



Teening Your Parent

Adolescent Development:
A Primer for Teens





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A young man with a beard and a young woman are looking at a smartphone together. They are standing in front of a chain-link fence. The man is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark sweater with a white pattern. The background is slightly blurred, showing some text on the fence like "STARKER" and "WORLD INC".

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A close-up photograph of two young men. The man on the left is smiling broadly, showing his teeth. The man on the right is partially visible, looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white. The text 'The Life of a Teenager' is overlaid in the center.

The Life of a Teenager

Adolescence through the Ages

Teenagers haven't always had the kind of life they do today. The expectations and requirements of teens, and even the entire idea that someone can be a teenager have changed considerably over time. The word "adolescent" comes from the Latin word for "growing up" and it didn't even exist until the 1400s!



5th-15th Century: Adolescence didn't exist. Parents looked after their children only until they were able to survive on their own. At that point, children became adults and parents were no longer responsible for them.

16th-17th Century: Showing affection or fussing over children was considered unnecessary and harmful - a recipe for poorly behaved children. Children were treated as adults and expected to behave accordingly.

18th-19th Century: Parents began to recognize that it was important to nurture and educate their children. Early education was provided by the church and focused mostly on religion. This schooling was usually only available to city-dwelling children from rich families. Education was considered an unnecessary luxury for children from poor or rural families, as they usually needed to work to help support their family. This continued into the Industrial Revolution (18th to 19th Century), when young people were needed for factory work.

20th-21st Century: Teenagers as we know them, emerged after the Industrial Age, thanks to a better understanding of how adolescence has its own unique challenges and influences, separate from childhood or adulthood. Unfortunately, a lot of what we believed about adolescence in the 20th century was based on theories that weren't backed up by science. For example, contrary to popular belief, adolescence doesn't have to be a time of constant, extreme angst, conflict and chaos.

Over the past decade, the lives of teenagers have changed dramatically. The ever-expanding reach of technology and social media has shifted how teens communicate and relate to each other, how they learn, and the kinds of experiences available to them. Although being a teenager today has many similarities to teenagers in the past, the way you experience those events will likely be quite different from the way your parents experienced those same events. This book is designed to help you better understand the changes and challenges associated with being a teenager, find common ground with your parents, and help you navigate the years to come.













What Are Teenagers Really Like?

Although all teenagers are different, the life challenges and experiences that teenagers go through are often similar. Adolescence is the time when people start to consolidate all of the different parts of their identity and experiment with independence; two things that can cause a lot of conflict with their families (more on that later). Consequently, for a long time we thought that it was natural and typical for the teenager years to be filled with conflict, struggle, and angst – which we know now isn't true. Many of today's teens pass through adolescence experiencing only mild conflict with their families. Of course, there are still teens who struggle - but struggle and conflict is not the necessary rite of passage we once thought. Most teens are positive, caring, enthusiastic, and committed. They're not alienated from society, getting in trouble, or causing problems. They understand and value their friends and family, want to succeed in school, have good jobs, and live rewarding lives.



Teenagers say their behaviour is influenced by:

-  How they were brought up **92%**
-  Personal willpower **89%**
-  Mother **89%**
-  Friends **86%**
-  Father **82%**
-  Characteristics they were born with **76%**
-  Other important adults **65%**
-  Music **64%**
-  Reading materials **49%**
-  Teachers **45%**



Check out
“The Emerging Millennials”
by R. Bibby (2009).

The Teenage Experience: What to Expect

A lot happens in adolescence. Your body starts to change, your thoughts start to change, and your feelings start to get more complicated. Adolescence is when you begin to figure out who you're going to be as an adult. Knowing what to expect and what is typical can make it easier for you to handle the challenges and changes that come with being a teenager. Here are some things you should know that may be relevant to you:

Ages: 10-13

- Puberty starts (females usually mature 1-2 years earlier than males)
- May be challenging to balance family obligations with wanting to be independent
- Become more aware of physical attractiveness and physical changes
- Become more aware of yourself as a person with future wants/wishes
- Often have high expectations and lofty goals for the future, even if these ideas are not realistic (e.g., being famous)
- Desire to make more friends and to test authority figures
- Your behaviour, mood, and motivations change often
- Start to become interested in sex and romantic partners
- May have difficulty thinking things through before acting

Ages: 14-16

- Most likely to experience conflict with your parents
- Want to spend most of your time with friends
- Less interested in family activities
- Puberty for some may be completed
- Desire to be similar to friends and classmates (e.g., clothing, language, values)
- Continued focus on yourself
- Increased ability to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings
- Begin to develop your own opinions, values, and identity

Ages: 17-21

- Start to experience the responsibilities that come with being an adult
- Start to have more positive experiences with your family
- Able to start making decisions independently
- Even better ability to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions
- Less concerned with your appearance
- Increased self-confidence
- Less interested in being the same as your friends and peers
- Better at problem solving
- Strengthened values
- Deeper and more stable emotions

Because adolescence must be understood in historical context, each generation takes on some unique characteristic that differentiate it from others. For example, for people born after 2000, their teen years have been highly influenced by technology-specific personal communication device such as the iPhone. Also, the duration of the period of adolescence has changed over historical time. Currently, the adolescent phase of life is the longest it has ever been!



Physical Changes

Puberty

When your brain decides it is time for puberty, a series of brain signals are sent to the pituitary gland (a pea shaped gland that sits right under your brain). These brain signals cause your pituitary gland to secrete growth hormone and a number of different hormones, which then trigger other parts of the body to secrete sex hormones, like testosterone and estrogen. These different hormones all work on different parts of the body to usher in the changes that we call puberty – weight and muscle gain, increased body hair, growth spurts, and increased sexual arousal. Puberty usually begins around age 10 for females and 12 for males - but some people start a bit earlier while others a bit later.

Teenage Brain

During the teenage years, the brain grows rapidly and undergoes many important changes. Certain parts of the brain decrease in size while other parts of the brain increase. As you use pathways that connect different parts of your brain, they become stronger and more efficient. Pathways that you don't use eventually disappear to make way for more useful connections.

The biggest change in the brain during adolescence is the development of the frontal lobes – the part of the brain just behind your forehead. This part of the brain is responsible for something called executive functioning, which includes problem solving, planning, social awareness, strategic thinking, and inhibition. It's the part of the brain that tells us “Hey, maybe that's not such a good idea...” The frontal lobes are growing and developing during adolescence and don't actually stop growing until the mid-twenties. This can contribute to why some teens are impulsive and act without thinking – even when it might be dangerous.

Brain growth and development is influenced by three main factors: genetics, early environment (beginning in the womb), and current environment. A healthy environment during adolescence may contribute to healthy brain development. Getting enough sleep, eating healthy, exercising, having positive friendships and family relationships, and successfully overcoming challenges all contribute to good brain health. Head injury, poor nutrition, lack of sleep, negative peer groups, and misuse of drugs or alcohol can all have a negative impact on your brain development.



Protect your Brain

Head injury can lead to serious and long-term problems in many parts of life. It can cause difficulties with thinking, behaviour, and emotions. Even a mild head injury can cause a concussion, which can result in short- or long-term consequences. It's essential to protect your brain by wearing a helmet, following safety rules while playing sports, always wearing a seat belt when in a motorized vehicle, and never getting in a car with a driver who was drinking or using drugs.

Sometimes, even with the best of care, a brain injury can happen. If you think you might have a concussion, seek medical attention immediately. Do not return to playing sports until you're cleared by your doctor, even if your coach, parents, or friends tell you it's okay. The doctor will give you 'return to play' guidelines to follow to make sure you are ready to return. Returning to school work also requires time and planning.

