violent behavior. Your teens need and deserve help coping with these feelings.** You or a mental health professional can give them opportunities to express themselves, and resolve these feelings.



Handling Tough Situations

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

to talk. If you are still concerned, or if you think that your teenagers may hurt themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for assistance in finding the right resources.

BULLYING

I was called to my 13-year-old son's school today because he stole some money from another boy during lunch. This wasn't the first incident. A few weeks ago, the principal called because Keith made another boy take the blame for graffiti he wrote on the school bus. No matter what we tell him, he constantly seems to get in trouble. What can I do?

You certainly have reason to be concerned about your son's behavior. He is acting like a bully and needs your help to put on the brakes. The principal was right to call. The school can set a clear standard—no bullying—and make sure that your son understands the consequences for violations of this rule. You, too, need to make clear that you disapprove of bullying. You need to help your son develop empathy—which is the ability to understand how other people feel—and to care about others' feelings. You will probably want to impose consequences on your son for his unacceptable behavior. Be firm, but do it in a loving way. Right now your son needs *your* empathy, understanding, and love. By providing this, you can show the power of caring about others in a positive way.

This still leaves the bigger part of the problem—getting to the reason for your son's behavior. You have to talk with him to determine why he is being a bully. What leads your son to behave in such hurtful ways?

With your help, or with the assistance of a professional, your son can understand his own motives for bullying. Some young people are bullies because they are bored and crave excitement; some do it to feel powerful; some engage in this behavior as a response to family problems; some do it for attention and to be popular with acknowledgment by their peer group. You need to ask him very detailed questions:

- Did you plan to take the other boy's lunch money beforehand, or was it a sudden urge?
- Why did you pick on that particular person?
- What were you thinking when you did it? (Ex: I need the money; I'll look cool.)
- How did you feel when you did it? (Ex: Excited, thrilled, frightened, powerful).
- How do you think the other boy felt?
- What's happening in your life or in our family that may be upsetting you?



When you understand the details of what happened, you can determine how to help your child. For example, if your son stole money because he saw it sitting on a lunch tray and had a sudden urge to grab it, he will need to learn to recognize his impulses, and to stop them. If he planned to steal money, pre-selected a victim and stole because he wanted to look important, he will need to learn positive ways to make friends and gain peer acceptance.

We have to help our children learn healthy and socially acceptable ways to cope with urges and anger, and to satisfy their emotional needs appropriately. A big challenge? Yes. But it's part of growing up and becoming a good citizen.

DRUG USE AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL

Our 16-year old daughter, Julia, was caught drinking at a party. We suspect that she has smoked marijuana, too. She's been doing poorly in school—in fact, now she's neglecting her schoolwork and failing one subject. We set up required study time, but it hasn't helped. She misses curfews and hasn't been doing her chores. We've talked with her

about alcohol, drugs and sex, and we've been clear about the rules and given her consequences when she has broken them. Obviously, it hasn't worked. She says I'm a nag. What else can I do?

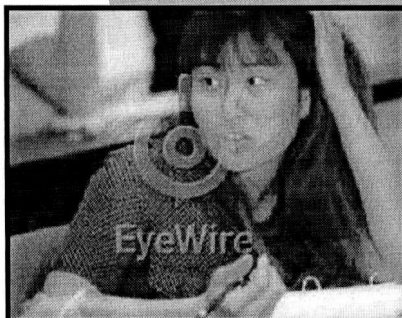
ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Julia's drinking and possible drug use may be the tip of the iceberg. Alcohol and drug use often occur along with other serious problems.

First, you need to talk to Julia about her alcohol and drug use, and find out what drugs she is using and how often she is using them. Don't confront her when she seems to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Wait until she is straight and sober. Then discuss your suspicions with her calmly and objectively, as you begin a dialogue about alcohol and other drugs. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules, and stick to it. Don't relent because she promises never to do it again. Make sure that she knows that her use of alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem and that she is harming herself.

If Julia has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you should get immediate help. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose chil-



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dren have been through treatment programs can also provide information.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think Julia is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have her evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for information about how to find someone who can help.

Listed in the box at right are signs that may indicate problems with alcohol or other drugs. They could also indicate other problems, not related to drugs. In either case, if you observe significant changes in your teen's behavior, something is wrong. Start a dialogue with your teen about the problems. If you are still confused about whether alcohol or other drugs are part of the problem, or if you recognize that a substance abuse problem exists, get professional help.

SIGNS OF

POSSIBLE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Research has shown that there are a number of factors that make individuals more likely to initiate drug use and to progress to drug abuse and or addiction. Many of these could be identified early by family members and friends. It is important to note that many people may exhibit one or more of these signs, but not necessarily use drugs. These signs may occur in the following areas:

Family: deteriorating relationships with family; behavior changes, such as withdrawal or hostility

School: truancy; drop in grades; behavior problems

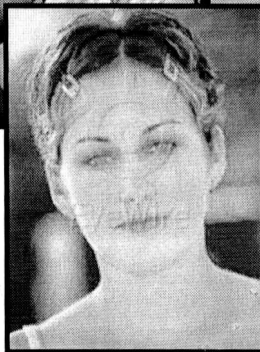
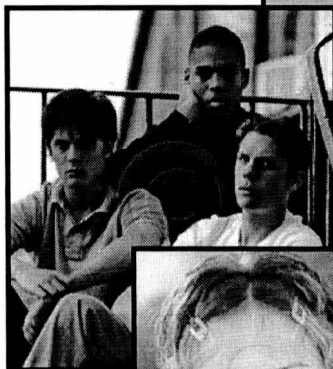
Social life: deteriorating relationships with old friends; developing a network of friends who are using alcohol or other drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities

Emotional life: basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy

Physical: memory problems, fatigue or hyper behavior; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming

Physical evidence: disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes or alcohol; signs of drug paraphernalia; use of incense; excess money or missing money

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health



VP

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 13, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR LISEL LOY

NOV 13 PM 2:04

FROM: Bruce Reed

SUBJECT: Parents Matter Brochure

This brochure was created by the White House Council on Youth Violence to be distributed by national education associations to middle schools and secondary schools throughout the country. Included in the brochure is a proposed forward from the President that I am submitting to you for approval. The brochure will be complete and ready to go to print Tuesday, November 14, 2000, pending any comments or edits you may have. We would like to send this to the printer as soon as possible, and preferably by Friday, November 18, 2000.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have much to celebrate about our nation's young people. They are far healthier, more prosperous, and look forward to more promising lives than ever before in our history. Teens of all ethnicities are completing high school and enrolling in college at record rates, and more teenagers than ever before are volunteering to serve through community service. In addition, many harmful behaviors are on the decline, including youth violence and gun-related crime, homicide, suicide, teen pregnancy and, in the last few years, drug use. Nonetheless, the rates of youth violence, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, and unintended pregnancy, are still far too high in our country. Despite a marked decline in teen homicide over the past several years, far too many communities are scarred by violence.

We know that the best approach to the problem of youth violence is a comprehensive one requiring the collaborative efforts of students and parents, teachers, health care providers, law enforcement, judges, counselors, and religious leaders. That is why, among other initiatives, my Administration created the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* Initiative, to support effective, collaborative responses to violence, bringing together school nurses, counselors, teachers, and law enforcement, to promote a healthier future for our children and our communities.

At the same time, we know that young people continue to need support and

guidance from their parents, as they grow into adulthood. In May 2000, the First Lady and I hosted a conference on "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers." At this conference we heard from parents, researchers, professionals who work with teenagers, and from teenagers themselves. The message we heard, loud and clear, and confirmed by recent studies, is that teens view their parents as the best source of information and guidance on serious life issues, and that teenagers rate not having enough time with their parents as their top concern.

That is why I directed my White House Council on Youth Violence to develop information resources for parents. This guide provides parents some helpful communication tips for talking to their teenagers. It suggests ways to discuss difficult issues—such as violence, guns, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs—and helps parents identify the warning signs of harmful behaviors. In some instances, parents may need professional guidance to assist them in dealing with the challenges of raising a teenager, and this guide provides helpful resources.

The great American author and champion of human rights, Pearl Buck, once said, "If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." In our national struggle against youth violence, we must not fail our children. All of us, especially parents, share responsibility to keep our children safe. We've all got to do our part, and this guide should help.

— President William Jefferson Clinton

The White House Council on Youth Violence was established by President Clinton in October, 1999, to coordinate the federal government's efforts in the research and prevention of youth violence. The Council is chaired by Bruce Reed, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and the Council members are the Attorney General and the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and Treasury.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals contributed to the development of this document. The White House Council on Youth Violence wishes to thank Dr. Robert Schwebel, the primary author of this guide, and Teddi Fine, Charlotte Gillespie, Anne Mathews-Younes, Bill Modzeleski, Carolyn O'Connor, Louise Peloquin, and Farris Tuma, for their assistance.

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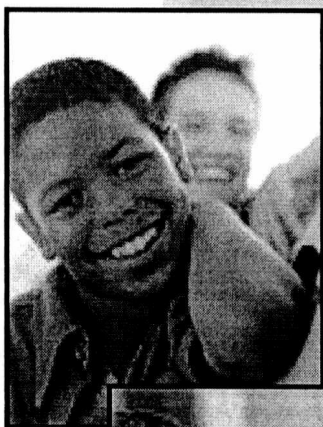
RADM Susan Blumenthal, M.D.
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INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting time to be a teenager in America. Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing society, with hopes for a very promising future. Survey results show that 84% of high-school students plan to attend a four-year college. Teens overwhelmingly share their parents' values of honesty and hard work, and are engaged in positive activities. More than half of all teenagers volunteer with a community organization, attend a house of worship weekly, read the newspaper twice a week or more, and attend cultural events or visit museums.

In spite of this positive outlook, however, adolescence—the transition between childhood and adulthood—is still one of the most difficult times for children and parents alike. Growing up is more than the physical changes that occur, such as

getting taller or more muscular. This passage is a time for establishing independence, testing limits, trying on different roles, exploring new feelings and fostering intellectual growth. Above all, adolescence is a *process* that takes time to happen.



We have all heard the frightening and heart-breaking statistics about youth violence, depression, tobacco and alcohol

and other drug use. Even the best-informed young people are constantly tested by social pressures, emotional needs and their peers. The push and pull between right and wrong can become a tug of war between adolescent and parent.

Being a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or caregiver of a teen is both rewarding and challenging. Caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life.

This guide provides some useful tools to improve your communication with your teenager to help him or her get through adolescence successfully. Read it all or select the sections that help you the most.

- **Getting the Conversation Started**—tips for opening up the dialogue, even after it has been shut down. (Page 2.)
- **Increasing Responsibility and Freedom**—ideas for how to set the limits that protect your teens while still giving them room to grow and develop. (Page 6.)
- **Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours**—anger-management skills that you can use, and that you can share with your adolescent. (Page 8.)
- **Handling Tough Situations**—examples of difficult situations, identification of warning signs of trouble, and advice on how to handle certain problems. (Page 9.)
- **When Parents Need Help First**—helping your spouse, or yourself, deal with issues that are affecting your child. (Page 16.)
- **Getting Help for Your Teen**—suggestions about how to get help for your teen and your family. (Page 19.)

Many parents worry when their teenagers don't want to spend as much time with the family as they did when they were younger. This can be both hurtful and frightening. You worry about their safety and about their future. It is normal for children to want to spend more time with their friends during the teen years, but it shouldn't mean that teens ignore their families. Parents and teens need to take action to stay connected or to reconnect.

I used to be close with my daughter. She would talk with me about everything. Now she's 14 and avoids me. She is quiet at dinner, and then goes to her room or talks with friends on the phone all evening. Sometimes she gets moody and angry. I want to reach her the way I used to, but I don't know how to start.

