

2017 Children’s Mental Health Report Supplement

Talking to Teens About the Brain, Behavior and Risk

Talking to teens about the risks of adolescence isn’t easy, but it’s not impossible.

Below we offer basic tips on talking with your teen. Following that you’ll find suggestions for using our 2017 Children’s Mental Health Report (childmind.org/2017report) to have an open and ongoing conversation about making good choices.

But how do you even start? Here are some tips for building rapport with your teen:

- 1. Start by listening.** Teens are more open to hearing you if they don’t feel pressured.
- 2. Show trust.** Teens want to be taken seriously, especially by their parents. Look for ways to show you trust your teen. That confidence boost can help him make good decisions.
- 3. Don’t be a dictator.** Hearing your thoughtful explanation of why you want to talk about this subject can help your teen feel better participating.
- 4. Make your teen a partner.** When sharing information like this report, make sure teens know you think it’s valuable for them and their lives.
- 5. Give praise.** Parents praise younger children more, but teens need the self-esteem boost, too.
- 6. Control your emotions.** Remember, you’re the adult. Teens are less able to think critically when they’re emotional. If you stay calm, they’re more likely to follow your lead.

Inside, you’ll find suggestions on how to talk about a variety of important subjects—like sleep, self-harm, drugs and social media. We suggest a fact from the Children’s Mental Health Report to start with, although you could take a look (childmind.org/2017report) and choose another! Then we provide some additional resources from childmind.org that you can look at, and even share with your teen.

Finally, we provide a list of discussion prompts and questions to get the conversation started. Remember to be open, be honest, and base your talk on facts. You do not have to be an expert to talk to your kids about these issues—just be a good listener, and don’t be afraid to look up the facts together with your child. The report (childmind.org/2017report) is a resource you can read together.

Brain Development 101

FACT:

The human brain is still developing well into adulthood, ending at around age 25.

RESOURCES:

The Teenage Brain (And What It Means for Parenting)

childmind.org/blog/teenage-brain-means-parenting/

The Teen Brain and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

childmind.org/blog/the-teen-brain-and-dialectical-behavioral-therapy

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Neural circuits, or systems, are responsible for most of what we can do and learn as humans — like speech, movement, emotional regulation, complex reasoning and more. Different neural systems develop throughout the first 25 years.
- ▶ Early childhood is a period when many systems develop; so is adolescence.
- ▶ When each brain system is developing, it is “plastic” and susceptible to disruption. That means that what teens do can have a real impact on their brain — for better or worse.
- ▶ Brain regions responsible for planning and impulse control are the last to become mature. These regions mature slowly in the period sometimes called emerging adulthood, from roughly 11 to 25 years of age.
- ▶ Do you feel like you can notice your brain changing? Do you see how you can learn both good and bad habits?
- ▶ Do you notice how some of your emotions seem stronger and harder to control?
- ▶ Do you feel more comfortable asking for help, knowing that some parts of your brain are stronger right now, and others are less developed?

Experimenting With Drugs and Alcohol

FACT:

Early use of alcohol and drugs increases the risk of dependence in adulthood.

RESOURCES:

How to Talk to Teens About Drug Use

childmind.org/article/talk-teenager-substance-use-abuse

Q&A: Why Limits Are Important

childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-alcohol-and-drugs

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ If you start using drugs even infrequently, you are more likely to develop a habit, increasing your risk for later addiction.
- ▶ Teens who start using drugs like benzodiazepines, stimulants and opiates before age 18 have a 50% to 100% higher risk of becoming dependent than adults who experiment with drugs.
- ▶ Drug use may even accelerate the onset of other serious illnesses, like psychosis, and make them more severe.
- ▶ Does this information change the way you think about using drugs?
- ▶ How can we develop tools to help you not use drugs when your friends are?

What's Up With Social Media and Cyberbullying?

FACT:

Heavy users of social media have a 27% increased risk of depression compared to typical peers.

RESOURCES:

Cyberbullying, Social Media and Self-Esteem
childmind.org/article/how-using-social-media-affects-teenagers

Managing Social Media Stress
With Mindfulness

childmind.org/article/social-media-stress-mindfulness

How Tech Changes Families

childmind.org/article/big-disconnect-how-tech-changes-families-2

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Social media is a huge and positive part of our lives now, but it can also have a negative effect on self-esteem and mood.
- ▶ Do you think when your friends post on social media they are posting about how their lives really are or how they want them to appear?
- ▶ Do you feel pressure to look or act a certain way because of other people's profiles?
- ▶ Do you feel your online life is balanced with face-to-face interactions?
- ▶ How can we set healthy limits for the amount of time you spend on social media?