Your brain is your most important asset. It's who you are, who you have been and who you will become. You only have one, so take care of it.



For more information on the teen brain, check out this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGdlpaWi3rc&feature=youtu.be>



Explore the following links if you are interested in learning more about the teenage brain architecture:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/the-teen-brain/>



Educate yourself about concussions and how to prevent them. Check out our "Brain Injury Guide for Youth":

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/product/brain-injury-guide-youth/>

Healthy Growth and Development

Healthy brain development and growth requires fuel. Here's what you should know about keeping your brain healthy:

Eating

Calories are fuel for a growing brain and body; and the body needs more calories during the start of adolescence than at any other point in life. On average, teenage males require 2400-2800 calories and teenage females require 1800-2400 calories daily, but not just any calories will do. It's important that those calories come mostly from health promoting choices. That includes lots of vegetables and fruit, whole grains, foods rich in calcium, iron, unsaturated fats, and a moderate amount of lean protein. The occasional fast food or junk food is totally fine – but it shouldn't be a regular occurrence! Learning how to prepare a few healthy meals with your parent can be a fun activity.



For help figuring out what you should be eating, check out Canada's Food Guide:

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Sleeping

It probably comes as no surprise to you, but the majority of teens don't get enough sleep. There are many reasons why this happens. First, teenagers need, on average, nine hours of sleep per night. At first glance, this might seem easy to achieve. If you have to be up at 7am for school, then you can just go to bed at 10pm, right? But here is the second problem – the hormones that your brain secretes to make you feel drowsy and tired aren't released until much later in the evening compared to when you were young; and probably even later than when your parents get tired. That means that because school starts at a set time in the morning, by the time you're tired enough to sleep, there's almost no chance to get nine hours.



For more information on healthy sleep hygiene, check out:

http://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Healthy_Sleeping.pdf

Not getting enough sleep can have serious, negative consequences. When we're not well-rested, we have difficulty learning, remembering, and coping with stress. Sleep is vital to our emotional, physical, and intellectual health and essential for healthy brain development. REM sleep (Rapid Eye Movement) is necessary to feel well-rested. REM sleep is when you do most of your dreaming and it accounts for 20-30 percent of your sleeping time.



So what can you do? Start by taking responsibility for your own sleep routine. Here are some things you can do:

- Unplug (no phone, TV, computer, tablet, or gaming device) at least an hour before bed. This isn't a punishment. These devices (bright screens and activity included) stimulate the brain and make it difficult for people to fall asleep and experience a restful sleep.
- If you aren't tired yet, do something quiet in your room – reading, drawing, and writing in a journal are all great options.
- Although it may be difficult, try to go to sleep and wake up within 30 minutes of the same time every day – even on the weekend. Our bodies can't tell the difference between a weekday and a weekend. Staying up late or sleeping in on the weekend can make it difficult to fall asleep and wake up during the week.
- Develop and follow a regular nightly routine before you go to bed (e.g., brush teeth, wash face, read for 15-30 minutes, etc.). A series of steps to follow every night cues our bodies that it's time to fall asleep.
- Try not to read, do homework, or text friends from bed. Your bed should be used for sleeping. This teaches your body that when you're in bed, you should be asleep. Do not bring your phone into your room when you are supposed to be sleeping.

Exercising

Exercise is so important; not only for your physical health but also for your mental health. Exercise is one of the healthiest and most effective ways to cope with stress as well as build a healthy mind and a healthy body. You should get about 30 minutes of vigorous exercise (e.g., jogging or running, swimming, dancing, or playing a sport) per day, five days per week. Although walking to and from school or the bus stop is a helpful addition to daily exercise, it's not vigorous enough to make a difference on its own.

Success and Failure

You can't win every time. In fact, it's important for you to fail and make mistakes sometimes. It's how you learn to cope with disappointment, pick yourself back up, and find the strength to try again. These experiences contribute to the way the brain develops. And just like learning to deal with failure shapes the brain, so does experiencing success. It's just as important for your development and self-esteem that you find areas to succeed and thrive. Having a balance of these positive experiences and challenging experiences helps you develop into a confident and capable adult. Don't be afraid to try new things and figure out what sports, activities, hobbies, and interests are the best fits for you.

While you are experiencing challenges along the way, you may experience some stress – which can be very healthy for you. Experiencing and learning how to use stress is an important part of having good mental health and can help you to adapt to life's circumstances successfully.



Healthy Relationships

We often learn about social complexities through example and trial/error. The relationships you have with your family shape the way your brain recognizes and understands relationships. Your family members are the first relationships you ever form, and they create a template for what a relationship could be. Do everything you can to have positive, supportive, and open relationships with your family members. Healthy relationships involve support and understanding, honest and open communication, equal give and take (i.e., both people are benefitting from the relationship), and clearly defined boundaries. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to have a healthy relationship with their family members, through no fault of their own. If you're not able to create healthy supportive relationships within your family, focus on the healthy relationships you've formed outside of your family – with friends, teachers, coaches, and others.

Having good relationships with adults that are good role models is one good way to learn how you can become an adult with good relationships.

Identity

Much of the conflict and stress associated with being a teenager stems from one core aspect of adolescence – identity development. Identity is all of the pieces of you as a teen that makes you who you are – it's ever-evolving, and you can have multiple identities. In different areas of your life certain identities may be stronger.

Adolescence is the time when most people start trying to figure out who they are. We try on different “identities” for size, looking for the one that fits best. This is why you might be interested in classical music one year, and rap the next. You're trying to figure out what you like and where you fit best. Feeling like you don't know who you are can be stressful – especially when you think you should know. This is one of the challenges of adolescence – we all think we should know exactly who we are, when the part of our brain that helps us understand how complex we really are, hasn't finished developing yet. Consequently, we try to fit ourselves into stereotypical boxes (e.g., “football player,” “band member,” “honour roll student,”); none of which are a perfect fit because these characteristics are too one-dimensional. As we age and the frontal lobes of our brain develop, we are able to merge the different parts of our identities and embrace being the complex people we actually are (e.g., a good student who plays football and plays in a band, along with many other characteristics). There are no short-cuts through this process. It's an essential part of being a teenager. Having a sense of identity comes only through time and experience.



Where do our identities come from? They are influenced by our natural abilities, our experiences, our relationships, and our environment. And, don't be afraid to fail at things. It is through failing at some things that we can learn valuable life lessons.

Experiences and Natural Abilities

Part of our identity comes from understanding our strengths and weaknesses, which we figure out by trying new things. Don't be afraid to get out there and do things that interest you. Adolescence is the perfect time to try new things and figure out what will be the best fit for you.

Our experiences shape how we see ourselves. People often underestimate the impact of their experiences on who they become. Through our experiences, we learn what we are good at, what we find challenging, how other people see us, and many other things. That doesn't mean that every experience we have is reflective of who we are – it just means that we usually think it's reflective of who we are. Everyone interacts with the world based on their own experiences. For example, someone might treat you badly, not because you deserve to be treated badly, but because their experiences are shaping the way they treat you. It's more a reflection of them than it is of you. This is important to remember because we might start to believe that something negative is part of our identity, solely because someone else made us think it was true – not because it's actually the truth. Because experiences help build us into who we are and will become, it's a good idea to try and explore positively challenging experiences.



Try volunteering in your community or participate in a program such as Katimavik (katimavik.org; available to teenagers in Quebec and Ontario) or Canada World Youth (canadaworldyouth.org).