Sometimes the solution is easy. Spend more time together. Suggest doing things that you both enjoy. Talk more. Dinner-time is an excellent opportunity for that kind of exchange. Talk about your day. Ask your teen about his or her day. Be

with their parents. You may be surprised to learn that a recent study indicated that most teenagers rate "not having enough time together" with parents as their top concern. Many will be glad that their parents care enough to make the effort to spend time with them. Some teens have a hard time expressing anger and upset feelings. They keep their feelings bottled inside. Parents need to draw such children out. Try to start a conversation by saying "I can see you've been upset. Let's talk about what's happening."

Some teens, however, may give parents the cold shoulder. If that happens, be patient, and be persistent until you break

How Do You Get Your Teenager to Start Talking to You Again?

The best way to help teens open up—and stay open—with parents and other adults in their lives, is by showing your acceptance of them. When they

make a mistake or misbehave, you can lovingly help them learn from their experience. Make sure they know that you love them, even when you may be deeply troubled by their behavior.



Why Do Teens Stop Talking?

Sometimes they're trying to be independent. Sometimes they're embarrassed about their own thoughts and feelings, such as anger, or their sexual desires. Sometimes, teens shut down because of pressures they feel at home, at school, or in the community. One of the most important reasons teens stop talking to you is that they're afraid to speak honestly with their parents. They believe if they talk openly about things they have done that might be wrong, they'll be given a lecture, punished, or criticized.



through. If you can't break through, there could be a more serious problem than embarrassment or a difficulty communicating.

sure the television is turned off and you and your teen are tuned in. Most teens agree that they want to spend more time

Getting the Conversation Started

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LISTENING TO YOUR TEEN

Let teens know you will listen and try to understand their point of view, without putting them down or trying to control them. Being open-minded sometimes can be difficult for adults. But to communicate with teens, parents need to do more than just talk; they need to listen, and really hear what their teens are saying. They also need to notice which issues are not being discussed and have the courage to start a dialogue about those issues.

When disagreements arise, listening does not mean that you give up your authority as a parent. It *does* mean giving teens a voice in matters that concern them. Through family dialogue, parents get to know what their teens are thinking and feeling, and teens get to know where their parents stand. Sometimes parents and teens can reach agreements when none seemed possible. Even when agreement cannot be reached, teens are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.



PRESSURES ON

TODAY'S TEENS

The pressures you felt as an adolescent have been magnified for teens today. You will recognize some of these issues that make it difficult for youth today as issues that concerned you during your youth. Others are unique to today's teens.

- Wanting to be part of a group
- HIV/AIDS
- Changing family structures
- Gangs and violence
- Insecurity about the future
- Money pressures
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy
- Media influences
- Concern about body image
- School pressures
- Easy access to alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and guns

TOUGH TOPICS

Parents can become frustrated when they try to start a conversation with their teenager and he or she just isn't interested.

There are tough topics, however, that need to be discussed. Teenagers face pressures and temptations about alcohol and other drugs, sex, tobacco, guns and violence. They need and deserve adult support. Don't wait for a crisis. Ideally, parents should find times and ways to talk with their teens *before* serious problems occur, preferably early in the lives of their children. But it is never too late to start.

Sometimes, you can simply begin a dialogue about these issues as part of normal conversation. Often, "teachable moments" happen during day-to-day activities. For example, you could discuss underage drinking when

someone gets intoxicated in the presence of your family, or in a movie, or when you see a newspaper story about an accident caused by teenage drinking. You could discuss violence, and better ways of solving problems, after watching a TV



Being Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Teens in minority ethnic and racial groups may face particular pressures related to their status as minorities. Parents of these teens should be especially sensitive to these pressures, as well as any cultural and language differences that may affect your teen's interactions at school, with peers, and with others.

Breaking the Ice

Why can't I get a discussion started with my son about alcohol, drugs or other tough issues? He just tells me "Everything is fine" or "It's my life" and walks away.

Below is an example of one good way to open a dialogue about a tough issue, and some roadblocks that you might encounter:

You: As a family, we've never talked about alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. I'd like to know what you think and feel about drugs—and I want to tell you what I think. I promise I won't punish you for what you think, or have done. I just want us to talk.

Teen: It's my life; I'm old enough to make my own decisions.

You: You're right. This is your life and you have to make your own decisions about what you do. I don't want to control you. But we do need to talk. I want to hear your thoughts, and I want to tell you mine. I promise to listen with an open mind, and ask that you do the same. We may disagree, but at least we will understand each other.

Teen: Forget it. You always end up lecturing me.

You: If our discussions have ended with me lecturing you, then I'm sorry. But, I won't lecture you now. I want to talk *with* you, not *at* you, and I want to hear what you have to say. I'm willing to hear your complaints, too. How do you feel about talking with me? Even someone as old as I am can change.

Teen: I don't know, but maybe we can talk later. Just not now.

You: OK, I can wait a little. Today is Monday. Let's both think about it for now, and we'll talk again on Thursday, because we do need to discuss these issues together.

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show or movie that portrays violence as a solution to a disagreement.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, try to be clear that your purpose is to build understanding and to be supportive, certainly not to find fault or to punish. If you can't nudge your child into a dialogue, back off for awhile. This strategy can be disarming. Then, give your son or daughter some time to think it over. A few days later, you can try again to start the discussion. Parents can be flexible in getting the dialogue going, but should not give up on the need for this discussion to eventually begin. Although it may be harder to get boys to open up, parents should engage in dialogue with their sons and daughters alike.

Today's teens, more than ever before, need to connect with adults—if not a parent, then a coach or teacher, grandparent or foster

parent, clergy member, or other trusted adult in their lives. Teens need at least one adult with whom they can talk openly. They should not be left to rely solely on other teens for important information, conversation, and help with problem solving about how to grow up wisely.

FIND

SOMEONE YOUR TEENS CAN TALK TO

Try to establish strong communication with your teen, but remember that some teens may talk more openly about sensitive topics with someone who is not their parent or guardian. If you are a parent, try not to let this hurt your feelings; remember that your child will respect you more in the long run if you encourage him or her to talk with someone else, if that is what works best. Single parents,

and other parents, may want to find a mentoring program that can be a source of support, and can provide someone with whom your teen can talk. Your teen's school guidance counselor may know about such programs.



**You don't trust me . . .
But they're my friends . . .
Everyone else is doing it . . .**

Teens need their independence, but how do you make sure they are safe? It's tough to decide when to give your teen more freedom. Do you hang on to the kite string for as long as you possibly can, or give the kite free air? The decision isn't easy. One parent's decision for his or her teen may not be right for other parents and their teens.

Although every adolescent is different, there are many experiences common to the teenage years. The most common may be the pull and push between dependence and independence.

Teens, at younger and younger ages, are putting themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—and for pregnancy. And some teens, and even younger children, smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, use other drugs, or commit acts of violence and other crimes. No wonder so many parents are concerned, even frightened; no wonder so many try to control the behavior of their teenage children.

It is important for parents to make rules for their young children. As children get older, however, they need to learn to make some of their own decisions and life choices. Teens need the chance to practice good decision-making skills, and to manage

new life experiences. Parents need to give teens the freedom to do just that. But there is a catch; teens must be ready. They need to agree to behave in responsible ways and show that they can handle the freedom. They also need to keep their parents informed. That way, parents know when to lend guidance and supervision, and how to support their teen's progress.

That's where respect, responsibility and reliability come in.

Respect: Respect is a two-way street, but it starts with you. Give your teens the respect that you would like to be given. Give them credit for their knowledge and abilities; pay attention and listen to them. That means showing confidence in your teen, and being supportive.

Responsibility: Teens are learning to take care of themselves as they prepare for adulthood. That's what growing up is all about. Give them an appropriate amount of freedom and independence. Encourage and promote responsibility and good decision-making, offering support and gentle help with difficult decisions. Let your teens know they can gain more freedom as they demonstrate increasingly responsible behavior.

Reliability: Part of growing up is learning and adapting to rules—rules about driving and work, rules about drink-



The Challenge

To help teens learn about the world and accept new challenges with the least amount of danger and harm. Parents must walk a fine line between controlling too much and being too relaxed about rules. When parents are too restrictive, they can push teens toward rebellion. When they are too permissive, teens may get out of control. It's a balancing act.



Increasing Responsibility and Freedom

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ing and dating, social rules and family rules. Teens will test the rules, but over time most will make these rules part of their lives. This kind of reliability is worthy of recognition and praise. **When you can rely on your teens behaving responsibly, it may be time to give them more freedom.**

Parents should believe in their teens; set high standards for them, encourage them,

expect them to achieve their goals, and provide consistent love and support—including practical help—so they can achieve the promise that lies within them.



CLOTHING AND HAIR

WHERE DO I DRAW THE LINE?

Jason is doing well in middle school. He's great with his younger brothers and helps around the house, but I'm concerned about some of his new friends. Some have dyed their hair odd colors; they wear baggy jeans with their boxer shorts showing. A few have pierced tongues and tattoos. A while ago, Jason asked about getting those baggy jeans. I said no, because the gang kids wear them. I hoped he'd forget about them, but he has asked again. Between the drugs in our neighborhood, baggy jeans, and new friends, I'm worried. I want to steer him away from problem kids. Should I let him buy the jeans? What should I do about his friends?

Adolescents are striving for independence. As their teens prepare for adulthood, parents should encourage independence, while making sure their teens don't drift too far from a positive course. How should parents react to the choices of their teenage children? In general, extend trust and give children as much freedom of choice as they can handle. Be sure to set limits, too. Your decisions about the baggy jeans and about your son's friends require careful evaluation of all the details. You need to think about your own values, look realistically at where Jason seems to be headed, understand what he is doing or wants to do and determine how best to promote his safety and growth.

Jason is doing well in school and not getting into trouble. Success in school gives children a sense of accomplishment. They can see a positive future for themselves and are less likely to want to join a gang. These facts argue

Get to Know Your Son's Friends

Ask your son to invite his friends to your home so you can meet them. You'll show that you have an open mind. If his friends behave poorly in your presence, your son will notice.

You also need to understand what the baggy jeans mean to Jason. Are they just a style he likes? Or is wearing them a way to identify with the gang types? Sometimes teens dress differently just to harmlessly show some independence from the family. Think back to your own adolescence, and remember the fashion changes. There may be some similarities.

Have a discussion with your son about his friends and about the clothing he likes to wear. Sometimes discussions can bridge differences. Maybe your son will be swayed by what you say about the jeans and gangs, or maybe he will convince you that baggy jeans have become a style that has little to do with belonging to a gang.

A conversation with your teen can help you decide whether there is a real problem or it is just a question of fashion.

for giving him more freedom. When it comes to his friends and his preferences in clothing, you need to gather more information if you're going to make a smart decision. You need to know more about your son's friends: What are they like? Do they use alcohol or other drugs? Are they in gangs? How does your son feel about these kids? How does he feel about drug use? How does he feel about gangs?

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting violently, abusing alcohol and other drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors. But family members—even in the most loving families—get angry at one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without a problem. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes be dangerous and may even become violent.

Some adults see anger as an emotion that should be suppressed, because it leads to trouble. Some grew up in families in which anger generally led to explosive behavior and even violence. Others were taught that it is not “nice” to be angry. Many adults are not good at managing anger, and expressing this emotion in a healthy way. It’s important that parents know how to manage anger successfully in family life, at work and in the community. And that same knowledge needs to be shared with children, so that they learn this important skill.

My teenage son doesn't know how to handle his intense feelings. He talks back to us and even swears at us. He doesn't do what we ask him to do. He seems to be trying to aggravate

us. I get so angry I blow up. We end up screaming at each other and -saying things we regret. I feel like things are out of control.

