



Raising Healthy Teens

Promoting the Health & Safety of Kent & South County Teens

Fall 2019

Your Child's Brain: The Last Body Part to Develop

Your Teen's Brain Won't Fully Mature Until Age 24 or 25. Okay...So What?

Well, this is often why your teen may be forgetful, make poor decisions, or take crazy risks. The part of the brain that controls these types of functions (the prefrontal cortex) hasn't fully matured yet. To add fuel to the fire, the part of your teen's brain that seeks pleasure and reward is fairly well developed. As you can imagine, the combination of the two can explain why some of your teen's actions and behaviors seem totally irrational. It's not their fault.

Teenage Brain Development

The teen years are a critical period of brain development and a time when their brain is very sensitive to toxins. If drugs or alcohol are introduced into their system, the brain's development is changed. Drug use can cause physical changes in the brain, specifically in the prefrontal cortex. This is the easiest excuse parents can give their children for avoiding alcohol and drugs. It goes beyond values, religious beliefs, legal issues, and plain good judgment; abstaining is vital to their health and future. Teach them to say no in order to keep their brain growing and developing the way it should.

The hippocampus is the part of the brain that deals with memory and mood regulation. Drug use causes cell damage and

death in the hippocampus, leading to problems with memory tasks, mood behaviors, and cognitive impairment. It also causes developmental issues in the part of the brain that controls attention and ability to understand complex ideas.

How Do I Talk to My Teen?

Remember, every conversation doesn't have to be about big issues. The goal is to build the relationship and keep the channels of communication open.

When you talk to your teen, be sure to:

- **Ask open-ended questions**
"What happened when you gave your presentation?"
- **Criticize behavior, not your teen**
"When you don't clean your room, it hurts my feelings."
- **Use "I" statements**
"I get upset when..." or "I feel hurt when..."
- **Be specific with your praise**
"You did a great job emptying the dishwasher and setting the table."
- **Never discount their feelings**
"I can understand why you would feel that way."

Parents Can Help Prevent Bullying by Recognizing the Signs

Kids might label it as teasing or joking around, but bullying happens in every elementary school. Could your child be bullied at school? Absolutely. But also consider that it might be your child who is doing the bullying. When you hear about bullying, treat the school as your ally and make sure that it completely stops. It is so important to end bullying early, so it doesn't continue throughout childhood.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying includes stealing passwords, sending offensive texts or spreading rumors via social media. Talk about this with your child. Encourage **thinking** before texting or posting something. If they are mad, sad or angry at someone, remind them **not** to post those thoughts on social media. If they see or experience cyberbullying, a trusted adult needs to be told.

Cyberbullying in elementary school is often done through gaming systems. Trash talking and jokes can quickly turn into bullying, and kids rarely know how to handle it.

One of the easiest ways to curb cyberbullying is by taking away your child's headphones and requiring all video games be played where you can hear what is said.

Girls are more likely than boys to commit cyberbullying and to be the victims.



Victims of bullying are often reluctant to report it, because they are embarrassed or humiliated by the bullying and might fear reprisals. In the case of cyberbullying, your child might be afraid you will take phone or computer privileges away to stop the problem. This is oftentimes not the best solution.

Teach Your Child These Steps to Help Them Deal with a Cyberbully:

- 1. STOP** If an offensive message is received, do not respond or engage. Stay calm.
- 2. BLOCK** Block the cyberbully and limit communication with friends about the incident.
- 3. TELL** Speak to a trusted adult. Do not erase or delete anything.

Teach your child to stand up against bullies in a non-violent way. Responding with violence can escalate the situation and get your child in trouble.

Avoidance is often the best strategy for younger children — play in a different place, play a different game, and stay near an adult when bullying is likely to occur.

Encourage your child to have more than one group of friends. Encourage friendships at school, at church, in your neighborhood, and wherever you spend your time. Having multiple groups of friends expands your child's sources of support.

How Do I Help My Child?

Warning signs include:

- Unexpectedly stops using their computer or phone
- Appears nervous when texts, emails or posts appear
- Appears uneasy about going to school
- Is withdrawn
- Appears angry or frustrated after using phone or computer
- Has trouble sleeping, a loss of appetite, excessive moodiness

Action Item Ask your child if he or she has ever been bullied or cyberbullied or knows someone at school struggling with bullying.

Do not blame the victim and do not contact the bully or the bully's family directly unless there are no other options.

Is My Child the Bully?

Have you ever wondered if your child might be the kid who bullies? Children that bully usually have little sympathy for others, have the need to control or dominate others physically, are often aggressive, and have difficulty controlling their temper.

Kids that bully usually deny involvement and have been known to accuse the victim of being the bully.

Your response is critical if your child bullies others. First, consider that they may not know that their behavior is wrong. Stay calm while letting your child know that bullying is wrong and that any retaliation on their part will not be tolerated.

Teach your child how to treat others by being kind and having empathy and respect. Make kindness a priority, not good grades or even personal happiness.

A Family Check Up: Building Good Communication Skills



Are you able to communicate calmly and clearly with your teenager regarding relationship problems, such as jealousy or need for attention?

Good communication between parents and children is the foundation of strong family relationships. Developing good communication skills helps parents catch problems early, support positive behavior, and stay aware of what is happening in their children's lives.