Relationships

Our identities are also largely shaped by our relationships. In fact, some people believe that we first start to understand who we are by understanding how other people see us. Someone who is constantly made to feel stupid by their family may believe they are stupid. Likewise, someone who is constantly made to feel smart and capable by their family may believe they are smart and capable. Once you hit adolescence, your friends and classmates also start to influence how you see yourself. Try to surround yourself with positive people and focus on building healthy relationships.

Environment

The environments we live in also play a significant role in our sense of identity. This doesn't just mean your house; environments can be as large as the society you live in, part of the world, religion, or culture you live in, or they can be as small as the school you go to or the neighbourhood you live in. Each one impacts who you are, what you believe is important, and the standards against which you reflect yourself. For example, in many developed countries, society expects that all children and teenagers should be educated. That means that whether or not they succeed in school becomes a part of most people's identities. Remember that although you can't choose all of your environments, you can choose some of them – the activities you do, sports you play, music you listen to, and friend groups you make. All of these environments will influence how your identity develops.

It's amazing really - by choosing your environments and friends and experiences, you can actually influence who you will become. You can help create YOU

Dating

Taking romantic interest in others is an important milestone for teenagers. Much like friendships, dating enhances your social skills, exposes you to different points of view and perspectives, and expands your sense of identity. Not all teenagers will be interested in dating at the same time (or at all), but as your focus begins to shift from your family to your peers, romantic relationships may start to become more important to you. If you have questions about dating or sex, talk to a parent or an adult you trust.

Some people know their sexual orientation before they reach adolescence, but for many LGBTQ+ teenagers, adolescence is when they start to become fully aware of their sexual identity. Some teens come to this realization suddenly and accept it just as quickly. Other teens need to take time and experiment in order to be certain of how they feel. Adolescence can be a stressful time for any teen, but for a teen who is struggling with accepting or expressing their own sexual identity; this time can be especially confusing and stressful. If you're struggling with your sexual identity, know that you're not alone.



There is a lot of information out there, especially on the internet - and a lot of it isn't accurate (i.e. porn not actually representative of most "real-life" sexual experiences!). Check out <https://www.sexandu.ca/> for information you can trust.



There are trusted, responsible people you can talk to, if you need someone to listen. Ask your school counsellor to recommend someone and check out pflagcanada.ca.



Sexuality

Are you ready for sex?

Deciding to have sex is a very personal decision - and one that will be different for everyone. Whenever you do decide to have sex, make sure that the decision feels right for you. Sex involves intimacy, and sharing your vulnerabilities and your body with another person. Sex has the power to profoundly impact our emotions, our self-esteem, and our physical health. If it's something you want to try, then you should think carefully about what kind of sex you are comfortable with, who you want to share it with, and what your boundaries are. If you are not comfortable talking about these topics with your partner(s), you are likely not ready to have sex. Talking about sex is extremely important (and necessary) as a foundation for healthy sexual experiences. You should never have sex because you feel pressured by another person or group of people. Only you know when you are ready.



Safe Sex

Sex can have consequences – some of which can last a lifetime. If you choose to have sex, make sure that you're having safe sex. Talk to your doctor about different methods of contraception to find out which one is right for you. Remember that not all forms of birth control protect you from sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and that the only contraceptive method that works 100% of the time is to not have sex. Even if you are not worried about contraception (e.g. same-sex sex or oral sex), you still need to use protection to be safe from STIs!

For more information on birth control, contraceptives, and sexually-transmitted infections, check out www.sexandu.ca

For information on unplanned pregnancy, check out www.cfsh.ca

Consent to Sexual Activity

Consent, where all parties involved are safe from emotional, social, and physical harm, is an essential part of sexual encounters. Consent is critical not just to sexual intercourse, but to all sexual acts, including sharing or posting sexual images and videos with others. What is consent? Consent is when all people involved agree to a sexual encounter and have the freedom to decide at any moment that they are no longer interested and want to stop the sexual activity. If someone is coerced, intimidated, or threatened into having sex, they have not given consent (even if they have not said “no”). If someone is incapacitated (e.g., due to alcohol/drugs or some other factor), they cannot provide consent. Consenting to one act (e.g., kissing) does not mean the person has consented to other acts (e.g., oral sex or sexual intercourse). Likewise, consenting to an act at one point in time (e.g., having sex this week) does not mean the person has consented to that act in the future (e.g., having sex tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year). Consent means that at this exact point in time, you are agreeing to participate in this particular sexual act. If you are initiating sexual activity, it is your responsibility to obtain consent.

Age of Consent

Not all people are able to provide consent. Children, teenagers up to a certain age, and many people with intellectual or developmental disabilities are not able to provide consent, because they are unlikely to understand the consequences of what they are consenting to. Note that this includes the sharing of sexual images and videos (see the Technology section for more). The legal age of consent in Canada is generally 16, but there are some exceptions.




For more information:
http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/en/no_means_no

How to Give Consent

You can give consent by openly saying “yes” or using another expression that indicates you are interested in trying or participating in a sexual activity.

How to Know if You’ve Received Consent

The only way to be certain is to ask someone if they would like to engage in whatever sexual activity you’re proposing and they say yes. When the degree or type of sexual activity changes, you can also check that your partner continues to consent by asking “is this okay?” What someone wears or their past behaviour does not imply consent. You have not received consent if your partner is drunk, high, or unconscious. You have not received consent if your partner is under the legal age of consent. You have not received consent if you have used force, intimidation, manipulation, or your authority to have sex with someone – even if they do not explicitly say no.



You have not received consent if your partner says no (in any respect), pushes you away (or any other action that implies they are not agreeing to the act), or resists in any way. You have not received consent if a partner who previously agreed to sexual activity is no longer interested in participating. You have not received consent if your partner is silent or unresponsive.

Consent within a Relationship

Consent is still required in a relationship. Each partner has the right to decline sexual activity whenever they choose. Consent is never waived in a relationship.



*For more information:
[http://www.srhweek.ca/
healthy-sexuality-healthy-
relationships/ navigating-
consent/](http://www.srhweek.ca/healthy-sexuality-healthy-relationships/navigating-consent/)*

Sexual Harassment and Assault

Sexual harassment and sexual assault are unwanted and inappropriate sexual contact, comments, or threats. They can be physical (e.g., oral sex, sexual touching, or sexual intercourse that occurs without consent) or non-physical (e.g., threats, sexual suggestiveness, blackmail, intimidation, and exhibitionism). If you are unable to consent to sex because you are unconscious or highly intoxicated, it is considered sexual assault. No one “deserves” or “asks” to be sexually assaulted. If you have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, it’s really important that you tell a parent, another trusted adult, or a health provider as soon as possible. Tell your parent you have something very serious to tell them and ask to speak in private. No matter how your parent reacts, remember that what happened to you was not your fault. The first thing you should do after telling your parent(s) or a trusted adult that you were sexually assaulted, is to go to the hospital. Do not shower or wash your clothes until after you’ve been to the hospital. By going to the hospital, they can a) ensure you are not in need of physical care, and b) provide evidence that your abuser has assaulted you. You may be unsure immediately if you want to involve legal action in your situation; however, by getting this “proof” right away, you will have the evidence you need should you need it. Once you have a grasp of what has happened you can decide how you want to proceed. The decision to take legal action is 100% up to you. Get advice from your parents or another trusted adult. Your local health provider such as a family doctor or emergency room nurse can give you advice and support. Some communities may have a sexual assault center you can call. Your school counsellor may also be someone you can consider talking to. Remember, you are not alone! Reaching out to trusted adults is the first step to take.