With the many changes that occur during adolescence, it’s not unusual for teenagers to feel anger and resentment toward parents. Adolescents struggle to establish their own independent identities as they prepare for adulthood. Sometimes anger is their way of asserting independence. This can wear thin on parents, who may fight back with their own anger, creating a vicious circle of escalating resentment.

The best solution to out-of-control anger—whether from a parent or from a teen—is to step back, and identify more positive, healthy ways to deal with strong feelings. We do this when we can calm down and respond in a disciplined and thoughtful way. By maintaining composure, parents can be good role models and open the door to constructive communication with their children.

But how do you keep calm when you feel pushed to the limit? Here are some suggestions:

TIPS FOR CALMING DOWN

- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes the issue is not worth the anger, or worth arguing about.
- **Take a deep breath; count to ten.** Think about the issue before a single word comes out of your mouth.
- **Go for a walk.**
- **Use “self-talk” to calm down.** That is, say something soothing to yourself such as: “I need to relax and stay calm. I can’t afford to blow up.”



Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

- **Reframe the issue.** For example, when your son says something rude to you, it may be less a matter of him disrespecting you than a sign that he has a problem with his anger. "Framing" it this way, you focus on the fact that he needs your help in overcoming this problem.

- **Use humor.** Humor can sometimes be a good way to calm anger, but be sure not to use sarcasm, which can sometimes be hurtful.

Sometimes the hardest part of helping children learn to manage their anger is that parents have to look at their own practices. Parents need to ask:

- "Have I accepted my own anger and the anger of others in the family?"
- Do I express anger in positive and constructive ways?
- Do I resolve conflict well?
- Have I taught my children to accept and express their anger?"

Resolving conflict constructively may be a huge challenge, but it's an absolute necessity for the sake of every member of your family.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Once you are calm, you are in a better position to address the issues that caused the conflict. Here are some tips:

- **Give your point of view.** State the problem as you see it; speak clearly and calmly—don't yell.

- **Ask to hear your teen's point of view.**

- **Pay attention, listen, and carefully consider what your teen is saying.**

- **Discuss ways to solve the dispute without a battle.**

- **Practice the art of compromise.** Find the middle ground you can both live with comfortably.

- **Assert your authority, when appropriate, but in a calm, yet firm manner.**



WHAT IF THE ANGER DOESN'T STOP?

When anger becomes a chronic problem for someone in the family, the underlying issue may be larger than you or your teen can manage. If you even *think* your family is at this crisis point, or if you even *think* you or any member of your family has a serious problem with anger management, it's time to seek help from a mental health professional. Recognize that this situation necessitates counseling, and sometimes that means the entire family will need help. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19).

Teenagers, like all of us, sometimes need help and guidance, but it can sometimes be difficult for parents to recognize when to intervene in their teenager's life. You know about the challenges that today's teenagers face—some of which are different than those you experienced as a teen. Understanding these challenges, and knowing when and how to intervene to help your child overcome them, is an essential role for parents.

It is also a difficult role. Being able to tell the difference between normal teenage

behavior and self-destructive, hurtful behavior can be difficult. The following examples are designed to help you understand some of the warning signs that your teenager may need help. Read through these examples and see if any sound familiar.

Remember, though, that every teenager is different and there is often no clear answer to your specific situation. If you are concerned, talk to your teenage children. At a minimum, let them know how you feel and tell them that you would like

What If Your Teen Is Being Bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem, affecting many children. A recent study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 students in grades 6 through 12 have been bullied in the past year.

Victims of bullies need help and support in responding to this aggressive behavior. Many parents give their children conflicting messages about how to respond to physical aggression. Should you encourage your teenager to "fight back" or not? We do not want to resort to violence, but we also do not want our children to be victims and to

feel powerless. Most experts agree that children should not hit back, other than for self-defense and survival. Retaliation perpetuates a cycle of violence. It may also lead to escalating physical confrontation, which can be very dangerous,

especially considering the possibility that weapons might be used.

Parents can help their children who have been teased or bullied learn to be powerful, without resorting to violence. You could start by letting your teenager

know that you seriously disapprove of taunting and other types of bullying behavior, and that you think no one should have to put up with this. You can empower teens by asking them if they have any ideas about what might end the bullying.

Parents can teach teens some powerful, non-

violent ways of responding when they are bullied:

- Demonstrate strength by using eye contact and positive self-assured body language, with their head held high and shoulders back.
- Practice "verbal self-defense", using anything from humor to clever comments to de-escalate tension.
- Proudly walk away from provocation, and ignore taunting.

Young people are entitled to a safe learning environment in their school. **Another way to empower your teenagers can be to encourage them to speak with school administrators about the problem.** In part they may want to raise the issue of their own situation, and their own safety fears. Sometimes, it is most empowering to discuss the situation as a school-wide problem, without focus on particular perpetrators. Parents should back up their children by also voicing the same concern. School/community partnerships can lead to effective programs that reduce bullying behavior.

If teenage children have been picked on for a long time, they probably have some intense emotions from that experience, and could benefit from talking about them. **Victims of bullies may experience anger, anxiety and even depression. Being the victim of a bully can also be a risk factor for violent behavior. Your teens need and deserve help coping with these feelings.** You or a mental health professional can give them opportunities to express themselves, and resolve these feelings.



Handling Tough Situations

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

to talk. If you are still concerned, or if you think that your teenagers may hurt themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for assistance in finding the right resources.

BULLYING

I was called to my 13-year-old son's school today because he stole some money from another boy during lunch. This wasn't the first incident. A few weeks ago, the principal called because Keith made another boy take the blame for graffiti he wrote on the school bus. No matter what we tell him, he constantly seems to get in trouble. What can I do?

You certainly have reason to be concerned about your son's behavior. He is acting like a bully and needs your help to put on the brakes. The principal was right to call. The school can set a clear standard—no bullying—and make sure that your son understands the consequences for violations of this rule. You, too, need to make clear that you disapprove of bullying. You need to help your son develop empathy—which is the ability to understand how other people feel—and to care about others' feelings. You will probably want to impose consequences on your son for his unacceptable behavior. Be firm, but do it in a loving way. Right now your son needs *your* empathy, understanding, and love. By providing this, you can show the power of caring about others in a positive way.

This still leaves the bigger part of the problem—getting to the reason for your son's behavior. You have to talk with him to determine why he is being a bully. What leads your son to behave in such hurtful ways?

With your help, or with the assistance of a professional, your son can understand his own motives for bullying. Some young people are bullies because they are bored and crave excitement; some do it to feel powerful; some engage in this behavior as a response to family problems; some do it for attention and to be popular with acknowledgment by their peer group. You need to ask him very detailed questions:

- Did you plan to take the other boy's lunch money beforehand, or was it a sudden urge?
- Why did you pick on that particular person?
- What were you thinking when you did it? (Ex: I need the money; I'll look cool.)
- How did you feel when you did it? (Ex: Excited, thrilled, frightened, powerful).
- How do you think the other boy felt?
- What's happening in your life or in our family that may be upsetting you?



When you understand the details of what happened, you can determine how to help your child. For example, if your son stole money because he saw it sitting on a lunch tray and had a sudden urge to grab it, he will need to learn to recognize his impulses, and to stop them. If he planned to steal money, pre-selected a victim and stole because he wanted to look important, he will need to learn positive ways to make friends and gain peer acceptance.

We have to help our children learn healthy and socially acceptable ways to cope with urges and anger, and to satisfy their emotional needs appropriately. A big challenge? Yes. But it's part of growing up and becoming a good citizen.

DRUG USE AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL

Our 16-year old daughter, Julia, was caught drinking at a party. We suspect that she has smoked marijuana, too. She's been doing poorly in school—in fact, now she's neglecting her schoolwork and failing one subject. We set up required study time, but it hasn't helped. She misses curfews and hasn't been doing her chores. We've talked with her

about alcohol, drugs and sex, and we've been clear about the rules and given her consequences when she has broken them.

Obviously, it hasn't worked. She says I'm a nag. What else can I do?

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

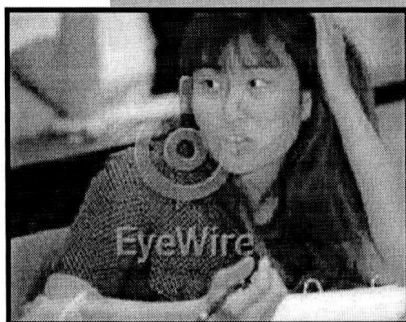
Julia's drinking and possible drug use may be the tip of the iceberg. Alcohol and drug use often occur along with other serious problems.

First, you need to talk to Julia about her alcohol and drug use, and find out what drugs she is using and how often she is using them. Don't confront her when she seems to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Wait until she is straight and sober. Then discuss your suspicions with her calmly and objectively, as you begin a dialogue about alcohol and other drugs. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules, and stick to it. Don't relent because she promises never to do it again. Make

sure that she knows that her use of alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem and that she is harming herself.

If Julia has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you should get immediate help. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose chil-

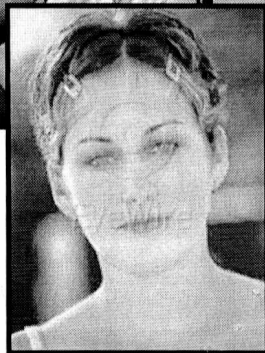
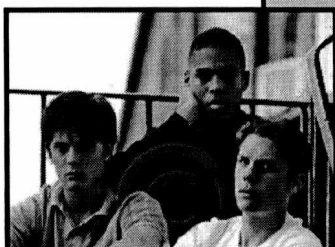


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dren have been through treatment programs can also provide information.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think Julia is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have her evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for information about how to find someone who can help.

Listed in the box at right are signs that may indicate problems with alcohol or other drugs. They could also indicate other problems, not related to drugs. In either case, if you observe significant changes in your teen's behavior, something is wrong. Start a dialogue with your teen about the problems. If you are still confused about whether alcohol or other drugs are part of the problem, or if you recognize that a substance abuse problem exists, get professional help.



SIGNS OF

POSSIBLE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Research has shown that there are a number of factors that make individuals more likely to initiate drug use and to progress to drug abuse and or addiction. Many of these could be identified early by family members and friends. It is important to note that many people may exhibit one or more of these signs, but not necessarily use drugs. These signs may occur in the following areas:

Family: deteriorating relationships with family; behavior changes, such as withdrawal or hostility

School: truancy; drop in grades; behavior problems

Social life: deteriorating relationships with old friends; developing a network of friends who are using alcohol or other drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities

Emotional life: basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy

Physical: memory problems, fatigue or hyper behavior; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming

Physical evidence: disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes or alcohol; signs of drug paraphernalia; use of incense; excess money or missing money

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 13, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR LISEL LOY

FROM: Bruce Reed

NOV 13 PM 2:04

SUBJECT: Parents Matter Brochure

This brochure was created by the White House Council on Youth Violence to be distributed by national education associations to middle schools and secondary schools throughout the country. Included in the brochure is a proposed forward from the President that I am submitting to you for approval. The brochure will be complete and ready to go to print Tuesday, November 14, 2000, pending any comments or edits you may have. We would like to send this to the printer as soon as possible, and preferably by Friday, November 18, 2000.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have much to celebrate about our nation's young people. They are far healthier, more prosperous, and look forward to more promising lives than ever before in our history. Teens of all ethnicities are completing high school and enrolling in college at record rates, and more teenagers than ever before are volunteering to serve through community service. In addition, many harmful behaviors are on the decline, including youth violence and gun-related crime, homicide, suicide, teen pregnancy and, in the last few years, drug use. Nonetheless, the rates of youth violence, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, and unintended pregnancy, are still far too high in our country. Despite a marked decline in teen homicide over the past several years, far too many communities are scarred by violence.

