

Adolescent Visit Handout For Parents

Adolescence is a time of change and challenge for your teen and for you. Teenagers are struggling to exert more independence and separation from their family and need guidance and support in their decision making. Healthy communication with your teen is extremely important in making them feel cared for and safe, and helps them learn how to manage their feelings, make safe personal decisions, and share their thoughts and worries with you.

Building a two-way bridge of communication requires:

Being available; set time aside each day to talk to your teen about their day. If you talk to them about their routine daily activities they will be more likely to share their more intimate feelings and activities with you.

Be a good listener; do not criticize, try not to interrupt, tune into the conversation and avoid distractions during your time together.

Respect your adolescent's feelings.

Try not to get upset when your teen makes mistakes; offer guidance, and expect them to take responsibility for their actions.

Be willing to negotiate and compromise; choose your battles.

Mix criticism with praise; don't forget to acknowledge their accomplishments and decisions.

Many teens go through rebellious periods. When rules are needed, set them and enforce them. This actually makes teens feel cared for and safe.

There are constant pressures placed on your adolescent to become sexually active in the immediate social environment and in the media. Studies show that kids who learn about sex from their friends instead of their parents are more likely to have sex before marriage. Teenagers are curious about sex whether you talk about it with them or not. Studies also show that teens whose parents talk openly about sex are more responsible in their sexual behavior. Gear your conversation with them based on their age, level of maturity, and your values. Be honest. Talk to them about peer pressure, emotional connections, and the medical risks involved like sexually transmitted diseases (Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Hepatitis, Syphilis, Herpes, and HIV) and unwanted pregnancy. Strengthen your teen's self esteem and prepare them for the pressures they may face at school and with friends. Encourage abstinence – it is 100% effective in prevention of STD's and pregnancy. Teach them to say “no” and to feel good about themselves. Help your teen understand that many teenagers decide to wait to have sex. Educate them about methods of contraception. Encourage them to be monogamous and to limit the number of their sexual partners. Teach them that people often lie about their sexual histories. If your teen is to become sexually active it is imperative that condoms be used with every partner and at every sexual encounter to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Date rape is a serious problem for adolescents and young adults. Make sure your teenager understands that “no always means no”, and that avoidance of alcohol and drugs may make date rape less likely to happen. Discuss oral sex with your teen early on. Many teenagers do not consider oral sex to be real sex and may

engage in it at younger ages (even 6th grade). They do not fully appreciate the emotional consequences or medical risks of oral sex (most are unaware that they can contract a sexually transmitted disease). Talk to your teen about forms of sexuality and masturbation in terms of your values. Even though it may be very difficult for you to discuss these topics with them, they are a normal part of human sexuality.

Substance abuse prevention

The use of tobacco, alcohol, pot, and other drugs is one of the biggest problems facing young people today. Prevention starts at home. If you smoke, try to quit. Provide guidance and clear rules about not using drugs. Teach your child to say “no”. Get to know your teen’s friends. Help them develop strong values and self-esteem and instruct them on how to deal with peer pressure and acceptance. The most important tip is to stay involved in your child’s life while gradually allowing him/her to make independent decisions.

Be aware of the warning signs that may indicate drug/alcohol use in your teen: smell of smoke or alcohol on your teen’s breath or clothes. Change in dress or appearance. Signs of intoxication. Change in choice of friends. Sudden mood changes, unexplained violence or frequent arguments. Change in eating and sleeping habits, truancy or failing grades. Suicidal thoughts or attempts. Don’t hesitate to call us for help.

Depression

Adolescence is can be a time of personal and family turmoil. Be aware that there are increased rates of teen depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide. Talk with your teenager frequently and watch for signs of weight loss, noticeable changes in eating or sleeping habits, violent behavior, social withdrawal from friends and family, isolation, drastic personality changes, drug use, or difficulty concentrating. Asking your teen whether s/he is depressed will not put thoughts of suicide into their head. Communicating with them about these feelings gives them a chance to talk about their problems and makes them feel that you care. It gives them hope that people will listen. If your child seems depressed, anxious, or emotionally vulnerable, please contact us so that we may help you find help for you and your teen. If your teen has thoughts of suicide you need to go to the emergency room immediately for a psychiatric evaluation or call crisis intervention at: (203) 797-7007.

Driving

Driving is considered by many teenagers to be a “right” of passage. It is important that you set strict rules about driving from the beginning. The first, is to remind your teen that driving is not a right but rather a privilege that may be revoked at any time, and that motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of death among teens. Drivers should concentrate on driving- tell your child to turn off the radio, not talk on, answer, or dial the cell phone while driving. The young driver is not allowed to ride with other teens as passengers. They should NEVER drive or get into the car with a driver who has taken any drug, alcohol, or marijuana, even if they do not appear intoxicated. It is important that you always offer to pick up your child at anytime, anywhere, with no questions asked.