The Life of a Parent

What is Life Like for a Parent?

It's hard being a parent. To do it well you need to be caring, understanding, tolerant, supportive, respectful and loving. As strange as it might seem, almost every action a parent takes impacts their child. For example, the relationship parents have with their children strongly determines how children will understand relationships with other people. Similarly, the expectations parents have for their children help children learn what they are capable of and motivate them to succeed. Even the way parents talk to their children shapes how children expect to be treated, even as teenagers and adults. In short, parents have to provide for their children – emotionally, intellectually, and physically. That includes ensuring that their child develops good coping skills for dealing with stress, knows how to make friends, understands the difference between right and wrong, learns constantly, appreciates the value of hard work, pursues interests and passions that can turn into careers, and feels valuable and worthy of love. In addition to all of this, parents also have to make sure their children have a roof over their heads and food on the table. Parenting is hard work and can cause a lot of pressure!



Parental Stress and Responsibilities

All of these responsibilities can be pretty stressful for your parent – especially if they don't have good social support. Your parent needs to be successful at work – not just for their own sake, but for yours' as well! Because one or more of your parents work, you're able to go to school, learn, and spend time with your friends. This helps you grow and develop into the person you will eventually become. Even as little as 50 years ago, many teenagers didn't have this same opportunity. Many teenagers, especially from poor families or rural areas, had to leave school before graduation in order to find a job and help support their families. Today, at least in North America, education is considered a right – and parents must allow their children and teenagers to go to school. The opportunity to learn without having to take on adult level responsibilities is an opportunity that not everyone in the world is afforded.



Parents as People

Parents are people too. This may seem obvious, but often we think of our parents only in relation to ourselves and forget that they have their own thoughts, worries, stresses, and emotions. As much as your parent might try to protect you from the thoughts and events that worry them, sometimes this stress spills over. It's not always easy (or healthy) to keep things bottled up inside! Sometimes your parent might have a really bad day at work, a stressful conversation with a family member, or something else entirely – and they snap at something they normally would not. It's important to remember that your parent's reaction to the things you do is not always about you. Just like when you have a bad day and snap at your mom or dad, the same can happen to your parent. Cut them a little slack. Ask if something is wrong or if they have had a bad day. Even if they choose not to share, your parent will probably appreciate that you care enough to ask. And remember that sometimes your parent's reaction actually is about you – but when they get upset, it's often because they were or are worried about you. Most parents want the best for their children and when they see their children heading down a potentially questionable path, it's only natural to want to step in and protect them. If your parents get upset with you, use the communication tips on page 27 to work through the issue and get to the root of what is actually going on.

The key word here is RESPECT.

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a red and white striped shirt, kissing another woman on the cheek. The woman being kissed has light brown hair and is wearing a black top. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The text 'Dealing With Your Parents' is overlaid on the image in white and pink.

Dealing With Your Parents

Conflict

As you're likely well aware, there are times you will get angry with your parents and times you will think they're being unfair. As much as it sucks, it's actually totally normal and important to feel that way. You're going to experience conflict in many different parts of life throughout your entire life – it's part of being human. How you deal with that conflict is what matters. It's normal to disagree and to think differently than your parents, but there are healthy ways to deal with disagreements. You're learning to be your own independent person and that can be difficult for your parents to accept. And sometimes you just don't agree on things because you are different people and have different perspectives!

Independence

Independence is often a source of conflict between teenagers and their parents. It can be hard for some parents to relinquish control and let their teenagers try things out for themselves. Most parents want to protect their children and prevent them from doing anything that might not work out as planned – but part of being a teenager is making mistakes! One of the most important ways we learn is by making mistakes. As long as you're not in danger, it's important to use this time to try new things and figure out what works for you. Becoming more independent will give you the freedom to make choices for yourself and greater opportunity to chart your own path.

Part of becoming more independent often includes separating ourselves from our families – physically and emotionally - to find our own place in the world. Wanting to spend more time with friends than with family is a typical part of this process. Our friendships are particularly influential during adolescence. Although a lot of our behaviour comes from our personalities and the way we were raised, in adolescence, we start to be influenced more by our friends and peers. This is why choosing a good peer group is so important. The type of friendships you choose help you figure out who you are and what matters to you. Friendships can help give you a sense of belonging and help your social skills to evolve. Choose your friends well. Remember that who you will become will in part depend on who your friends are.

If your parents are having difficulty with you expressing your independence or understanding what it's like to be a teen today, they may find it helpful to read this book's companion – Parenting Your Teen. Don't be hesitant about sharing it with them. And follow-up by talking to them about it. Also, try introducing your parents to your friends. You may be surprised how well they get along. Sometimes your parents and your friends' parents even may become friends!

Communication

Communication can be one of the fastest ways to both trigger and resolve conflict. Although most people only think about verbal communication (i.e., the words you say), it's just as important to consider your nonverbal communication (i.e., how you say those words). Nonverbal communication includes your tone of voice, your facial expression, and your body position (e.g., crossed arms). Although we don't always realize it, people often pay as much attention to our nonverbal communication as they do to our verbal communication. Unfortunately, we rarely pay as much attention to our own nonverbal communication.

Talking to your parents: Here are some tips for communicating with your parents that can help you resolve conflict in a healthy way:

- Listen to each other. This is the single most important thing that both of you can do. Pay attention to what your parents are saying verbally and nonverbally. Try not to spend the time they are talking thinking about your own response.
- Respect your parent and their opinions. Remember respect does not mean agreement. People can respectfully disagree.
- Don't interrupt each other. Let your parent express their thoughts without jumping in or jumping to conclusions. Ask your parent to do the same for you.
- Speak clearly. Pause before you respond to make sure that what you say is actually what you want to say. It's easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment and blurt out something you don't really mean or something you later wish you didn't say.
- Be aware not only of what you say but of how you say it. Often your parents are more aware of how you say something than what you actually say.
- If your parent starts to get upset, ask what they think you meant – often what we mean to say and what someone hears us say are different.
- Try to understand where your parent is coming from. Why are they interpreting this situation in a particular way?
- Stay calm. This one can be really tough, especially when it feels like your parent is being unfair. Remember that they are much more likely to actually listen to what you're saying if you stay calm and rational. Take a deep breath, focus on what you want to say.



- Give reasons. Do your best to explain to your parent why you want to do something. Staying calm and presenting a well-reasoned argument can help your parent understand where you're coming from.
- Ask to take a break if things get too heated or if the conversation keeps going in circles. Walk away (and allow your parents to walk away). If they walk away from you, they likely are not in the right headspace to communicate effectively right now. Respect that they recognized that and try again when it is a better time for them.
- Communicate while doing a simple activity. Often, sitting down face to face can be intimidating. If one or both of you is doing something else, it may relieve some of that nervous energy. You can have a conversation while driving, walking, cooking, knitting, or even colouring. These small activities act as a fidget to release energy that might otherwise add unnecessary stress to the conversation.
- If the resolution of the conflict is not what you hoped, take some time and space to calm down and acknowledge your disappointment.
- Remember, conflict does not usually resolve with a zero/sum outcome. "Winning" an argument is not usually the goal! Conflict resolution often requires compromise. Healthy conflict leads to healthy resolution and maturity.



