The Teen Years
(13–18 years)

Developmental Overview

Adolescence marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Physical growth in early adolescence is rapid, and hormonal changes are typically greater than at any other age [17]. The teen years are often divided into the stages of *early adolescence,* ages 10 or 11 through age 14; *middle adolescence,* ages 15 and 16; and *late adolescence,* ages 17 through 19.

In early adolescence, children usually begin to worry about their appearance, become more moody because of hormonal changes, and focus on friendships. In middle adolescence, teens gradually become more comfortable with themselves and others. However they may begin to push family boundaries and experiment with new behaviors. By late adolescence, most teenagers have reached their adult height and are beginning to focus on independence and relationships apart from the family [17]. During these three stages of teen development, almost every part of the body is affected by the surge of growth, including the skeletal, muscular, and reproductive systems. Rapid growth, along with the difference in growth patterns, can create anxieties in teenagers. Popular media like television and movies often contribute to an adolescent's negative view of his or her body.

Teens show their independence and individuality by questioning, arguing, disputing, and at times rejecting their parents' opinions and beliefs. They also spend more time with friends and away from home than in earlier years. Despite their occasionally rebellious attitudes, teenagers still value their families and firm rules more than they are likely to admit. Parents who have consistently provided support and guidance for their children throughout the early childhood and middle years are likely to see their parenting efforts pay dividends. Their teens will likely respond to rules appropriately, despite some grumbling, and navigate peer influences more successfully than those children who have not experienced family support and guidance. However, if parents suddenly become lax in expectations, or if the family has a history of inconsistent family guidelines, their teenagers may feel lost, unsafe, and unprotected. They may also find themselves in dangerous situations with little understanding of the consequences.

Six areas in which parents can help their teenager develop healthy relationships and recognize and resist dangerous influences:

organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement
substance use
access to weapons and guns
peer influences
dating relationships
transitions to adulthood

In this section, we suggest six areas in which parents have opportunities to help their teenager develop healthy relationships and recognize and resist dangerous influences. These include: organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement; substance use; access to weapons and guns; peer influences; dating relationships; and successful transitions from adolescence to young adulthood.

How teens are impacted by these six areas is interrelated and complex. The five domains of influence that are mentioned in the previous sections also impact teenagers. Those domains include individual factors, family factors, school factors, peer-related factors, and community and neighborhood factors [19].

A comprehensive list of issues affecting aggression in youth is beyond the scope of this *Guide*. Instead, we focus on a few issues upon which parents' actions can have a significant impact. Factors that can contribute to patterns of aggression, such as parenting style, family strengths, temperament, and learning disabilities, are mentioned in the introduction to this *Guide.* In this section, brief research summaries are included to help parents understand the role each issue plays in violence prevention. A list of resources follows, so that parents know where to get additional information and help.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Organized Activities, Volunteerism, and Community Involvement

How do organized activities, volunteerism, and community involvement fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"The most relevant fact for education against violence is that teaching self-restraint and responsible conduct is most successful when young people are positively involved in some other activities, rather than when they are only asked to refrain from what they are tempted to do" ([15], p. 57).

Healthy teen development is supported by participating in organized activities and volunteering in the community. In a recent article in *American Psychologist,* Reed Larson [27] notes that "structured, voluntary youth activities," such as sports, arts, music, participation in organizations, community service, and other hobbies, are associated with a variety of positive outcomes for teens. Some of the outcomes include decreased delinquency and greater school achievement, increased self-control, increased initiative, and selflessness. Young people who volunteer are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, vandalism, and skipping school [16]. At the same time, parents should guard against overscheduling activities, given the increased amount of homework in high school and the importance of family time [23]. Clearly, teenagers should be encouraged to balance their lives with activities related to school, family, and community service. This balance will vary for individual teenagers.

Adolescence is also a time when young people, particularly girls, are likely to be self-absorbed. In girls, this is a characteristic that is sometimes described as a developmental stage rather than a problem. Volunteer work, good deeds for neighbors, and political action help teenage girls move beyond themselves into the larger world [42]. Volunteer work and social action may also help prevent cynicism, depression, and narcissism [43]. These kinds of activities are often viewed as a link between school and employment that builds an adolescent's understanding of the world of work [7; 16].

Several experts have noted that teenagers with a religious commitment are more likely to be involved in service activities. Commitment to a faith community appears to provide an anchor for teens [18]. "The adults in our churches and community made children feel valued and important," says Marian Wright Edelman. "They took time and paid attention to us. They struggled to find ways to keep us busy. And while life was often hard and resources scarce, we always knew who we were and that the measure of our worth was inside our heads and hearts and not outside in our possessions or on our backs" ([14], p. 5).