We know that the best approach to the problem of youth violence is a comprehensive one requiring the collaborative efforts of students and parents, teachers, health care providers, law enforcement, judges, counselors, and religious leaders. That is why, among other initiatives, my Administration created the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* Initiative, to support effective, collaborative responses to violence, bringing together school nurses, counselors, teachers, and law enforcement, to promote a healthier future for our children and our communities.

At the same time, we know that young people continue to need support and

guidance from their parents, as they grow into adulthood. In May 2000, the First Lady and I hosted a conference on "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers." At this conference we heard from parents, researchers, professionals who work with teenagers, and from teenagers themselves. The message we heard, loud and clear, and confirmed by recent studies, is that teens view their parents as the best source of information and guidance on serious life issues, and that teenagers rate not having enough time with their parents as their top concern.

That is why I directed my White House Council on Youth Violence to develop information resources for parents. This guide provides parents some helpful communication tips for talking to their teenagers. It suggests ways to discuss difficult issues—such as violence, guns, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs—and helps parents identify the warning signs of harmful behaviors. In some instances, parents may need professional guidance to assist them in dealing with the challenges of raising a teenager, and this guide provides helpful resources.

The great American author and champion of human rights, Pearl Buck, once said, "If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." In our national struggle against youth violence, we must not fail our children. All of us, especially parents, share responsibility to keep our children safe. We've all got to do our part, and this guide should help.

—President William Jefferson Clinton

The White House Council on Youth Violence was established by President Clinton in October, 1999, to coordinate the federal government's efforts in the research and prevention of youth violence. The Council is chaired by Bruce Reed, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and the Council members are the Attorney General and the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and Treasury.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals contributed to the development of this document. The White House Council on Youth Violence wishes to thank Dr. Robert Schwebel, the primary author of this guide, and Teddi Fine, Charlotte Gillespie, Anne Mathews-Younes, Bill Modzeleski, Carolyn O'Connor, Louise Peloquin, and Farris Tuma, for their assistance.

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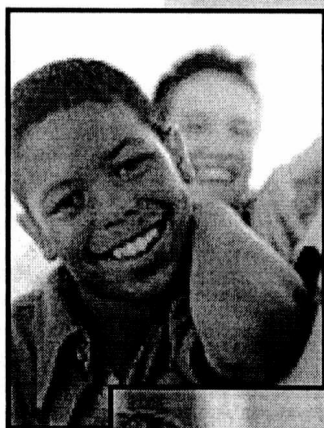
RADM Susan Blumenthal, M.D.
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INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting time to be a teenager in America. Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing society, with hopes for a very promising future. Survey results show that 84% of high-school students plan to attend a four-year college. Teens overwhelmingly share their parents' values of honesty and hard work, and are engaged in positive activities. More than half of all teenagers volunteer with a community organization, attend a house of worship weekly, read the newspaper twice a week or more, and attend cultural events or visit museums.

In spite of this positive outlook, however, adolescence—the transition between childhood and adulthood—is still one of the most difficult times for children and parents alike. Growing up is more than the physical changes that occur, such as

getting taller or more muscular. This passage is a time for establishing independence, testing limits, trying on different roles, exploring new feelings and fostering intellectual growth. Above all, adolescence is a *process* that takes time to happen.



We have all heard the frightening and heart-breaking statistics about youth violence, depression, tobacco and alcohol

and other drug use. Even the best-informed young people are constantly tested by social pressures, emotional needs and their peers. The push and pull between right and wrong can become a tug of war between adolescent and parent.

Being a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or caregiver of a teen is both rewarding and challenging. Caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life.

This guide provides some useful tools to improve your communication with your teenager to help him or her get through adolescence successfully. Read it all or select the sections that help you the most.

- **Getting the Conversation Started**—tips for opening up the dialogue, even after it has been shut down. (Page 2.)
- **Increasing Responsibility and Freedom**—ideas for how to set the limits that protect your teens while still giving them room to grow and develop. (Page 6.)
- **Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours**—anger-management skills that you can use, and that you can share with your adolescent. (Page 8.)
- **Handling Tough Situations**—examples of difficult situations, identification of warning signs of trouble, and advice on how to handle certain problems. (Page 9.)
- **When Parents Need Help First**—helping your spouse, or yourself, deal with issues that are affecting your child. (Page 16.)
- **Getting Help for Your Teen**—suggestions about how to get help for your teen and your family. (Page 19.)

Many parents worry when their teenagers don't want to spend as much time with the family as they did when they were younger. This can be both hurtful and frightening. You worry about their safety and about their future. It is normal for children to want to spend more time with their friends during the teen years, but it shouldn't mean that teens ignore their families. Parents and teens need to take action to stay connected or to reconnect.

I used to be close with my daughter. She would talk with me about everything. Now she's 14 and avoids me. She is quiet at dinner, and then goes to her room or talks with friends on the phone all evening. Sometimes she gets moody and angry. I want to reach her the way I used to, but I don't know how to start.

Sometimes the solution is easy. Spend more time together. Suggest doing things that you both enjoy. Talk more. Dinner-time is an excellent opportunity for that kind of exchange. Talk about your day. Ask your teen about his or her day. Be

with their parents. You may be surprised to learn that a recent study indicated that most teenagers rate "not having enough time together" with parents as their top concern. Many will be glad that their parents care enough to make the effort to spend time with them. Some teens have a hard time expressing anger and upset feelings. They keep their feelings bottled inside. Parents need to draw such children out. Try to start a conversation by saying "I can see you've been upset. Let's talk about what's happening."

Some teens, however, may give parents the cold shoulder. If that happens, be patient, and be persistent until you break

How Do You Get Your Teenager to Start Talking to You Again?

The best way to help teens open up—and stay open—with parents and other adults in their lives, is by showing your acceptance of them. When they

make a mistake or misbehave, you can lovingly help them learn from their experience. Make sure they know that you love them, even when you may be deeply troubled by their behavior.



Why Do Teens Stop Talking?

Sometimes they're trying to be independent. Sometimes they're embarrassed about their own thoughts and feelings, such as anger, or their sexual desires. Sometimes, teens shut down because of pressures they feel at home, at school, or in the community. One of the most important reasons teens stop talking to you is that they're afraid to speak honestly with their parents. They believe if they talk openly about things they have done that might be wrong, they'll be given a lecture, punished, or criticized.



through. If you can't break through, there could be a more serious problem than embarrassment or a difficulty communicating.

sure the television is turned off and you and your teen are tuned in. Most teens agree that they want to spend more time

Getting the Conversation Started

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LISTENING TO YOUR TEEN

Let teens know you will listen and try to understand their point of view, without putting them down or trying to control them. Being open-minded sometimes can be difficult for adults. But to communicate with teens, parents need to do more than just talk; they need to listen, and really hear what their teens are saying. They also need to notice which issues are not being discussed and have the courage to start a dialogue about those issues.

When disagreements arise, listening does not mean that you give up your authority as a parent. It *does* mean giving teens a voice in matters that concern them. Through family dialogue, parents get to know what their teens are thinking and feeling, and teens get to know where their parents stand. Sometimes parents and teens can reach agreements when none seemed possible. Even when agreement cannot be reached, teens are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.



PRESSURES ON

TODAY'S TEENS

The pressures you felt as an adolescent have been magnified for teens today. You will recognize some of these issues that make it difficult for youth today as issues that concerned you during your youth. Others are unique to today's teens.

- Wanting to be part of a group
- HIV/AIDS
- Changing family structures
- Gangs and violence
- Insecurity about the future
- Money pressures
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy
- Media influences
- Concern about body image
- School pressures
- Easy access to alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and guns

TOUGH TOPICS

Parents can become frustrated when they try to start a conversation with their teenager and he or she just isn't interested.

There are tough topics, however, that need to be discussed. Teenagers face pressures and temptations about alcohol and other drugs, sex, tobacco, guns and violence.

They need and deserve adult support. Don't wait for a crisis. Ideally, parents should find times and ways to talk with their teens *before* serious problems occur, preferably early in the lives of their children. But it is never too late to start.

Sometimes, you can simply begin a dialogue about these issues as part of normal conversation. Often, "teachable moments" happen during day-to-day activities. For example, you could discuss underage drinking when

someone gets intoxicated in the presence of your family, or in a movie, or when you see a newspaper story about an accident caused by teenage drinking. You could discuss violence, and better ways of solving problems, after watching a TV



Breaking the Ice

Why can't I get a discussion started with my son about alcohol, drugs or other tough issues? He just tells me "Everything is fine" or "It's my life" and walks away.

Below is an example of one good way to open a dialogue about a tough issue, and some roadblocks that you might encounter:

You: As a family, we've never talked about alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. I'd like to know what you think and feel about drugs—and I want to tell you what I think. I promise I won't punish you for what you think, or have done. I just want us to talk.

Teen: It's my life; I'm old enough to make my own decisions.

You: You're right. This is your life and you have to make your own decisions about what you do. I don't want to control you. But we do need to talk. I want to hear your thoughts, and I want to tell you mine. I promise to listen with an open mind, and ask that you do the same. We may disagree, but at least we will understand each other.

Teen: Forget it. You always end up lecturing me.

You: If our discussions have ended with me lecturing you, then I'm sorry. But, I won't lecture you now. I want to talk *with* you, not *at* you, and I want to hear what you have to say. I'm willing to hear your complaints, too. How do you feel about talking with me? Even someone as old as I am can change.

Teen: I don't know, but maybe we can talk later. Just not now.

You: OK, I can wait a little. Today is Monday. Let's both think about it for now, and we'll talk again on Thursday, because we do need to discuss these issues together.

Being Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Teens in minority ethnic and racial groups may face particular pressures related to their status as minorities. Parents of these teens should be especially sensitive to these pressures, as well as any cultural and language differences that may affect your teen's interactions at school, with peers, and with others.

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show or movie that portrays violence as a solution to a disagreement.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, try to be clear that your purpose is to build understanding and to be supportive, certainly not to find fault or to punish. If you can't nudge your child into a dialogue, back off for awhile. This strategy can be disarming. Then, give your son or daughter some time to think it over. A few days later, you can try again to start the discussion. Parents can be flexible in getting the dialogue going, but should not give up on the need for this discussion to eventually begin. Although it may be harder to get boys to open up, parents should engage in dialogue with their sons and daughters alike.

Today's teens, more than ever before, need to connect with adults—if not a parent, then a coach or teacher, grandparent or foster

parent, clergy member, or other trusted adult in their lives. Teens need at least one adult with whom they can talk openly. They should not be left to rely solely on other teens for important information, conversation, and help with problem solving about how to grow up wisely.

FIND

SOMEONE YOUR TEENS CAN TALK TO

Try to establish strong communication with your teen, but remember that some teens may talk more openly about sensitive topics with someone who is not their parent or guardian. If you are a parent, try not to let this hurt your feelings; remember that your child will respect you more in the long run if you encourage him or her to talk with someone else, if that is what works best. Single parents,

and other parents, may want to find a mentoring program that can be a source of support, and can provide someone with whom your teen can talk. Your teen's school guidance counselor may know about such programs.



**You don't trust me . . .
But they're my friends . . .
Everyone else is doing it . . .**

Teens need their independence, but how do you make sure they are safe? It's tough to decide when to give your teen more freedom. Do you hang on to the kite string for as long as you possibly can, or give the kite free air? The decision isn't easy. One parent's decision for his or her teen may not be right for other parents and their teens.

Although every adolescent is different, there are many experiences common to the teenage years. The most common may be the pull and push between dependence and independence.

Teens, at younger and younger ages, are putting themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—and for pregnancy. And some teens, and even younger children, smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, use other drugs, or commit acts of violence and other crimes. No wonder so many parents are concerned, even frightened; no wonder so many try to control the behavior of their teenage children.