Healthy Parent-Teen Relationships

Why it Matters

Having a healthy relationship with your parents is good for everyone. It makes your life and your parents' lives easier and more rewarding, and it helps to lay the foundation for healthy relationships in the future. Here's what you can do to help you to have a healthy relationship with your parents:



Building and Maintaining

Healthy relationships are a two-way street, meaning that they require active participation from both people. That includes trust and respect, support and understanding, honest and open communication, equal give and take (i.e., both people are benefitting from the relationship), and clearly defined boundaries. As such, if you want your parents to trust and respect you, your opinions, and your decisions, you need to do the same for them. It's pretty rare for parents to put limits and boundaries on you just because they don't want you to have any fun. Usually, your parents believe they have a good reason for the rules and boundaries they set. Stay calm, be polite, and ask them about their reasoning. Try to see things from their perspective and encourage them to do the same for you. Remember that often when your parents seem unreasonable to you they are actually worried or concerned about you. One way to help them worry less is to work at maintaining good, open and honest communication. Use the communication tips above to help your parent understand your perspective and to get to know their perspective. Good communication is the cement of healthy relationships.

A young man with curly brown hair is shown in profile, looking down and to the left. He has his right hand pressed against his forehead, suggesting deep thought or concern. He is wearing a grey V-neck t-shirt. The background is a plain, light grey color.

Other Concerns During **Adolescence**

Technology and Social Media

The ways by which teenagers communicate today is drastically different than when most parents were teenagers - so much of our lives are lived online today. Technology makes it possible for many teenagers to live as much (or more) in the virtual world as they do in the real world - something parents can have trouble understanding. The ever-present use of technology has advantages and disadvantages for teenagers' social behaviour. From a positive standpoint, using technology to communicate lets teens access their friends 24/7, find somewhere to belong, and cultivate friendships with people they might not otherwise meet. Unfortunately, today's technology use does have downsides. Life doesn't only exist in the virtual world. When you communicate with someone online or via text message, you have time to think before you respond - time to process what was said, time to think about alternate responses, and time to choose the option that makes you look the best. This rarely happens in real life. Online and phone communication need to be balanced with plenty of face-to-face communication for good social development. The key here is balance.

Safety

Another concern with online communication is safety. The internet can be an amazing information and social tool but it can also be dangerous. Important things for you to know:

- People can claim to be anyone on the internet. It's really important to remember that just because someone claims to be a 14-year-old girl, doesn't mean that they are actually a 14-year-old girl; they could just as easily be a 45-year-old man. For the vast majority of the internet, there are no safety checks. People can claim to be whomever they choose and there is no way to know if they are telling the truth. This makes it much easier for predators to harm unsuspecting teenagers - even if you think it would never happen to you.
- Avoid giving out personal information. This can include your address, phone number, age, parent's jobs, financial information, etc. It may seem innocent but this information can be dangerous in the wrong hands. And as previously mentioned, we don't always know exactly who we're really speaking with on the internet.
- Be socially responsible, and behave online as you would face-to-face. Don't take advantage of the anonymity of the internet in a negative way.
- Don't share your passwords with anybody. This includes best friends, significant others, etc. The only people you should be sharing passwords with is your parents.



- Think before you post. What goes on the internet is **PERMANENT**. Posting or sending inappropriate or embarrassing photos or comments is not something that you can delete if you regret it later. Even if you try to delete something later, a copy of it always remains on the internet (in addition to the copies downloaded by other people before you removed the original). If it's not something you want everyone to have access to forever, then don't put it on the internet. This includes platforms such as snapchat. Even though it alerts you when something is screenshotted, it is still possible for people to get around these functions. Another thing to be aware of is private accounts such as spam/friends only Instagram accounts. Even if you only let a very select group of people follow you, it is easy for these things to be saved or

Cyberbullying

24/7 access to peers can mean that teenagers who are bullied don't have a safe space to escape. The bullying doesn't end when the teen goes home at the end of the school day. Internet, texting, and social media use make it possible for bullies to have 24/7 access to their victims, making it hard for teenagers to escape. Cyberbullying can include sending mean/threatening emails or texts, posting embarrassing or explicit photos of someone online, pretending to be someone else online, or tricking someone into revealing personal information and sharing it with others. Approximately one quarter of teens may have been targets of electronic bullying. Bullying - whether online or in person - is never okay. If you're being bullied, tell a parent, a teacher, or another trusted adult. Bullying is not just a "normal" part of being a teenager and it is not necessary for "toughening up". Bullying has no positive purpose and its impact can be long-lasting and severe.

Remember, everyone has a responsibility to stop bullying. If you witness bullying, you can help by involving a responsible adult and not supporting people who are bullying others.

Sexting

Consensual sexting can be fun and part of a healthy intimate relationship, but sometimes it's easy to forget that this information can be electronically saved and potentially available to people you may not want to share that information with. Both texts and photos that you send to someone can also be forwarded and shared with others. Consider these potential consequences before engaging in these activities. Although sometimes difficult to do, there are places you can turn if things go wrong. Visit www.needhelpnow.ca if you need help removing unwanted information. You can also request to have photos or posts removed from various social media platforms by stating that they violate the site's guidelines.



For more information about living online, check out: <http://mediasmarts.ca/>



To learn more about how to use stress to learn how to adapt and grow resilience, check out the following link: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Stress-Transitions.pdf>.



For more information on sexting check out <http://kidshelpphone.ca/topic/sex-relationships/sexting/>



Stress

Teenagers experience all kinds of stressors during adolescence, including stress about school, friends, classmates, family conflicts, personal identity, health problems, the future, and financial issues. Although severe and long-lasting stress can make some people more likely to develop a mental illness, regular everyday stress does not cause mental illness. In fact, not all stress is actually bad. Stress can help us realize our values, motivate us, and make us work harder. Stress can help us rise up to successfully meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities. After all – if something doesn't matter to us, we may not be motivated to work hard and accomplish our goals. Unfortunately, if stress starts to get overwhelming, it can also prevent us from getting things done and make us feel terrible. Here are some signs that you may be too stressed:

Physical Symptoms:

Headache; neck ache; indigestion; stomach ache; sweaty palms; racing heart; difficulty sleeping.

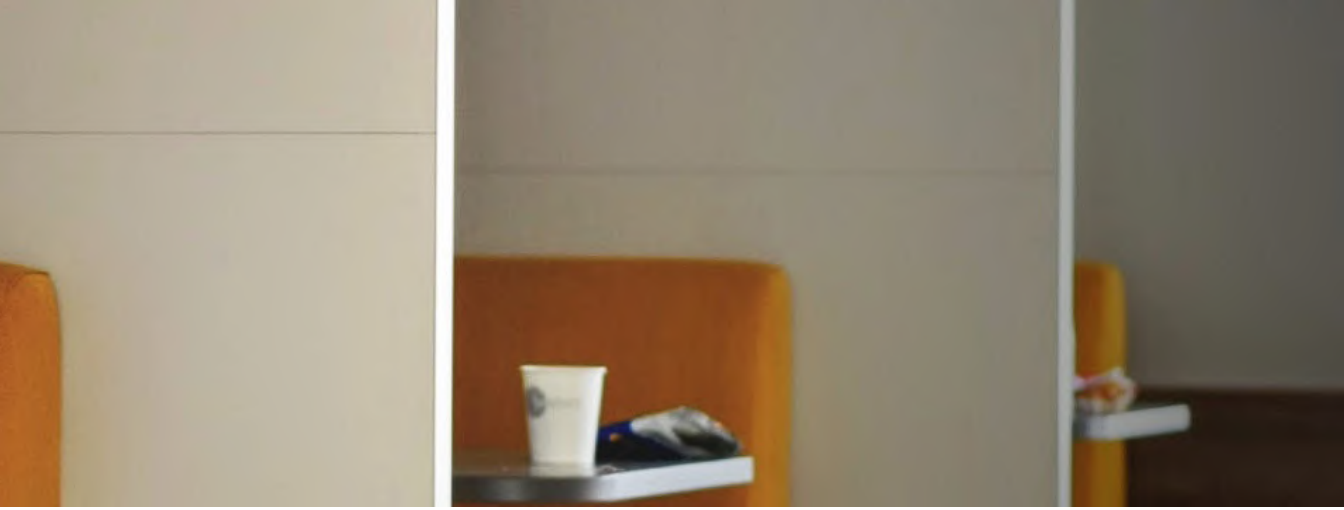
Emotional Symptoms:

Crying; anger; loneliness; forgetfulness; diminished sense of humour; irritability; hopelessness; unhappiness; indecisiveness; worry; nervousness; difficulty concentrating.