Volunteer work, good deeds for neighbors, and political action help youth move beyond themselves into the larger world.

For some families, a sense of purpose and worth comes from a religious perspective. For other families, it may come from another belief system or ideology. Volunteer work on social justice or environmental issues, for example, can also provide an important sense of purpose and instill lifelong values in adolescents [18]. Volunteering and community service may also help teens develop relationships with civic-minded adults and friends that will lead to the development of a community-oriented identity [22].

Parent partnerships with schools and community organizations should not stop when the child becomes a teenager. Ongoing parental involvement is key to setting an example of the importance of school and community commitment. These valuable connections become some of the "building blocks of human development" that contribute to healthy outcomes for children and adolescents ([5], p. xiv).

Parents can encourage their teen's volunteer efforts by becoming personally involved in community service. Parents can talk about community issues and needs while paying attention to the social issues that captivate their teenager. Parents can also encourage their teenager to think of ways to solve community problems and attend community and cultural events with their children [24].

Who can parents talk to if they have concerns about their child's participation in structured voluntary activities?

School counselors, representatives of religious organizations, local youth clubs, YMCA/YWCAs, park district organizations, Boy/Girl Scouts, and the Urban League will have good ideas about how to get children involved in their communities.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Urban Youth in Community Service: Becoming Part of the Solution
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed351425.html

Volunteerism and Youth: What Do We Know?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew100/spot100.html

Extracurricular Activities in Children's Lives
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199c.html

SEARCH Institute's Asset Approach: Protecting Youth through Community Collaboration
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/spot999.html

Impacts and Effects of Service-Learning
http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu/res/bibs/imps.htm

Ups and Downs of Adolescence: Youth Community Service
http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/fcs/upsdowns/upsjan99.htm

Preventing Problems vs. Promoting the Positive: What Do We Want for Our Children?
http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/posdev.pdf

Developing Empathy in Children and Youth
http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/7/cu13.html

America's Teenage Volunteers
http://www.indepsec.org/programs/research/teenvolun1.pdf

What Role Can Churches Play in At-Risk Prevention?
http://www.search-institute.org/archives/tff.htm

Substance Abuse

How does drug or alcohol abuse fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both" ([13], p. 10).

There is a strong relationship between alcohol use in teens and aggressive, delinquent, and even more serious criminal behaviors. In a recent survey, teens who used alcohol were more likely to report that they used illicit drugs than were teens who did not use alcohol. This finding was true for heavy, binge, or light drinkers. Alcohol use and other drug use have been implicated in the leading causes of death and injury among adolescents and young adults, including motor vehicle crashes, homicides, and suicides ([35; 52]). In addition, the risk for violent behavior increases when teenagers use alcohol and have access to guns [1]. Alcohol use and drug use are also strong predictors for violence against partners in dating relationships [40].

Many parents have difficulty knowing how to respond to alcohol abuse in their children. Responding may be difficult because the parents may drink alcohol themselves or they may have done so during their adolescent or young adult years. Consequently, parents may minimize the consequences of their teen's experimenting with some of the "gateway drugs." Gateway drugs include alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. Not all teens who experiment with the gateway drugs go on to "harder drugs" such as cocaine or crack. However, there is a direct relationship between early alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use and later use of harder drugs. Once a teen experiments with one drug, the step to another drug becomes easier [26]. New information also suggests that some children may be genetically predisposed to addiction and that even limited exposure to gateway drugs may put these children at significant risk of long-term addiction.

Teens who choose to abuse substances often have similar characteristics or risk factors. These teenagers typically have poor social skills, and they may be shy or aggressive. They may not be doing well in school and may be rebellious while pushing for more independence. They may also seek excitement and have poor impulse control. Family characteristics or risk factors include parents who abuse substances, have poor family management skills, and have high levels of family conflict or physical abuse. Environmental risk factors include living in a community that accepts substance abuse. Other risk factors include poverty, the influence of friends, and neighborhood disorganization, where making a connection with a family support organization is difficult [44].

> *The risk for violent behavior increases when youth use alcohol and have access to guns.*

But it is not just teens from environments that accept or condone substance abuse who are at risk. It is not unusual for any teenager to try an illegal substance. Studies suggest that friends can have a tremendous impact on whether or not a youth will experiment with drugs. Recent surveys, for example, show that one of the most important factors that encourages teens not to use drugs is that the teenager's friends do not use drugs [44].