It is important for parents to make rules for their young children. As children get older, however, they need to learn to make some of their own decisions and life choices. Teens need the chance to practice good decision-making skills, and to manage

new life experiences. Parents need to give teens the freedom to do just that. But there is a catch; teens must be ready. They need to agree to behave in responsible ways and show that they can handle the freedom. They also need to keep their parents informed. That way, parents know when to lend guidance and supervision, and how to support their teen's progress.

That's where respect, responsibility and reliability come in.

Respect: Respect is a two-way street, but it starts with you. Give your teens the respect that you would like to be given. Give them credit for their knowledge and abilities; pay attention and listen to them. That means showing confidence in your teen, and being supportive.

Responsibility: Teens are learning to take care of themselves as they prepare for adulthood. That's what growing up is all about. Give them an appropriate amount of freedom and independence. Encourage and promote responsibility and good decision-making, offering support and gentle help with difficult decisions. Let your teens know they can gain more freedom as they demonstrate increasingly responsible behavior.

Reliability: Part of growing up is learning and adapting to rules—rules about driving and work, rules about drink-



The Challenge

To help teens learn about the world and accept new challenges with the least amount of danger and harm. Parents must walk a fine line between controlling too much and being too relaxed about rules. When parents are too restrictive, they can push teens toward rebellion. When they are too permissive, teens may get out of control. It's a balancing act.



Increasing Responsibility and Freedom

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ing and dating, social rules and family rules. Teens will test the rules, but over time most will make these rules part of their lives.

This kind of reliability is worthy of recognition and praise. **When you can rely on your teens behaving responsibly, it may be time to give them more freedom.**

Parents should believe in their teens; set high standards for them, encourage them,

expect them to achieve their goals, and provide consistent love and support—including practical help—so they can achieve the promise that lies within them.



CLOTHING AND HAIR

WHERE DO I DRAW THE LINE?

Jason is doing well in middle school. He's great with his younger brothers and helps around the house, but I'm concerned about some of his new friends. Some have dyed their hair odd colors; they wear baggy jeans with their boxer shorts showing. A few have pierced tongues and tattoos. A while ago, Jason asked about getting those baggy jeans. I said no, because the gang kids wear them. I hoped he'd forget about them, but he has asked again. Between the drugs in our neighborhood, baggy jeans, and new friends, I'm worried. I want to steer him away from problem kids. Should I let him buy the jeans? What should I do about his friends?

Adolescents are striving for independence. As their teens prepare for adulthood, parents should encourage independence, while making sure their teens don't drift too far from a positive course. How should parents react to the choices of their teenage children? In general, extend trust and give children as much freedom of choice as they can handle. Be sure to set limits, too. Your decisions about the baggy jeans and about your son's friends require careful evaluation of all the details. You need to think about your own values, look realistically at where Jason seems to be headed, understand what he is doing or wants to do and determine how best to promote his safety and growth.

Jason is doing well in school and not getting into trouble. Success in school gives children a sense of accomplishment. They can see a positive future for themselves and are less likely to want to join a gang. These facts argue

Get to Know Your Son's Friends

Ask your son to invite his friends to your home so you can meet them. You'll show that you have an open mind. If his friends behave poorly in your presence, your son will notice.

You also need to understand what the baggy jeans mean to Jason. Are they just a style he likes? Or is wearing them a way to identify with the gang types? Sometimes teens dress differently just to harmlessly show some independence from the family. Think back to your own adolescence, and remember the fashion changes. There may be some similarities.

Have a discussion with your son about his friends and about the clothing he likes to wear. Sometimes discussions can bridge differences. Maybe your son will be swayed by what you say about the jeans and gangs, or maybe he will convince you that baggy jeans have become a style that has little to do with belonging to a gang.

A conversation with your teen can help you decide whether there is a real problem or it is just a question of fashion.



for giving him more freedom. When it comes to his friends and his preferences in clothing, you need to gather more information if you're going to make a smart decision. You need to know more about your son's friends: What are they like? Do they use alcohol or other drugs? Are they in gangs? How does your son feel about these kids? How does he feel about drug use? How does he feel about gangs?

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting violently, abusing alcohol and other drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors. But family members—even in the most loving families—get angry at one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without a problem. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes be dangerous and may even become violent.

Some adults see anger as an emotion that should be suppressed, because it leads to trouble. Some grew up in families in which anger generally led to explosive behavior and even violence. Others were taught that it is not “nice” to be angry. Many adults are not good at managing anger, and expressing this emotion in a healthy way. It’s important that parents know how to manage anger successfully in family life, at work and in the community. And that same knowledge needs to be shared with children, so that they learn this important skill.

My teenage son doesn't know how to handle his intense feelings. He talks back to us and even swears at us. He doesn't do what we ask him to do. He seems to be trying to aggravate

us. I get so angry I blow up. We end up screaming at each other and -saying things we regret. I feel like things are out of control.

With the many changes that occur during adolescence, it’s not unusual for teenagers to feel anger and resentment toward parents. Adolescents struggle to establish their own independent identities as they prepare for adulthood. Sometimes anger is their way of asserting independence. This can wear thin on parents, who may fight back with their own anger, creating a vicious circle of escalating resentment.

The best solution to out-of-control anger—whether from a parent or from a teen—is to step back, and identify more positive, healthy ways to deal with strong feelings. We do this when we can calm down and respond in a disciplined and thoughtful way. By maintaining composure, parents can be good role models and open the door to constructive communication with their children.

But how do you keep calm when you feel pushed to the limit? Here are some suggestions:

TIPS FOR CALMING DOWN

- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes the issue is not worth the anger, or worth arguing about.
- **Take a deep breath; count to ten.** Think about the issue before a single word comes out of your mouth.
- **Go for a walk.**
- **Use “self-talk” to calm down.** That is, say something soothing to yourself such as: “I need to relax and stay calm. I can’t afford to blow up.”



Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

- **Reframe the issue.** For example, when your son says something rude to you, it may be less a matter of him disrespecting you than a sign that he has a problem with his anger. "Framing" it this way, you focus on the fact that he needs your help in overcoming this problem.

- **Use humor.** Humor can sometimes be a good way to calm anger, but be sure not to use sarcasm, which can sometimes be hurtful.

Sometimes the hardest part of helping children learn to manage their anger is that parents have to look at their own practices. Parents need to ask:

- "Have I accepted my own anger and the anger of others in the family?"
- Do I express anger in positive and constructive ways?
- Do I resolve conflict well?
- Have I taught my children to accept and express their anger?"

Resolving conflict constructively may be a huge challenge, but it's an absolute necessity for the sake of every member of your family.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Once you are calm, you are in a better position to address the issues that caused the conflict. Here are some tips:

- **Give your point of view.** State the problem as you see it; speak clearly and calmly—don't yell.

- **Ask to hear your** teen's point of view.

- **Pay attention, listen, and carefully consider what your teen is saying.**

- **Discuss ways to solve the dispute without a battle.**

- **Practice the art of compromise.** Find the middle ground you can both live with comfortably.

- **Assert your authority, when appropriate, but in a calm, yet firm manner.**



WHAT IF THE ANGER DOESN'T STOP?

When anger becomes a chronic problem for someone in the family, the underlying issue may be larger than you or your teen can manage. If you even *think* your family is at this crisis point, or if you even *think* you or any member of your family has a serious problem with anger management, it's time to seek help from a mental health professional. Recognize that this situation necessitates counseling, and sometimes that means the entire family will need help. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19).

Teenagers, like all of us, sometimes need help and guidance, but it can sometimes be difficult for parents to recognize when to intervene in their teenager's life. You know about the challenges that today's teenagers face—some of which are different than those you experienced as a teen. Understanding these challenges, and knowing when and how to intervene to help your child overcome them, is an essential role for parents.

It is also a difficult role. Being able to tell the difference between normal teenage

behavior and self-destructive, hurtful behavior can be difficult. The following examples are designed to help you understand some of the warning signs that your teenager may need help. Read through these examples and see if any sound familiar.

Remember, though, that every teenager is different and there is often no clear answer to your specific situation. If you are concerned, talk to your teenage children. At a minimum, let them know how you feel and tell them that you would like

What If Your Teen Is Being Bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem, affecting many children. A recent study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 students in grades 6 through 12 have been bullied in the past year.

Victims of bullies need help and support in responding to this aggressive behavior. Many parents give their children conflicting messages about how to respond to physical aggression. Should you encourage your teenager to "fight back" or not? We do not want to resort to violence, but we also do not want our children to be victims and to

feel powerless. Most experts agree that children should not hit back, other than for self-defense and survival. Retaliation perpetuates a cycle of violence. It may also lead to escalating physical confrontation, which can be very dangerous,

especially considering the possibility that weapons might be used.

Parents can help their children who have been teased or bullied learn to be powerful, without resorting to violence. You could start by letting your teenager

know that you seriously disapprove of taunting and other types of bullying behavior, and that you think no one should have to put up with this. You can empower teens by asking them if they have any ideas about what might end the bullying.

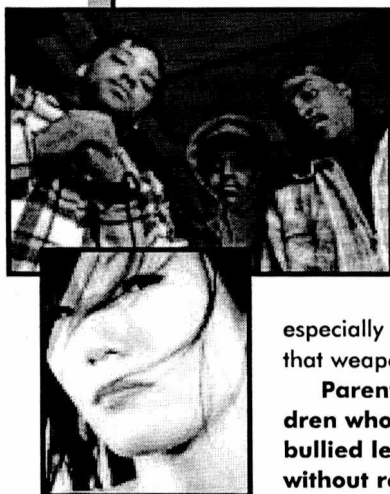
Parents can teach teens some powerful, non-

violent ways of responding when they are bullied:

- Demonstrate strength by using eye contact and positive self-assured body language, with their head held high and shoulders back.
- Practice "verbal self-defense", using anything from humor to clever comments to de-escalate tension.
- Proudly walk away from provocation, and ignore taunting.

Young people are entitled to a safe learning environment in their school. **Another way to empower your teenagers can be to encourage them to speak with school administrators about the problem.** In part they may want to raise the issue of their own situation, and their own safety fears. Sometimes, it is most empowering to discuss the situation as a school-wide problem, without focus on particular perpetrators. Parents should back up their children by also voicing the same concern. School/community partnerships can lead to effective programs that reduce bullying behavior.

If teenage children have been picked on for a long time, they probably have some intense emotions from that experience, and could benefit from talking about them. **Victims of bullies may experience anger, anxiety and even depression. Being the victim of a bully can also be a risk factor for violent behavior. Your teens need and deserve help coping with these feelings.** You or a mental health professional can give them opportunities to express themselves, and resolve these feelings.



Handling Tough Situations

PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

to talk. If you are still concerned, or if you think that your teenagers may hurt themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for assistance in finding the right resources.

BULLYING

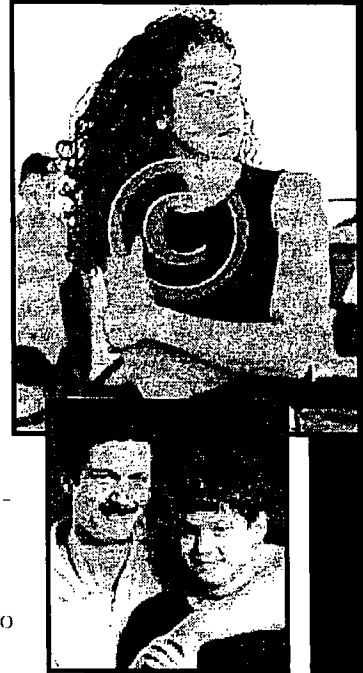
I was called to my 13-year-old son's school today because he stole some money from another boy during lunch. This wasn't the first incident. A few weeks ago, the principal called because Keith made another boy take the blame for graffiti he wrote on the school bus. No matter what we tell him, he constantly seems to get in trouble. What can I do?