Behavioural Symptoms:

Drinking, smoking or using drugs; withdrawal or avoidance; acting aggressively; feeling restless; eating poorly; having nightmares.

It's really important to learn how to manage stress. Learning how to cope with smaller stressors teaches us how to deal with larger stressors in the future. Although we sometimes assume that people just know how to cope – it's actually something we learn. People can be taught how to cope better. Sometimes we're directly taught ways that we can use to help cope with our emotions. Most often, however, we learn how to cope through modeling. We cope the way we see others cope – in particular, influential others like our parents or friends. Unfortunately, the people around us don't always use healthy coping strategies themselves, which can mean that we learn unhealthy coping strategies too, like drinking, using drugs, avoidance, and self-harm. Here are some healthy ways to cope with stress:



Do something. If the stress is caused by a problem that has a solution, the best way to cope with that problem is to solve it. For example, if you're stressed about an exam, the best way to cope with that stress is to study. Gaining a better understanding of the material will help lower your stress. Unfortunately, not all stressors can be "solved". In those situations, the best plan is to cope with emotion causing the stress, rather than the situation itself. The following self-care tips can help you cope with negative emotions.

Exercise. Daily vigorous physical activity improves health and mood, and helps get rid of stress. Even something as simple as going for a brisk walk can help.

Sleep. Teenagers need 8-9 hours of sleep each night. Getting adequate sleep will help you feel better the next day. If you have trouble sleeping, follow the tips on page 13.


Eat healthy. Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to fight stress. Try not to skip meals, to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and to go easy on the junk food.

Stay away from alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drugs affect your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Although drinking or using drugs may make you feel less stressed in the short-term, they won't resolve your stress. They'll only give you a false sense of confidence and may actually make your problems much worse in the long run. This includes cigarettes!

Limit caffeine. Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.

Daily relaxation time. Take time each day to relax. Read a book, watch a movie, play a game, listen to music – whatever helps you to relax.

Practice relaxation exercises. Stress can have physical symptoms, like tension and shallow breathing. Practicing these relaxation exercises can help to reduce the physical consequences of stress. Box Breathing and Hand Relaxation are two relaxation techniques that work really well, work really quickly, and can be done anywhere, anytime.



Box Breathing: If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

- 1) Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.
- 2) Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.
- 3) Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- 4) Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again. Repeat this process as many times as necessary. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing may help you feel calmer and more in control.

Hand Relaxation: Hand relaxation helps to get rid of the tense feelings in your body. Here's how you do it:

- 1) Clench the muscles in your left hand (make a fist) really tightly for 5 seconds.
- 2) Let go gradually (for about 15 seconds), breathing slowly and concentrating on the feeling in your hand.
- 3) Repeat using your right hand.

Go outside. Staying inside all the time can be really draining. Getting outside and enjoying the sun and fresh air can help improve your mood. Try to link this with exercise if possible; even a brisk walk outdoors may help.

Build healthy relationships. It's important to have a good support network of people you trust. Talking to people who care for you can be a big help!

Acknowledging feelings. It's okay to feel angry or upset once in a while. In fact, it's healthy. You don't have to bottle up your feelings. Talk to the people in your support network. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your



Be realistic. Stress can make people interpret things as much worse than they actually are. Ask someone you trust for their opinion. Sometimes taking a step away from your own feelings and perspective is just what you need to start feeling better. This additional perspective can also help you understand how to better solve the challenges or take advantage of the opportunity.

Manage your time. Practice scheduling and prioritizing your projects and other responsibilities — it will help you feel more in control, more productive, and less overwhelmed. Use a timetable organizer or your phone calendar (so it is always with you) and check it every morning to help you plan the day. When attempting tasks, start with the most manageable task first. Accomplishing a few tasks, even if they're easy, will help you gain the confidence necessary to tackle larger projects.

Accept what you can't change. Sometimes stressful things happen that we just have to live with. Not every problem can be solved. Try to accept what has happened, acknowledge how you feel about the situation, and then move on. Don't think about or focus on the problem for extended periods of time if nothing can be done. This will only make you feel worse. Acknowledge, accept, and then use healthy coping strategies to move on. Read a book/watch a movie/listen to music, practice relaxation exercises, spend time with friends and family, and focus on the things you can control. Ultimately, all that any of us can control is our own behaviour; our own reaction. No one can control someone else's behaviour. Remembering this can help you to shift your perspective. With time, most stress will pass.



Learn to take better care of your health. Download "Taking Charge of Your Health":

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/taking-charge-of-your-health>

Use the right language. Over the last little while it has become popular to use words that define a mental illness to describe normal emotions. This is confusing and unhelpful. Remember: depression is not feeling sad, and anxiety is not worry. It is really important to use the right words to describe how you are feeling. Here are some examples. What do each of these words mean?

Words that identify a mental illness

*Anxiety
Depressed*

Words that identify emotional states

*Fearful, Demoralized, Worried, Despondent,
Nervous, Distraught, Perturbed, Disturbed,
Bothered, Distressed, Concerned, Upset*

Mental Illness

Adolescence is a period of exciting change but it can also be a time of vulnerability. Many mental illnesses are likely to emerge during the teen years, due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Although most teenagers will not develop a mental illness, one in five may in their lifetime

What is a Mental Illness?

A **mental illness**, which is also called a mental disorder, is a medical illness that is based in the brain and affects the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves. It is diagnosed by a doctor or psychologist with advanced training in mental health. There are a number of different mental illnesses, which have different combinations of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (e.g., thinking) signs and symptoms. Mental illnesses require professional help.

A **mental health problem** is when someone has emotional, cognitive, or physical difficulties, usually due to changes in their environment (e.g., a breakup, job loss, death of a loved one). Although these problems are distressing to the person involved, they will usually be resolved with healthy coping strategies and time. Mental health problems do not usually require medical attention, although a counsellor can sometimes be helpful.

Mental distress is a signal from our brains that something has changed and we need to adapt. Everyone experiences mental distress. For example: being frustrated because we're stuck in traffic, worried we didn't study enough for an exam, or thinking someone has treated us unfairly. Although unpleasant, mental distress does not need professional help. It passes relatively quickly with the use of healthy coping strategies and it leads to adaptation!

Common Mental Illnesses in Adolescence

Depressive Disorders are a group of disorders that all have the same core components - a persistent sad, empty, or irritable mood and changes in the way you think and act, which significantly interfere with your ability to be successful at school, at home, and with your friends. There are different kinds of Depressive Disorders, some that are more intense and tend to occur in short bursts (e.g., Major Depressive Disorder) and others that are less intense but more long-lasting and pervasive (e.g., Persistent Depressive Disorder). Depressive Disorders often have a genetic component, which means that if someone in your immediate family has a Depressive Disorder, you are also more likely to develop a Depressive Disorder. Effective treatment of Depressive Disorders includes psychotherapy and medication.