Just Being a Teen...or Depression and Anxiety?

FACT:

One-third of teenagers experience anxiety; 15% struggle with depression.

RESOURCES:

How to Help Your Depressed Teen

childmind.org/article/how-to-help-your-depressed-teenager

What Is Social Anxiety?

childmind.org/article/what-is-social-anxiety

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Anxiety and depression symptoms are common and serious.
- ▶ Do you know what the symptoms of anxiety are? They include physical problems like stomachaches or trouble sleeping, school avoidance and fear of being away from parents, trouble focusing, and explosive outbursts.
- ▶ Do you know what the symptoms of depression are? They include persistent sadness, reduced interest in activities, changes in sleep patterns or weight, sluggishness, negative outlook on self, and suicidal thoughts.
- ▶ Do you have friends who may be feeling anxious or depressed?
- ▶ How can we make it easier to talk about anxiety and depression and get help?

Talking About Self-Harm Without Shame or Blame

FACT:

28% of adolescents report engaging in moderate to severe self injury every year.

RESOURCES:

What Drives Self-Injury and How to Treat It
childmind.org/article/what-drives-self-injury-and-how-to-treat-it

What to Do if You're Worried About Suicide
childmind.org/article/youre-worried-suicide

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Some young people hurt themselves to communicate how they're feeling; others do it to lessen or offset emotional pain.
- ▶ Self-injury like cutting or burning is different from thinking about, planning, or attempting suicide.
- ▶ Still, researchers think that people who self-harm might be more likely than others to die by suicide.
- ▶ Do you know people who try to communicate by hurting themselves?
- ▶ Do you have strategies to let others know how you're feeling, or talk through tough emotions?
- ▶ How can we make it easier for people to talk about emotional pain and thoughts of self-harm?
- ▶ Do you know about the anonymous hotlines you or a friend can call if they want to talk? National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800)-273-8255. Crisis Text Line: Text "UROC" to 741741

Is Marijuana "OK" Now?

FACT:

Daily use of marijuana doubles the risk of onset of a psychotic disorder.

RESOURCES:

Marijuana and Psychosis
childmind.org/article/marijuana-and-psychosis

Does Teenage Marijuana Use Affect IQ?
childmind.org/article/teenage-marijuana-use-affect-iq

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Evidence shows early marijuana use may accelerate the onset of other serious illnesses, like psychosis.
- ▶ Marijuana can quickly become a problem for teens with disorders like ADHD.
- ▶ More than 90% of adults treated for marijuana dependence start using before age 18.
- ▶ Do you feel social pressure to use marijuana or alcohol?
- ▶ What tools/strategies can we come up with to help you in those situations?

I'll Sleep When I'm Twenty-Five

FACT:

Insufficient sleep triples teen reports of depressive symptoms.

RESOURCES:

Parents Guide to Teenagers and Sleep

childmind.org/guide/parents-guide-to-teenagers-and-sleep

How to Help Teens Get More Sleep

childmind.org/article/help-teenagers-get-sleep

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ Teens who spend three or more hours a day on electronic devices are 28% more likely to get less than seven hours of sleep than peers who use devices more sparingly.
- ▶ Lack of sleep can negatively affect teens' mood, ability to think, to react, to regulate their emotions, to learn and to get along with adults.
- ▶ Do you feel like you can't put down your phone or other electronic device, even when you know you need sleep?
- ▶ What tools/strategies can we come up with to help you balance your online time with taking care of your body?
- ▶ How can we make time management and self-care something the whole family works on together?

The Risks of Risk-Taking

FACT:

Brain development in adolescence results in increased intensity in feelings (fear, excitement, sexual attraction) and decreased ability to "hit the brakes" in responding to these feelings.

RESOURCES:

What Parents Should Know About Teens, Drinking and Drugs

childmind.org/article/parents-know-teens-drinking-drugs

What Parents Should Know About Concussions

childmind.org/article/what-parents-should-know-about-concussions

TALK ABOUT IT:

- ▶ The parts of the brain that help teens get motivated about their interests, develop passions and seek out new experiences are developing in adolescence. This brain development also means that if teens are exposed to drugs they are more likely to develop drug habits and become dependent; it also means teens are more likely to take risks, like having unprotected sex or driving drunk.
- ▶ The teen brain is also wired to be more self-conscious. These feelings peak around 15 years old.
- ▶ Peer approval has been shown to be highly rewarding to the teen brain. This may be why teens are more likely to take risks when other teens are around. Do you have that experience?
- ▶ How do you think understanding your brain's development can help you avoid bad decisions and risky situations?
- ▶ What tools/strategies can we come up with to help you pause and ask for help if you find yourself in risky situations?