You certainly have reason to be concerned about your son's behavior. He is acting like a bully and needs your help to put on the brakes. The principal was right to call. The school can set a clear standard—no bullying—and make sure that your son understands the consequences for violations of this rule. You, too, need to make clear that you disapprove of bullying. You need to help your son develop empathy—which is the ability to understand how other people feel—and to care about others' feelings. You will probably want to impose consequences on your son for his unacceptable behavior. Be firm, but do it in a loving way. Right now your son needs *your* empathy, understanding, and love. By providing this, you can show the power of caring about others in a positive way.

This still leaves the bigger part of the problem—getting to the reason for your son's behavior. You have to talk with him to determine why he is being a bully. What leads your son to behave in such hurtful ways?

With your help, or with the assistance of a professional, your son can understand his own motives for bullying. Some young people are bullies because they are bored and crave excitement; some do it to feel powerful; some engage in this behavior as a response to family problems; some do it for attention and to be popular with acknowledgment by their peer group. You need to ask him very detailed questions:

- Did you plan to take the other boy's lunch money beforehand, or was it a sudden urge?
- Why did you pick on that particular person?
- What were you thinking when you did it? (Ex: I need the money; I'll look cool.)
- How did you feel when you did it? (Ex: Excited, thrilled, frightened, powerful).
- How do you think the other boy felt?
- What's happening in your life or in our family that may be upsetting you?



When you understand the details of what happened, you can determine how to help your child. For example, if your son stole money because he saw it sitting on a lunch tray and had a sudden urge to grab it, he will need to learn to recognize his impulses, and to stop them. If he planned to steal money, pre-selected a victim and stole because he wanted to look important, he will need to learn positive ways to make friends and gain peer acceptance.

We have to help our children learn healthy and socially acceptable ways to cope with urges and anger, and to satisfy their emotional needs appropriately. A big challenge? Yes. But it's part of growing up and becoming a good citizen.

DRUG USE AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL

Our 16-year old daughter, Julia, was caught drinking at a party. We suspect that she has smoked marijuana, too. She's been doing poorly in school—in fact, now she's neglecting her schoolwork and failing one subject. We set up required study time, but it hasn't helped. She misses curfews and hasn't been doing her chores. We've talked with her

about alcohol, drugs and sex, and we've been clear about the rules and given her consequences when she has broken them. Obviously, it hasn't worked. She says I'm a nag. What else can I do?

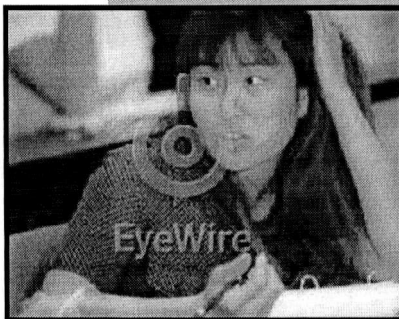
ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Julia's drinking and possible drug use may be the tip of the iceberg. Alcohol and drug use often occur along with other serious problems.

First, you need to talk to Julia about her alcohol and drug use, and find out what drugs she is using and how often she is using them. Don't confront her when she seems to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Wait until she is straight and sober. Then discuss your suspicions with her calmly and objectively, as you begin a dialogue about alcohol and other drugs. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules, and stick to it. Don't relent because she promises never to do it again. Make sure that she knows that her use of alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem and that she is harming herself.

If Julia has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you should get immediate help. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose chil-



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dren have been through treatment programs can also provide information.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think Julia is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have her evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for information about how to find someone who can help.

Listed in the box at right are signs that may indicate problems with alcohol or other drugs. They could also indicate other problems, not related to drugs. In either case, if you observe significant changes in your teen's behavior, something is wrong. Start a dialogue with your teen about the problems. If you are still confused about whether alcohol or other drugs are part of the problem, or if you recognize that a substance abuse problem exists, get professional help.

SIGNS OF

POSSIBLE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Research has shown that there are a number of factors that make individuals more likely to initiate drug use and to progress to drug abuse and or addiction. Many of these could be identified early by family members and friends. It is important to note that many people may exhibit one or more of these signs, but not necessarily use drugs. These signs may occur in the following areas:

Family: deteriorating relationships with family; behavior changes, such as withdrawal or hostility

School: truancy; drop in grades; behavior problems

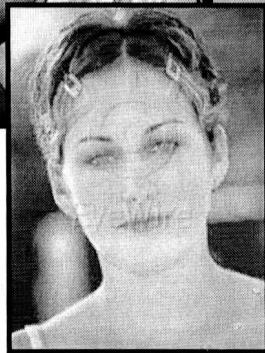
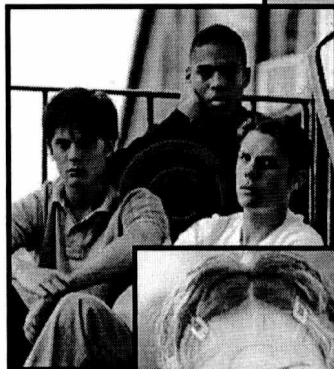
Social life: deteriorating relationships with old friends; developing a network of friends who are using alcohol or other drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities

Emotional life: basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy

Physical: memory problems, fatigue or hyper behavior; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming

Physical evidence: disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes or alcohol; signs of drug paraphernalia; use of incense; excess money or missing money

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

00 NOV 13 PM 2:04

November 13, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR LISEL LOY

FROM: Bruce Reed

SUBJECT: Parents Matter Brochure

This brochure was created by the White House Council on Youth Violence to be distributed by national education associations to middle schools and secondary schools throughout the country. Included in the brochure is a proposed forward from the President that I am submitting to you for approval. The brochure will be complete and ready to go to print Tuesday, November 14, 2000, pending any comments or edits you may have. We would like to send this to the printer as soon as possible, and preferably by Friday, November 18, 2000.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have much to celebrate about our nation's young people. They are far healthier, more prosperous, and look forward to more promising lives than ever before in our history. Teens of all ethnicities are completing high school and enrolling in college at record rates, and more teenagers than ever before are volunteering to serve through community service. In addition, many harmful behaviors are on the decline, including youth violence and gun-related crime, homicide, suicide, teen pregnancy and, in the last few years, drug use. Nonetheless, the rates of youth violence, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, and unintended pregnancy, are still far too high in our country. Despite a marked decline in teen homicide over the past several years, far too many communities are scarred by violence.

We know that the best approach to the problem of youth violence is a comprehensive one requiring the collaborative efforts of students and parents, teachers, health care providers, law enforcement, judges, counselors, and religious leaders. That is why, among other initiatives, my Administration created the *Safe Schools Healthy Students* Initiative, to support effective, collaborative responses to violence, bringing together school nurses, counselors, teachers, and law enforcement, to promote a healthier future for our children and our communities.

At the same time, we know that young people continue to need support and

guidance from their parents, as they grow into adulthood. In May 2000, the First Lady and I hosted a conference on "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers." At this conference we heard from parents, researchers, professionals who work with teenagers, and from teenagers themselves. The message we heard, loud and clear, and confirmed by recent studies, is that teens view their parents as the best source of information and guidance on serious life issues, and that teenagers rate not having enough time with their parents as their top concern.

That is why I directed my White House Council on Youth Violence to develop information resources for parents. This guide provides parents some helpful communication tips for talking to their teenagers. It suggests ways to discuss difficult issues—such as violence, guns, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs—and helps parents identify the warning signs of harmful behaviors. In some instances, parents may need professional guidance to assist them in dealing with the challenges of raising a teenager, and this guide provides helpful resources.

The great American author and champion of human rights, Pearl Buck, once said, "If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." In our national struggle against youth violence, we must not fail our children. All of us, especially parents, share responsibility to keep our children safe. We've all got to do our part, and this guide should help.

— President William Jefferson Clinton

The White House Council on Youth Violence was established by President Clinton in October, 1999, to coordinate the federal government's efforts in the research and prevention of youth violence. The Council is chaired by Bruce Reed, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and the Council members are the Attorney General and the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and Treasury.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals contributed to the development of this document. The White House Council on Youth Violence wishes to thank Dr. Robert Schwebel, the primary author of this guide, and Teddi Fine, Charlotte Gillespie, Anne Mathews-Younes, Bill Modzeleski, Carolyn O'Connor, Louise Peloquin, and Farris Tuma, for their assistance.

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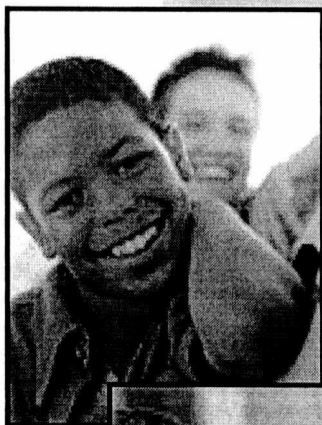
RADM Susan Blumenthal, M.D.
*U.S. Assistant Surgeon General
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Scientific Editor*

INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting time to be a teenager in America. Young people today are growing up in a rapidly changing society, with hopes for a very promising future. Survey results show that 84% of high-school students plan to attend a four-year college. Teens overwhelmingly share their parents' values of honesty and hard work, and are engaged in positive activities. More than half of all teenagers volunteer with a community organization, attend a house of worship weekly, read the newspaper twice a week or more, and attend cultural events or visit museums.

In spite of this positive outlook, however, adolescence—the transition between childhood and adulthood—is still one of the most difficult times for children and parents alike. Growing up is more than the physical changes that occur, such as

getting taller or more muscular. This passage is a time for establishing independence, testing limits, trying on different roles, exploring new feelings and fostering intellectual growth. Above all, adolescence is a *process* that takes time to happen.



We have all heard the frightening and heart-breaking statistics about youth violence, depression, tobacco and alcohol

and other drug use. Even the best-informed young people are constantly tested by social pressures, emotional needs and their peers. The push and pull between right and wrong can become a tug of war between adolescent and parent.

Being a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or caregiver of a teen is both rewarding and challenging. Caring adults can make all the difference in a child's life.

This guide provides some useful tools to improve your communication with your teenager to help him or her get through adolescence successfully. Read it all or select the sections that help you the most.

- **Getting the Conversation Started**—tips for opening up the dialogue, even after it has been shut down. (Page 2.)
- **Increasing Responsibility and Freedom**—ideas for how to set the limits that protect your teens while still giving them room to grow and develop. (Page 6.)
- **Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours**—anger-management skills that you can use, and that you can share with your adolescent. (Page 8.)
- **Handling Tough Situations**—examples of difficult situations, identification of warning signs of trouble, and advice on how to handle certain problems. (Page 9.)
- **When Parents Need Help First**—helping your spouse, or yourself, deal with issues that are affecting your child. (Page 16.)
- **Getting Help for Your Teen**—suggestions about how to get help for your teen and your family. (Page 19.)

Many parents worry when their teenagers don't want to spend as much time with the family as they did when they were younger. This can be both hurtful and frightening. You worry about their safety and about their future. It is normal for children to want to spend more time with their friends during the teen years, but it shouldn't mean that teens ignore their families. Parents and teens need to take action to stay connected or to reconnect.

I used to be close with my daughter. She would talk with me about everything. Now she's 14 and avoids me. She is quiet at dinner, and then goes to her room or talks with friends on the phone all evening. Sometimes she gets moody and angry. I want to reach her the way I used to, but I don't know how to start.

Sometimes the solution is easy. Spend more time together. Suggest doing things that you both enjoy. Talk more. Dinner-time is an excellent opportunity for that kind of exchange. Talk about your day. Ask your teen about his or her day. Be

with their parents. You may be surprised to learn that a recent study indicated that most teenagers rate "not having enough time together" with parents as their top concern. Many will be glad that their parents care enough to make the effort to spend time with them. Some teens have a hard time expressing anger and upset feelings. They keep their feelings bottled inside. Parents need to draw such children out. Try to start a conversation by saying "I can see you've been upset. Let's talk about what's happening."