The main feature of Bipolar Disorders is unexpected mood shifts from extremely low (Depression) to elevated (Hypomania) or extremely elevated/irritable (Mania). These mood changes are accompanied by changes in how you think and act. People experiencing Mania feel like they can do anything, regardless of reality. Their minds and mouths race; they don't feel the need to sleep; they're easily distracted; and they often participate in high-risk activities that could cause them serious harm (e.g., sexual promiscuity, risky business investments, shopping sprees, dangerous physical activities), without acknowledging the risks and consequences. Bipolar Disorders have a significant genetic component, which means that if someone in your immediate family has Bipolar Disorder, you are more likely to also develop Bipolar Disorder. Bipolar Disorders are most effectively treated by medication and psychotherapy.

Anxiety Disorders are a group of disorders that involve inappropriate, excessive, or unreasonable worry about a situation or object. There are different types of Anxiety Disorders. For example, Social Anxiety Disorder is when someone is afraid of social situations where they might be judged. Some people with Anxiety Disorders also have panic attacks, which are sudden and overwhelming surges of fear and anxiety that are accompanied by frightening physical sensations (e.g., racing heart, difficulty breathing, nausea, chest pain, sweating, etc.). Someone having a Panic Attack often believes they are dying. Panic Disorder is a type of Anxiety Disorder. Anxiety Disorders frequently have a genetic component and are most effectively treated by psychotherapy and if necessary, medication.



For more information on Depression, check out this video:

<http://youtu.be/i8EPz-kxAiVw>



For more information on Social Anxiety Disorder check out this video:

<http://youtu.be/kitHQU-WrA7s>



For more information on Panic Disorder check out this video:

http://youtu.be/R3S_XYaE-PUs



You can find out more about mental disorders at teenmentalhealth.org

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is when someone has substantial difficulty concentrating, paying attention, remembering details, organizing, and planning. They may also have trouble sitting still, acting appropriately in controlled situations (e.g., in class), keeping quiet, and waiting their turn to act or speak. These issues happen in multiple situations (e.g., at school and at home) and start before age 12. ADHD frequently has a genetic component and is most effectively treated with medication. Psychotherapy is helpful for treating any associated social problems.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is when people have frequent thoughts or mental images (i.e., obsessions), causing significant anxiety, which they try to get rid of using repetitive behaviours (i.e., compulsions). For example, someone might have obsessive thoughts about germs, which cause intense feelings of anxiety. The person then washes their hands excessively (the compulsion) to try to reduce the anxiety. Compulsions are excessive in nature and are not always clearly linked to the obsession they are trying to neutralize. Common compulsions include hand washing, checking, and ordering. Somebody who is simply extremely organized or wants things done in a particular way most likely does not have OCD. People with OCD can spend a large part of their day fixating on obsessions and performing compulsions, which impairs their ability to succeed in all areas of life. OCD is most effectively treated with psychotherapy and medication.

Disturbed eating behaviour, dangerous weight loss techniques, and inaccurate self-image are the main features of Eating Disorders. Although Eating Disorders are more reported in teenage girls, they also occur in boys. Eating Disorders have serious physical, social, and emotional consequences and can be life-threatening. They are best treated using psychotherapy.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people following a severely traumatic event (e.g., war, natural disaster, rape, assault, abuse, witnessing a murder/suicide). Someone with PTSD will continue to re-experience the event, through flashbacks and/or night terrors. People with PTSD will often experience intense anxiety and physical distress in reaction to things that remind them of the traumatic event. This anxiety is so distressing that the person may avoid places and situations that remind them of the event. Most people exposed to a traumatic event will not develop PTSD. PTSD is most effectively treated with psychotherapy and if necessary, medication.



Schizophrenia is diagnosed when someone experiences at least one of the following:

- 1) **delusions** – the unwavering belief in something that is not true, in spite of evidence to the contrary
- 2) **hallucinations** – believing you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch something that does not actually exist
- 3) **disorganized thinking** – thoughts and speech are poorly organized, poorly communicated, and difficult or impossible to understand
- 4) **grossly disorganized or abnormal motor behaviour** – behaviour is unpredictable, inappropriate for the situation, or completely non-reactive to the environment (i.e., the person is like a statue)
- 5) **negative symptoms** – decrease in emotional expression, purposeful behaviour, speech, social interest, and pleasure or enjoyment. Schizophrenia has a genetic component, meaning that if someone in your immediate family has Schizophrenia, you are at risk for also developing the disorder. If you are at risk for Schizophrenia, marijuana use may increase your chances of developing the disorder.
- 6) **Schizophrenia** is most effectively treated with medication and social therapies.



*For more information on ADHD check out these videos:
http://youtu.be/rIKMo8VuC_c
and
<http://youtu.be/rLghxG-3mGMM>*



*For more information on OCD check out this video:
<http://youtu.be/ua9zr-16jC1M>*



*For more information on these and other mental disorders that may affect teenagers, check out this website:
www.teenmentalhealth.org*

Dangerous Behaviours

Suicide

Suicide is a very serious issue and should always be treated as such. Although it is rare overall, it is one of the leading causes of death among young people and a tragedy for the teenager, their families, their friends, and their communities. Suicide is strongly associated with untreated mental illness. The best way to decrease suicide is to effectively treat the underlying mental illness.

People who die by suicide usually believe that it is the only way out. Their thinking is not clear and they are not able to realize how their actions will affect the people who care about them. Often thoughts of suicide can happen as a result of something that makes you feel overwhelmed. If you act on that feeling, you may end up harming yourself. If you wait until the feeling passes or reach out for help instead, you will be able to move beyond the feeling and get the help you need.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, this means that you should get help. Please tell someone you trust. It may seem hopeless, like nothing will change – but almost all problems can be solved with some help. Talk to your parents or call the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868. The Kids Help Phone has trained counsellors on hand 24/7 who can help, even if it's just to listen to you. If you would prefer to text, Kids Help Phone also powers a Crisis Text Line; text HOME to 686868 in Canada to be connected with a Crisis Responder. If you are feeling suicidal right now, please tell your parents or another trusted adult immediately and call 911. You are not alone. People care about you. Things can get better, even if it doesn't feel like it right now.

If you are worried that your friend might be suicidal, tell an adult you both trust. Understanding the warning signs for suicide can help keep your friend safe:

- Intense hopelessness or sadness
- Preoccupation with death
- Withdrawal from family and friends or reconnecting with loved ones
- Talking about what it will be like when they are gone



Self-Harm

Self-harm (or self-injury) is when people intentionally hurt themselves by cutting, biting, hitting, burning, pulling out hair, etc. Many people think that people who self-harm are suicidal (i.e., they assume that by cutting, the individual is trying to die) but that isn't true. Self-harm is not the same thing as suicide. Often, self-harm is used to cope with strong emotions and is not an attempt to die. Many youth report that they've self-harmed at least once, and most people who self-harm frequently began when they were teenagers. Sometimes if your friends are self-harming it becomes easier for you to self-harm too. This is not helpful – for you or for your friend.

