

Parenting: The Teen Years

The teen years pose some of the most difficult challenges for families. Teenagers, dealing with hormone changes and an ever-complex world, may feel that no one can understand their feelings, especially parents. As a result, the teen may feel angry, alone and confused while facing complicated issues about identity, peers, sexual behavior, drinking and drugs.

Parents may be frustrated and angry that the teen seems to no longer respond to parental authority. Methods of discipline that worked well in earlier years may no longer have an effect. And, parents may feel frightened and helpless about the choices their teen is making.

As a result, the teen years are ripe for producing conflict in the family. Typical areas of parent-teen conflict may include:

- disputes over the teen's curfew;
- the teen's choice of friends;
- spending time with the family versus with peers;
- school and work performance;
- cars and driving privileges;
- dating and sexuality;
- clothing, hair styles and makeup;
- self destructive behaviors such as smoking, drinking and using drugs.

Dealing with the issues of adolescence can be trying for all concerned. But families are generally successful at helping their children accomplish the developmental goals of the teen years -- reducing dependence on parents, while becoming increasingly responsible and independent.

However, there are a number of warning signs that things are not going well and that the family may want to seek outside help. These include aggressive behavior or violence by the teen, drug or alcohol abuse, promiscuity, school truancy, brushes with the law or runaway behavior. Likewise, if a parent is resorting to hitting or other violent behavior in an attempt to maintain discipline, this is a strong danger sign.

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