Relationship Problems & Clear Communication

- Negative example: Mom gets defensive
- Positive example: Mom is understanding

Before You Begin:

- Be sure it's a good time to talk and you can focus one hundred percent on communicating with your child
- Have a plan
- Gather your thoughts before you approach your child
- Be calm and patient
- Limit distractions

Key Communication Skills Include:

Questioning

The kind of information you receive depends a lot on how you ask the question.

- **Show interest/concern** Don't blame/accuse. For example, instead of, "How do you get yourself into these situations?" say, "That sounds like a difficult situation. Were you confused?"
- **Encourage problem-solving/thinking** For example: Instead of, "What did you think was going to happen when you don't think?" say, "So, what do you think would have been a better way to handle that?"

Listening and observing

Youth feel more comfortable bringing issues and situations to their parents when they know they will be listened to and not be accused.

Reducing Emotion

Sometimes, talking with children brings up strong feelings that interfere with clear thinking. Following the **CALM** steps can help parents keep conversation moving in the right direction:

Control your thoughts and your actions

Assess and decide if you are too upset to continue

Leave the situation if you are feeling too angry or upset

Make a plan to deal with the situation within 24 hours

Practice Skill

When listening to your child, remember:

- Show understanding
- Repeat back or summarize what your child said
- Practice patience
- Emphasize positive behaviors and choices

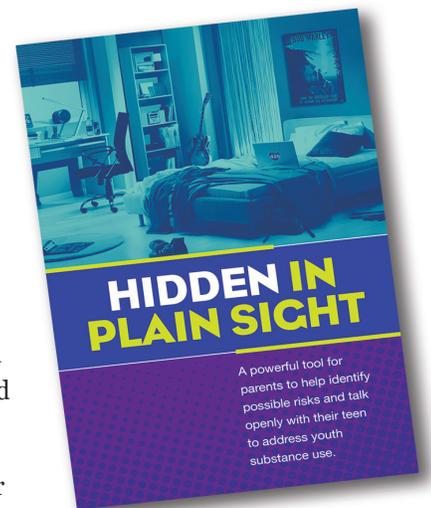
Hidden in Plain Sight at School Open Houses & Parent Nights

What is Hidden in Plain Sight?

Hidden in Plain Sight allows parents a unique interactive opportunity to look into a Teenager's Mock Bedroom. The room is full of common household items that could be used to hide or disguise drug, alcohol, tobacco use or other "risky" behaviors. Adults are asked to search for the items, and then compare their results with the answers. Prevention specialists are on-hand to answer any questions and share resources.

And while paranoia is never a good thing, neither is denial.

Many items that you will see could be found in your teen's room. However, that does not necessarily indicate your teen has an issue with risky behaviors. This demonstration is purely to bring awareness and give parents tools that will ultimately encourage meaningful conversations with their teen.



What Parents Need to Know About Vaping

Vaping is illegal for anyone under the age of 18, although in some states the restriction is at age 21. Up until 2016, there was little if any regulation of the vaping industry. In addition to the requirement to check ID, merchants are prohibited from giving away free samples, using vending machines (unless in age 21+ establishments) and claiming that products are safer alternatives to other tobacco products. As of 2018, nicotine warning labels must be on vaping products and they must list all ingredients.



What Are the Signs of Vaping?

Equipment

You may find devices that look like flash drives, e-juice bottles, pods (that contain e-juice) or product packaging. Aside from leaf marijuana, gel jars that contain dabs, small tools to scoop dabs and cartridges that contain THC oil are signs of vaping marijuana.

Online purchases, packages in mail, store purchases

Be aware of purchases made online and charged to your credit card or unusual packages that arrive in the mail. Kids also buy them at big box stores, gas stations or from other friends.

Scent

While the smell from vaping is faint, you may catch a whiff of a flavoring smell such as bubble gum or chocolate cake and take note.

Increased thirst, nose bleeds

Some of the chemicals used in e-juices have the effect of drying out the mouth and nasal passages. As a result, some kids drink more liquids or seem more prone to nose bleeds.

Decreased caffeine use

Some teens and young adults develop a sensitivity to caffeine. If your child drank caffeinated energy drinks and quits, it may be as a result of vaping.

Marijuana's Effect on Education

Marijuana can impact your teen's achievement in the classroom, on standardized tests and in the future.

- Marijuana use impairs the ability to concentrate and **retain information**. This can be especially problematic during peak learning years.
- Marijuana use is linked to **lower grades**.
- Marijuana and underage drinking are linked to **higher dropout rates**. A teenage marijuana user's odds of dropping out are more than 2x that of a non-user.
- Marijuana is **addictive**. It can cause problems for young users when their bodies and brains are still developing, which decreases their likelihood of success.
- The **earlier** kids start using marijuana, the more likely they are to become **dependent** on this or other illicit drugs later in life.
- Even **occasional use** negatively impacts emotion, motivation, and decision making. More research is coming on this emerging concern.

Heavy Marijuana Use In Teens is Linked to



Lower grades and exam scores



Less likely to graduate from High School or enroll in College

“ Not getting to class, changing majors, the B average becomes a C average – they are small things that aren't disastrous but they can change the course of where you are heading.”

Alan J. Budney, researcher and professor at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, NY Times



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