



Teenagers are especially vulnerable to stress. In their time of discovery, they have anxieties about their sexual identity, their grades and, in many cases, their performance as athletes. Unfortunately, they may come to feel that drugs, alcohol or even suicide can also offer relief from emotional pain. You can help prepare your children for the hard knocks of life. You can listen, let them know you care and support them through each crisis.

Troubled Teens

What to Expect, What to Do

How You Can Prepare

To give your teen a stable base, there are many things you can do. Make your home a friendly place. Offer praise whenever you can. Assume a positive, helpful attitude. Be ready to listen at all hours. Talk straight, with no moralizing. Ask questions, without accusation or blame. Take a stand with reason, not revenge. Be consistent, not rigid. Educate yourself, then provide information about sexual abuse, AIDS, drugs and alcohol.

What You Can Look For

Once you understand the feelings behind teen troubles, you can watch for the danger signals. Among them:

- ◆ hyperactivity or other behavior changes
- ◆ isolation, mood swings or depression
- ◆ discipline problems and low grades
- ◆ weight loss
- ◆ frequent borrowing or missing money in the household
- ◆ drug paraphernalia

Some traits, such as increased independence and new interests, are natural for the age. You can develop a sensitivity to your child's individual traits. Then, you can keep communication open.

The Suicide Myth

Some people believe that if a person talks about suicide, he won't do it. This is untrue.

You need to take suicide threats seriously. Trouble may be brewing if your teen talks or writes about suicide or if he or she is greatly saddened by the loss of a friend, the death of a family member or the break-up of a romance. Other warning signs are:

- ◆ sudden personality changes. Is your teen unduly angry, tearful, clinging or irrational?
- ◆ a growing fear of failure in school or elsewhere. Indications that he or she is giving things away or making a will.
- ◆ avoidance of friends and social activities.
- ◆ self-abusive behavior.
- ◆ preoccupation with death.

What to Do

If in doubt, ask your teen if he or she is going through a crisis, or is entertaining thoughts of suicide. Your care and love are critical. Often, the teen doesn't see suicide as final. In a time of stress, a desperate young person may somehow see death as a temporary escape from pain, rather than the irreversible step that it is.

Use Your Resources

Many families face teen troubles. You and your teenager can move through difficult periods more easily if you take advantage of the expert resources available. Many list 24-hour help lines in the telephone directory.