If you self-harm, it can be hard to stop – either because you don't want to or you don't know how to. One of the best first steps you can take is to tell your parents or another adult you trust. If cutting, biting, hitting, or another self-harming behaviour is how you cope with your intense emotions, it's important to start developing healthier coping strategies before you try to stop self-harming. You need to have healthy tools in place to handle difficult emotions. This will take time and patience. A counsellor, therapist, or psychologist can help you build up an arsenal of positive coping strategies and understand where these difficult emotions come from. When you have more positive coping strategies to choose from, it makes it much easier to stop hurting yourself.

Why should I stop?

Although people who self-harm are not trying to die, accidents can happen. Many people underestimate how dangerous certain activities are and might accidentally cut too deep, cut in the wrong place, hit too hard, or something else entirely. Learning and practicing healthier coping strategies now, as a teenager, helps to solidify healthy coping skills and make it easier for you to deal with intense emotions throughout the rest of your life.



For more information on self-injury, visit sioutreach.org.

Substance Use

Most adults with substance use problems began abusing drugs and/or alcohol as a teenager. Teen drug or alcohol use is especially problematic because teenagers' brains are not yet fully developed. Introducing alcohol or drugs to a still-developing brain can have serious negative long-term consequences.

Alcohol is the drug that is used most often by teens. Chronic abuse of alcohol can lead to many harmful outcomes, including liver cancer, bone marrow problems, cardiovascular disease, damage to the central nervous system, and impaired memory. Occasional use of moderate amounts of alcohol does not typically lead to problems. Unfortunately, occasional moderate alcohol use is less common among teens than binge drinking, which may lead to difficulties. It is important to realize that alcoholism doesn't depend on age. An alcoholic isn't always the 55 year old man drinking beer every night until he passes out, it can also look like a teenage girl who is binge-drinking multiple nights every week and feels she can't have a fun time without alcohol.

Smoking during adolescence can have profound effects on a teenager's growth, development, and health. Taking the time to think about what exactly is in cigarettes may be a wakeup call for many teens. Cigarettes contain many harmful and toxic chemicals, including tar (not a pleasant thought to be inhaling tar, is it?), ammonia (which is typically found in dry cleaning fluids), carbon monoxide (which limits the amount of oxygen supplied in the body), formaldehyde (a cancer-causing chemical used to preserve dead bodies), and nicotine (one of the most addictive chemicals known). Smoking can increase your heart rate, elevate your blood pressure, lower your sperm count if you're male, wrinkle your skin, decrease your night vision, and cause cancer of the pancreas, lungs, kidneys, bladder, larynx, throat, and esophagus. The numerous detrimental effects of smoking make it the number one preventable cause of death. One third of smokers will die from a smoking-related cause. The nicotine patch or nicotine gum may be helpful for teens who are trying to quit smoking.





E-cigarettes and Vaping, also commonly referred to as “vapes”, “e-cigs”, “e-hookahs” and “vape pens”, are electronic devices that heat a liquid and produce an aerosol or a mix of small particles in the air. While the full effects of vaping on one’s physical health are unknown at this time, it’s important to remember that many contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and contains harmful chemicals known to be linked to cancer, heart disease and respiratory disease. The popularity of e-cigarettes among teens is rapidly growing. Tempting e-cigarette flavours and a reduced stigma associated with smoking are factors that attract teens to vaping. Teens who would have not otherwise started smoking traditional cigarettes are now becoming addicted to nicotine through e-cigarette use.

Smokeless tobacco is another form of tobacco use that is typically chewed or put directly into the mouth. Although it is not as popular as smoking, this form of tobacco use is becoming increasingly popular in teens (especially on male sports teams). Like cigarettes, smokeless tobacco contains formaldehyde and nicotine, but it also contains other harmful ingredients, including lead (a poison), cadmium (found in car batteries), polonium (a nuclear waste), uranium (used in nuclear weapons) and fibreglass (used to make tiny cuts in your lip to allow these harmful chemicals into your body). Smokeless tobacco can lead to cancer of the mouth, lip, voice box, throat, and tongue.

Cannabis (i.e., pot, weed, marijuana) is another popular drug used by teens. Many teens experiment with cannabis without becoming dependent on the drug; however, it is not without health risks. Frequent cannabis use can interfere with attention span, memory, coordination, energy level, and judgment. In addition, recent research has found that cannabis use may trigger the onset of Schizophrenia and/or psychosis in people who are at risk for the disorder. Recent research suggests that smoking too much cannabis can actually have a negative impact on how brains grow and develop during the teen years!



Check out the following video for more information about cannabis:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=A-2-65hH224

Ecstasy or MDMA or Molly use alters the person’s perceptions and causes feelings of hyperactivity – which makes it most often used at parties or dances. When a teenager is dehydrated or when the drug is used in high doses, ecstasy, MDMA, or Molly can be fatal. Some teens that use this drug will experience psychotic symptoms and that can lead to all sorts of problems.



Hard drugs include speed, LSD, cocaine, crystal meth, heroin and certain prescription narcotics, like OxyContin, Dilaudid, or Percocet. These drugs are extremely harmful to health, may be addictive, and should be avoided at all costs. Although there is some debate about our ability to responsibly use alcohol and marijuana, there is no debate about the use of hard drugs. Hard drugs should never be used – by adults OR teenagers.

If drugs or alcohol use are causing you (or a friend) problems with school, work, family, friends, or anywhere else – it’s important to seek help. Talk to a trusted parent, teacher, counsellor, or doctor.

If you notice any of the following signs of alcohol poisoning or drug overdose in someone you know, call 911 immediately. Someone with alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose may get brain damage and die.

Most pharmacies now provide Naloxone (Narcan) kits and pharmacist training on administering the drug. This may be a good thing to have if you suspect somebody in your life is using narcotics. There is no harm in giving Naloxone to somebody who doesn’t need it, but it can save somebody’s life if they are having an opioid overdose.



Signs of Alcohol Poisoning:

- Loss of consciousness
- Slow or irregular heart beat
- Vomiting
- Seizure
- Low body temperature
- Pale or bluish skin

Signs of Drug Overdose:

- Loss of consciousness
- Chest pain
- Heavy sweating
- Delusions/hallucinations
- Faster breathing
- Seizures or uncontrollable twitching
- Fever
- Racing or irregular heartbeat
- Cold or pale skin



Getting Help

Getting Help

It can feel overwhelming if you think you might have a mental illness or other serious mental health concern. The first and most important thing you can do is talk to someone you trust. Tell your parents or a responsible adult that you can confide in (such as a teacher or a school counsellor) what you've been experiencing, how you've been feeling, and that you would like to talk to your doctor. Your family doctor or paediatrician will be able to help you figure out what is going on and refer you to someone who specializes in mental health, if necessary. Don't lose hope. Most common mental illnesses are very treatable.

Don't let anybody convince you that going to therapy, taking medications, or getting any other type of help is weak. Seeking help is never shameful. It takes courage to admit you need help and even more bravery to take the steps to get help.

Note: If you are feeling suicidal, call 911 and go to the hospital immediately.

Helpful Websites

TeenMentalHealth.org

www.teenmentalhealth.org

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre

<http://keltymentalhealth.ca>

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov



For more information on asking your doctor about what best kind of help you need, check out this list of questions to ask them: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/product/communicating-health-care-provider-every-person-ask/>



For more information about kinds of treatments for a mental illness that are available and how to talk about them with your doctor, check out: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/product/evidence-based-medicine-youth/>

Adolescence is an exciting time full of new experiences, new challenges and new opportunities. Maintaining a positive and open relationship with your parents can make it easier for you to navigate the ups and downs of your teenage years. Remember, even when they're driving you nuts, your parents want you to succeed. Cut them some slack and they just might do the same for you in return.