Some teens, however, may give parents the cold shoulder. If that happens, be patient, and be persistent until you break

How Do You Get Your Teenager to Start Talking to You Again?

The best way to help teens open up—and stay open—with parents and other adults in their lives, is by showing your acceptance of them. When they

make a mistake or misbehave, you can lovingly help them learn from their experience. Make sure they know that you love them, even when you may be deeply troubled by their behavior.



Why Do Teens Stop Talking?

Sometimes they're trying to be independent. Sometimes they're embarrassed about their own thoughts and feelings, such as anger, or their sexual desires. Sometimes, teens shut down because of pressures they feel at home, at school, or in the community. One of the most important reasons teens stop talking to you is that they're afraid to speak honestly with their parents. They believe if they talk openly about things they have done that might be wrong, they'll be given a lecture, punished, or criticized.



through. If you can't break through, there could be a more serious problem than embarrassment or a difficulty communicating.

sure the television is turned off and you and your teen are tuned in. Most teens agree that they want to spend more time

Getting the Conversation Started

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LISTENING TO YOUR TEEN

Let teens know you will listen and try to understand their point of view, without putting them down or trying to control them. Being open-minded sometimes can be difficult for adults. But to communicate with teens, parents need to do more than just talk; they need to listen, and really hear what their teens are saying. They also need to notice which issues are not being discussed and have the courage to start a dialogue about those issues.

When disagreements arise, listening does not mean that you give up your authority as a parent. It *does* mean giving teens a voice in matters that concern them. Through family dialogue, parents get to know what their teens are thinking and feeling, and teens get to know where their parents stand. Sometimes parents and teens can reach agreements when none seemed possible. Even when agreement cannot be reached, teens are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.



PRESSURES ON

TODAY'S TEENS

The pressures you felt as an adolescent have been magnified for teens today. You will recognize some of these issues that make it difficult for youth today as issues that concerned you during your youth. Others are unique to today's teens.

- Wanting to be part of a group
- HIV/AIDS
- Changing family structures
- Gangs and violence
- Insecurity about the future
- Money pressures
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy
- Media influences
- Concern about body image
- School pressures
- Easy access to alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and guns

TOUGH TOPICS

Parents can become frustrated when they try to start a conversation with their teenager and he or she just isn't interested.

There are tough topics, however, that need to be discussed. Teenagers face pressures and temptations about alcohol and other drugs, sex, tobacco, guns and violence.

They need and deserve adult support. Don't wait for a crisis. Ideally, parents should find times and ways to talk with their teens *before* serious problems occur, preferably early in the lives of their children. But it is never too late to start.

Sometimes, you can simply begin a dialogue about these issues as part of normal conversation. Often, "teachable moments" happen during day-to-day activities. For example, you could discuss underage drinking when

someone gets intoxicated in the presence of your family, or in a movie, or when you see a newspaper story about an accident caused by teenage drinking. You could discuss violence, and better ways of solving problems, after watching a TV



Breaking the Ice

Why can't I get a discussion started with my son about alcohol, drugs or other tough issues? He just tells me "Everything is fine" or "It's my life" and walks away.

Below is an example of one good way to open a dialogue about a tough issue, and some roadblocks that you might encounter:

You: As a family, we've never talked about alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. I'd like to know what you think and feel about drugs—and I want to tell you what I think. I promise I won't punish you for what you think, or have done. I just want us to talk.

Teen: It's my life; I'm old enough to make my own decisions.

You: You're right. This is your life and you have to make your own decisions about what you do. I don't want to control you. But we do need to talk. I want to hear your thoughts, and I want to tell you mine. I promise to listen with an open mind, and ask that you do the same. We may disagree, but at least we will understand each other.

Teen: Forget it. You always end up lecturing me.

You: If our discussions have ended with me lecturing you, then I'm sorry. But, I won't lecture you now. I want to talk *with* you, not *at* you, and I want to hear what you have to say. I'm willing to hear your complaints, too. How do you feel about talking with me? Even someone as old as I am can change.

Teen: I don't know, but maybe we can talk later. Just not now.

You: OK, I can wait a little. Today is Monday. Let's both think about it for now, and we'll talk again on Thursday, because we do need to discuss these issues together.

Being Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Teens in minority ethnic and racial groups may face particular pressures related to their status as minorities. Parents of these teens should be especially sensitive to these pressures, as well as any cultural and language differences that may affect your teen's interactions at school, with peers, and with others.

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show or movie that portrays violence as a solution to a disagreement.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, try to be clear that your purpose is to build understanding and to be supportive, certainly not to find fault or to punish. If you can't nudge your child into a dialogue, back off for awhile. This strategy can be disarming. Then, give your son or daughter some time to think it over. A few days later, you can try again to start the discussion. Parents can be flexible in getting the dialogue going, but should not give up on the need for this discussion to eventually begin. Although it may be harder to get boys to open up, parents should engage in dialogue with their sons and daughters alike.

Today's teens, more than ever before, need to connect with adults—if not a parent, then a coach or teacher, grandparent or foster

parent, clergy member, or other trusted adult in their lives. Teens need at least one adult with whom they can talk openly. They should not be left to rely solely on other teens for important information, conversation, and help with problem solving about how to grow up wisely.

FIND

SOMEONE YOUR TEENS CAN TALK TO

Try to establish strong communication with your teen, but remember that some teens may talk more openly about sensitive topics with someone who is not their parent or guardian. If you are a parent, try not to let this hurt your feelings; remember that your child will respect you more in the long run if you encourage him or her to talk with someone else, if that is what works best. Single parents,

and other parents, may want to find a mentoring program that can be a source of support, and can provide someone with whom your teen can talk. Your teen's school guidance counselor may know about such programs.



**You don't trust me . . .
But they're my friends . . .
Everyone else is doing it . . .**

Teens need their independence, but how do you make sure they are safe? It's tough to decide when to give your teen more freedom. Do you hang on to the kite string for as long as you possibly can, or give the kite free air? The decision isn't easy. One parent's decision for his or her teen may not be right for other parents and their teens.

Although every adolescent is different, there are many experiences common to the teenage years. The most common may be the pull and push between dependence and independence.

Teens, at younger and younger ages, are putting themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—and for pregnancy. And some teens, and even younger children, smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, use other drugs, or commit acts of violence and other crimes. No wonder so many parents are concerned, even frightened; no wonder so many try to control the behavior of their teenage children.

It is important for parents to make rules for their young children. As children get older, however, they need to learn to make some of their own decisions and life choices. Teens need the chance to practice good decision-making skills, and to manage

new life experiences. Parents need to give teens the freedom to do just that. But there is a catch; teens must be ready. They need to agree to behave in responsible ways and show that they can handle the freedom. They also need to keep their parents informed. That way, parents know when to lend guidance and supervision, and how to support their teen's progress.

That's where respect, responsibility and reliability come in.

Respect: Respect is a two-way street, but it starts with you. Give your teens the respect that you would like to be given. Give them credit for their knowledge and abilities; pay attention and listen to them. That means showing confidence in your teen, and being supportive.

Responsibility: Teens are learning to take care of themselves as they prepare for adulthood. That's what growing up is all about. Give them an appropriate amount of freedom and independence. Encourage and promote responsibility and good decision-making, offering support and gentle help with difficult decisions. Let your teens know they can gain more freedom as they demonstrate increasingly responsible behavior.

Reliability: Part of growing up is learning and adapting to rules—rules about driving and work, rules about drink-

The Challenge

To help teens learn about the world and accept new challenges with the least amount of danger and harm. Parents must walk a fine line between controlling too much and being too relaxed about rules. When parents are too restrictive, they can push teens toward rebellion. When they are too permissive, teens may get out of control. It's a balancing act.



Increasing Responsibility and Freedom

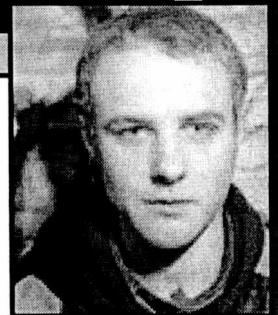
PARENTS MATTER: HELPING YOUR CHILDREN NAVIGATE THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

ing and dating, social rules and family rules. Teens will test the rules, but over time most will make these rules part of their lives.

This kind of reliability is worthy of recognition and praise. **When you can rely on your teens behaving responsibly, it may be time to give them more freedom.**

Parents should believe in their teens; set high standards for them, encourage them,

expect them to achieve their goals, and provide consistent love and support—including practical help—so they can achieve the promise that lies within them.



CLOTHING AND HAIR

WHERE DO I DRAW THE LINE?

Jason is doing well in middle school. He's great with his younger brothers and helps around the house, but I'm concerned about some of his new friends. Some have dyed their hair odd colors; they wear baggy jeans with their boxer shorts showing. A few have pierced tongues and tattoos. A while ago, Jason asked about getting those baggy jeans. I said no, because the gang kids wear them. I hoped he'd forget about them, but he has asked again. Between the drugs in our neighborhood, baggy jeans, and new friends, I'm worried. I want to steer him away from problem kids. Should I let him buy the jeans? What should I do about his friends?

Adolescents are striving for independence. As their teens prepare for adulthood, parents should encourage independence, while making sure their teens don't drift too far from a positive course. How should parents react to the choices of their teenage children? In general, extend trust and give children as much freedom of choice as they can handle. Be sure to set limits, too. Your decisions about the baggy jeans and about your son's friends require careful evaluation of all the details. You need to think about your own values, look realistically at where Jason seems to be headed, understand what he is doing or wants to do and determine how best to promote his safety and growth.

Jason is doing well in school and not getting into trouble. Success in school gives children a sense of accomplishment. They can see a positive future for themselves and are less likely to want to join a gang. These facts argue

Get to Know Your Son's Friends

Ask your son to invite his friends to your home so you can meet them. You'll show that you have an open mind. If his friends behave poorly in your presence, your son will notice.

You also need to understand what the baggy jeans mean to Jason. Are they just a style he likes? Or is wearing them a way to identify with the gang types? Sometimes teens dress differently just to harmlessly show some independence from the family. Think back to your own adolescence, and remember the fashion changes. There may be some similarities.

Have a discussion with your son about his friends and about the clothing he likes to wear. Sometimes discussions can bridge differences. Maybe your son will be swayed by what you say about the jeans and gangs, or maybe he will convince you that baggy jeans have become a style that has little to do with belonging to a gang.

A conversation with your teen can help you decide whether there is a real problem or it is just a question of fashion.

for giving him more freedom. When it comes to his friends and his preferences in clothing, you need to gather more information if you're going to make a smart decision. You need to know more about your son's friends: What are they like? Do they use alcohol or other drugs? Are they in gangs? How does your son feel about these kids? How does he feel about drug use? How does he feel about gangs?

Warm family relationships can help protect children from acting violently, abusing alcohol and other drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors. But family members—even in the most loving families—get angry at one another from time to time. When families communicate well and work cooperatively, anger can be resolved without a problem. Handled poorly, however, anger gets in the way of good communication between parent and child. Anger without control can sometimes be dangerous and may even become violent.

Some adults see anger as an emotion that should be suppressed, because it leads to trouble. Some grew up in families in which anger generally led to explosive behavior and even violence. Others were taught that it is not “nice” to be angry. Many adults are not good at managing anger, and expressing this emotion in a healthy way. It’s important that parents know how to manage anger successfully in family life, at work and in the community. And that same knowledge needs to be shared with children, so that they learn this important skill.

My teenage son doesn't know how to handle his intense feelings. He talks back to us and even swears at us. He doesn't do what we ask him to do. He seems to be trying to aggravate

us. I get so angry I blow up. We end up screaming at each other and -saying things we regret. I feel like things are out of control.

