

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN THROUGH THEIR ADOLESCENT YEARS

Center for Literacy
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As your children become older, they are confronted everyday with new experiences at school and outside of the home. As they seek more independence, they begin to make more decisions on their own. At the same time, friends become very important to them, and pressure grows from wanting to please their friends. You can help build trust and good communication with your teenage son or daughter by first becoming aware of certain problem areas in your teen's life. A young adult faces problems in situations such as making choices between school and work, between using or not drugs and alcohol; understanding teen sexuality and teen anxiety.

How can I help my teenage children make positive decisions when they experience problems in their lives?

MAKING CHOICES: SCHOOL AND WORK

You can help your children understand that they can make decisions, and take control of their own schooling, or work. If they drop out of school they can find ways to get back in.

- Help your children stay in school until they graduate.
- Help your children understand that they can pursue a college education.
- Help your teenagers find good counseling in their high school for college opportunities and financial aid.
- Learn the laws for working minors. If your teenagers are sixteen years old and they work during or after school, your children are limited by law to work a certain amount of hours. Enforce those hours so that they continue to do well in school.
- Remind your teenagers that getting skills for careers takes time. They can learn these skills through school work or in vocational training.
- Encourage your children to find employment that is stimulating, if they want to work. Try to help them relate the job to their school work. Remind them that being bilingual has advantages, and encourage them to find jobs where they can use both languages.
- Ask your children's principal about work programs that the city may offer throughout the year or during the summer. For example, your children can find work as a volunteer in a business, law office, or at a health clinic.
- Encourage your children to go back to school or to get a G.E.D. (General Education Diploma) if they drop out of school. You can locate a GED program in a community organization or at a community college.
- Help your children locate a vocational program in your community or at the high school. There are a variety of opportunities from which they can choose.
- Help your teenager locate an Adult Education program in your community or at a city college which can teach them to learn how to read or write, study for a GED diploma, or learn ESL (English as Second Language).

TEEN ANXIETY

As children approach adolescence, there is more anxiety in their lives. Teens who are experiencing problems at school or with friends often show the following signs: lack of appetite, delinquent behavior in and out of school, apathy, or lack of attention.

- Emphasize to your children that you love them, and that you are available to help them get through their difficult situations.
- Love your children the way they are. Don't expect your child to be perfect or to be somebody that she/he is not.
- Teach your children to care, to act responsibly, and to respect others and as well as themselves. Act as their role model.
- Teach your children to live with whatever you can offer them. Nobody is perfect, and anybody can make mistakes. Teach them that they can learn from their mistakes as well as their successes.
- Help your teenagers lessen anxiety by learning about coping strategies. They can learn to cope with their problems through programs from the school, community groups, or mental health institutions.

TEEN SEXUALITY: LEARNING ABOUT OPTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

As your children become more aware of information in their environment about sexual attitudes, teach them that prevention and abstinence are positive choices that they can make.

TEEN PREGNANCY

- Listen and communicate openly to your teenagers if they have questions about sex.
- Help your teenagers learn more about health, good self-image, and personal safety.
- Learn more about the facts of teenage pregnancy and the reasons for it.
- Talk to your teenagers about the consequences of having a baby. List the responsibilities that having a baby requires, such as providing constant attention and care, providing food, and buying diapers and other baby supplies.
- Offer your teenage daughter emotional support if you learn that she is pregnant. Although you may feel disappointed and upset, let her know that you will be there for her.
- Offer your teenage son emotional support if you learn that his girlfriend is pregnant. Encourage your son and his girlfriend to seek advice from a counselor or health care person.
- Locate community support groups for counseling if your daughter becomes pregnant. They can provide you and your teen information about nutrition and health during pregnancy.
- Help your teenage daughter or son seek a community that teaches pre-natal, parenting and post-natal care if needed.

AIDS AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

- How can I talk to my children about sex and the risks of sex?

- Tell your children that each person is in charge of his/her own body, ideas and beliefs.
- Talk to them about what it means to have a "sexual relationship." Explain the responsibilities

- of having an intimate relationship.
- Assure them that abstinence is the best choice until they become adults. It is also the most effective way to avoid getting sexually transmitted diseases or getting pregnant
- Inform yourself of the risks of sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea, herpes, and the HIV virus that a person can catch if h/she does not use protection. Look for general information in the library or from a clinic about these diseases.
- Explain to them that there are some birth control methods that protect against pregnancy, but may not protect against sexually transmitted diseases or AIDS.
- Talk to your children about AIDS, how it is caught, and how it is passed on. Explain the difference between AIDS and HIV. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is the actual disease.
- Attend workshops that a clinic or community may offer on AIDS.
- Inform your children that a person can be infected with HIV in the following ways: sharing needles when taking drugs, sharing needles when for ear piercing or tattooing, and taking part in any unprotected sexual intercourse. Children are also infected if they are born to HIV-infected mothers.
- Find people in your neighborhood that you can trust and who can offer you and your children advice about AIDS. For example, other family members, other parents, teachers, or counselors. Also, ask help from organizations for centers for teenagers, nurses, doctors, or local organizations that help with sexual health matters.
- Call the National AIDS Hotline for more information, or if you have questions. The number for information in English is: 1-800-342-AIDS. The number for information in Spanish is 1-800-342-7432.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

If you learn that your child is involved with drugs, alcohol, or other substance abuse, there are ways to help your child. You don't have to feel helpless.

- Be honest and firm with your children about how you feel about substance abuse.
- Look for signs that might tell you there is something wrong with your child. For example, does your child get into trouble at school to help with explanations.
- Stay calm. Look for a guidance counselor from the school, community, clinic, or community to help you.
- Remember that you are your children's model and that they will follow whatever positive or negative examples you show them. If you are seriously involved with substance abuse or alcohol, seek immediate attention from a substance abuse counselor from a clinic or community organization.

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