With the many changes that occur during adolescence, it’s not unusual for teenagers to feel anger and resentment toward parents. Adolescents struggle to establish their own independent identities as they prepare for adulthood. Sometimes anger is their way of asserting independence. This can wear thin on parents, who may fight back with their own anger, creating a vicious circle of escalating resentment.

The best solution to out-of-control anger—whether from a parent or from a teen—is to step back, and identify more positive, healthy ways to deal with strong feelings. We do this when we can calm down and respond in a disciplined and thoughtful way. By maintaining composure, parents can be good role models and open the door to constructive communication with their children.

But how do you keep calm when you feel pushed to the limit? Here are some suggestions:

TIPS FOR CALMING DOWN

- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes the issue is not worth the anger, or worth arguing about.
- **Take a deep breath; count to ten.** Think about the issue before a single word comes out of your mouth.
- **Go for a walk.**
- **Use “self-talk” to calm down.** That is, say something soothing to yourself such as: “I need to relax and stay calm. I can’t afford to blow up.”



Managing Anger: Theirs and Yours

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- **Reframe the issue.** For example, when your son says something rude to you, it may be less a matter of him disrespecting you than a sign that he has a problem with his anger. "Framing" it this way, you focus on the fact that he needs your help in overcoming this problem.

- **Use humor.** Humor can sometimes be a good way to calm anger, but be sure not to use sarcasm, which can sometimes be hurtful.

Sometimes the hardest part of helping children learn to manage their anger is that parents have to look at their own practices. Parents need to ask:

- "Have I accepted my own anger and the anger of others in the family?"
- Do I express anger in positive and constructive ways?
- Do I resolve conflict well?
- Have I taught my children to accept and express their anger?"

Resolving conflict constructively may be a huge challenge, but it's an absolute necessity for the sake of every member of your family.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

Once you are calm, you are in a better position to address the issues that caused the conflict. Here are some tips:

- **Give your point of view.** State the problem as you see it; speak clearly and calmly—don't yell.

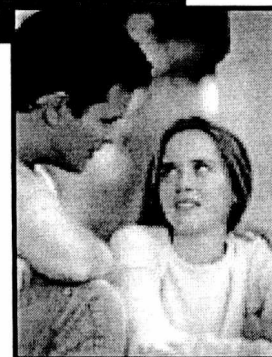
- **Ask to hear your teen's point of view.**

- **Pay attention, listen, and carefully consider what your teen is saying.**

- **Discuss ways to solve the dispute without a battle.**

- **Practice the art of compromise.** Find the middle ground you can both live with comfortably.

- **Assert your authority, when appropriate, but in a calm, yet firm manner.**



WHAT IF THE ANGER DOESN'T STOP?

When anger becomes a chronic problem for someone in the family, the underlying issue may be larger than you or your teen can manage. If you even *think* your family is at this crisis point, or if you even *think* you or any member of your family has a serious problem with anger management, it's time to seek help from a mental health professional. Recognize that this situation necessitates counseling, and sometimes that means the entire family will need help. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19).

Teenagers, like all of us, sometimes need help and guidance, but it can sometimes be difficult for parents to recognize when to intervene in their teenager's life. You know about the challenges that today's teenagers face—some of which are different than those you experienced as a teen. Understanding these challenges, and knowing when and how to intervene to help your child overcome them, is an essential role for parents.

It is also a difficult role. Being able to tell the difference between normal teenage

behavior and self-destructive, hurtful behavior can be difficult. The following examples are designed to help you understand some of the warning signs that your teenager may need help. Read through these examples and see if any sound familiar.

Remember, though, that every teenager is different and there is often no clear answer to your specific situation. If you are concerned, talk to your teenage children. At a minimum, let them know how you feel and tell them that you would like

What If Your Teen Is Being Bullied?

Bullying is a serious problem, affecting many children. A recent study indicated that nearly 1 in 10 students in grades 6 through 12 have been bullied in the past year.

Victims of bullies need help and support in responding to this aggressive behavior. Many parents give their children conflicting messages about how to respond to physical aggression. Should you encourage your teenager to "fight back" or not? We do not want to resort to violence, but we also do not want our children to be victims and to

feel powerless. Most experts agree that children should not hit back, other than for self-defense and survival. Retaliation perpetuates a cycle of violence. It may also lead to escalating physical confrontation, which can be very dangerous,

especially considering the possibility that weapons might be used.

Parents can help their children who have been teased or bullied learn to be powerful, without resorting to violence. You could start by letting your teenager

know that you seriously disapprove of taunting and other types of bullying behavior, and that you think no one should have to put up with this. You can empower teens by asking them if they have any ideas about what might end the bullying.

Parents can teach teens some powerful, non-

violent ways of responding when they are bullied:

- Demonstrate strength by using eye contact and positive self-assured body language, with their head held high and shoulders back.
- Practice "verbal self-defense", using anything from humor to clever comments to de-escalate tension.
- Proudly walk away from provocation, and ignore taunting.

Young people are entitled to a safe learning environment in their school. **Another way to empower your teenagers can be to encourage them to speak with school administrators about the problem.** In part they may want to raise the issue of their own situation, and their own safety fears. Sometimes, it is most empowering to discuss the situation as a school-wide problem, without focus on particular perpetrators. Parents should back up their children by also voicing the same concern. School/community partnerships can lead to effective programs that reduce bullying behavior.

If teenage children have been picked on for a long time, they probably have some intense emotions from that experience, and could benefit from talking about them. **Victims of bullies may experience anger, anxiety and even depression. Being the victim of a bully can also be a risk factor for violent behavior. Your teens need and deserve help coping with these feelings.** You or a mental health professional can give them opportunities to express themselves, and resolve these feelings.



Handling Tough Situations

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to talk. If you are still concerned, or if you think that your teenagers may hurt themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for assistance in finding the right resources.

BULLYING

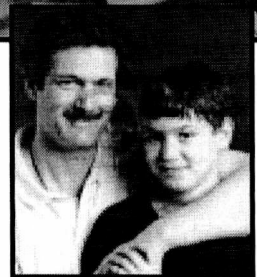
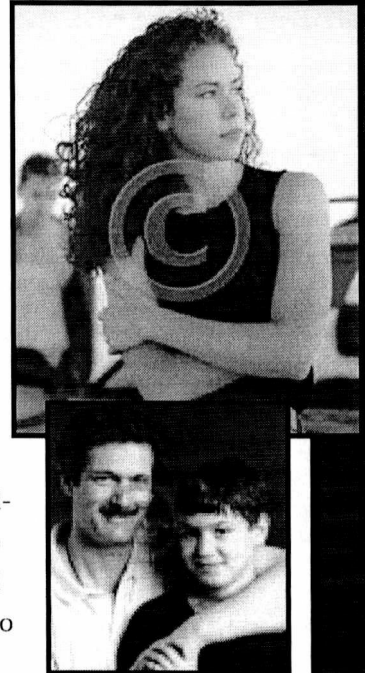
I was called to my 13-year-old son's school today because he stole some money from another boy during lunch. This wasn't the first incident. A few weeks ago, the principal called because Keith made another boy take the blame for graffiti he wrote on the school bus. No matter what we tell him, he constantly seems to get in trouble. What can I do?

You certainly have reason to be concerned about your son's behavior. He is acting like a bully and needs your help to put on the brakes. The principal was right to call. The school can set a clear standard—no bullying—and make sure that your son understands the consequences for violations of this rule. You, too, need to make clear that you disapprove of bullying. You need to help your son develop empathy—which is the ability to understand how other people feel—and to care about others' feelings. You will probably want to impose consequences on your son for his unacceptable behavior. Be firm, but do it in a loving way. Right now your son needs *your* empathy, understanding, and love. By providing this, you can show the power of caring about others in a positive way.

This still leaves the bigger part of the problem—getting to the reason for your son's behavior. You have to talk with him to determine why he is being a bully. What leads your son to behave in such hurtful ways?

With your help, or with the assistance of a professional, your son can understand his own motives for bullying. Some young people are bullies because they are bored and crave excitement; some do it to feel powerful; some engage in this behavior as a response to family problems; some do it for attention and to be popular with acknowledgment by their peer group. You need to ask him very detailed questions:

- Did you plan to take the other boy's lunch money beforehand, or was it a sudden urge?
- Why did you pick on that particular person?
- What were you thinking when you did it? (Ex: I need the money; I'll look cool.)
- How did you feel when you did it? (Ex: Excited, thrilled, frightened, powerful).
- How do you think the other boy felt?
- What's happening in your life or in our family that may be upsetting you?



When you understand the details of what happened, you can determine how to help your child. For example, if your son stole money because he saw it sitting on a lunch tray and had a sudden urge to grab it, he will need to learn to recognize his impulses, and to stop them. If he planned to steal money, pre-selected a victim and stole because he wanted to look important, he will need to learn positive ways to make friends and gain peer acceptance.

We have to help our children learn healthy and socially acceptable ways to cope with urges and anger, and to satisfy their emotional needs appropriately. A big challenge? Yes. But it's part of growing up and becoming a good citizen.

DRUG USE AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL

Our 16-year old daughter, Julia, was caught drinking at a party. We suspect that she has smoked marijuana, too. She's been doing poorly in school—in fact, now she's neglecting her schoolwork and failing one subject. We set up required study time, but it hasn't helped. She misses curfews and hasn't been doing her chores. We've talked with her

about alcohol, drugs and sex, and we've been clear about the rules and given her consequences when she has broken them.

Obviously, it hasn't worked. She says I'm a nag. What else can I do?

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Julia's drinking and possible drug use may be the tip of the iceberg. Alcohol and drug use often occur along with other serious problems.

First, you need to talk to Julia about her alcohol and drug use, and find out what drugs she is using and how often she is using them. Don't confront her when she seems to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Wait until she is straight and sober. Then discuss your suspicions with her calmly and objectively, as you begin a dialogue about alcohol and other drugs. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules, and stick to it. Don't relent because she promises never to do it again. Make

sure that she knows that her use of alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem and that she is harming herself.

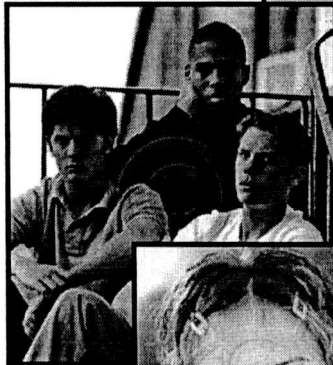
If Julia has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you should get immediate help. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose chil-



dren have been through treatment programs can also provide information.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think Julia is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have her evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems. Refer to the sections on "Getting Help for Your Teen" (page 19) for information about how to find someone who can help.

Listed in the box at right are signs that may indicate problems with alcohol or other drugs. They could also indicate other problems, not related to drugs. In either case, if you observe significant changes in your teen's behavior, something is wrong. Start a dialogue with your teen about the problems. If you are still confused about whether alcohol or other drugs are part of the problem, or if you recognize that a substance abuse problem exists, get professional help.



SIGNS OF

POSSIBLE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Research has shown that there are a number of factors that make individuals more likely to initiate drug use and to progress to drug abuse and or addiction. Many of these could be identified early by family members and friends. It is important to note that many people may exhibit one or more of these signs, but not necessarily use drugs. These signs may occur in the following areas:

Family: deteriorating relationships with family; behavior changes, such as withdrawal or hostility

School: truancy; drop in grades; behavior problems

Social life: deteriorating relationships with old friends; developing a network of friends who are using alcohol or other drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favorite activities

Emotional life: basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy

Physical: memory problems, fatigue or hyper behavior; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming

Physical evidence: disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes or alcohol; signs of drug paraphernalia; use of incense; excess money or missing money

Source: Adapted from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health