While many of these risk factors might have been handled more easily by intervening when the teen was younger, it is never too late to start helping a youth who is headed for trouble. For example, encouraging your teen to participate in positive school activities is helpful. A teenager may not respond to the parent's "nudging" as readily as a suggestion from a coach or favorite teacher at school. However, parents may find it helpful to talk with a school counselor or teacher and ask for his or her support to help engage the teenager in activities that will encourage healthy friendships and better

school performance. If the family is experiencing communication problems, parents may find it helpful to call a "family meeting" to discuss these concerns and possible solutions. Parents may also want to seek outside help from a counselor, religious leader, or other professional. Regardless of what has happened in the teenager's past, a sincere effort to eliminate risky behaviors during the adolescent years can have a positive impact on the child's future and the family's ability to cope.

Many children credit their parents as a major influence in choosing not to smoke or use alcohol or drugs.

Parents who remember drug experimentation from their own teenage years might be interested in these facts about drug use today:

- Many of today's drugs are more potent and addictive than the drugs in common use 20 years ago. Some are now known to cause permanent brain damage or death—even from minimal use [4; 26; 28].
- New research suggests that the adolescent and young adult brain is more vulnerable to addiction than previously thought. Youth who begin drug experimentation in their teen years are much more likely to be addicted to substances in later years than people who experiment with drugs or alcohol starting in their middle to late 20s [4].
- Researchers have also found more links between substance abuse and memory loss, psychiatric conditions, and learning disabilities. Although the nature of these links is not yet fully understood, a youth with a disability or psychiatric condition may be at greater risk of abusing substances or becoming addicted [34; 44].

Many children credit their parents as a major influence in choosing not to smoke or use alcohol or drugs. Parents can encourage the growth of protective factors in their children by such simple acts as helping with homework and eating dinner with their children. Parents should also be clear about family values, setting an example of being honest, and engaging in healthy activities.

However, many parents may not be aware that their teenager is experimenting with drugs until they find drug paraphernalia left around the house or in the family car. In this situation, it is likely that the child has been "using" for some time and may already be addicted. The teen has probably reached the point when he or she is less able to hide the addictive behavior. In situations such as this, parents are encouraged to seek immediate help from a counselor specializing in substance abuse issues so that their child can be assessed and have access to treatment. Current medical practice and research support the view that addiction is a disease and that, like other diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, drug addiction requires prompt and appropriate medical attention [33; 34].

Who can parents talk to if they have concerns about their child's drug or alcohol abuse?

"*Even in the face of mounting evidence, parents often have a hard time acknowledging that their child has an alcohol, tobacco, or drug problem. Anger, resentment, guilt, and a sense of failure are all common reactions, but it is important to avoid self-blame. Drug abuse occurs in families of all economic and social backgrounds, in happy and unhappy homes alike. Most important is that the faster you act, the sooner your child can start to become well again*" [47].

School counselors, physicians, substance abuse counselors, parent support groups, community drug hotlines, city and local health departments, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Al-Anon and Alateen are all good sources of information and assistance.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Urban School-Community Parent Programs to Prevent Drug Use
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed427093.html

Preventing Substance Abuse at Home and at School
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew497/pnew497d.html

Drug Use Rises for Teenagers
http://npin.org/pnews/1996/pnewn96/pnewn96f.html

How Can Schools Help Prevent Children from Using Drugs?
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00384/n00384.html

The Brown Adolescent Newsletter: Drug Abuse Prevention: Programs That Work
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew498/pnew498c.html

Drug Abuse Prevention: School-Based Strategies That Work
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed409316.html

Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Abuse: Sources of Problem Behaviors
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed316615.html

Youth and Alcohol: An Overview
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/substnce/docs/youthalc.htm

Substance Abuse
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/substnce/docs/tableoc.htm

Teens, Alcohol, and Other Drugs
http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/teendrug.htm

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
http://www.ncadd.org/index.html

Teens: Alcohol and Other Drugs
http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/teendrug.htm

A Guide for Parents, Grandparents, Elders, Mentors, and Other Caregivers: Keeping Youth Drug Free
http://www.health.org/reality/parentsguide/

Drugs and Alcohol: Children and Youth: Materials for Adults Working with Kids Ages 5-12
http://www.ncpc.org/10adu8.htm

Ups and Downs of Adolescence: Facts about Substance Abuse
http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/fcs/upsdowns/upsapr00.htm

Growing Up Drug Free
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/parents_guide/index.html

CASA's Parents' Guide to Raising Drug Free Kids
http://www.casacolumbia.org/newsletter1458/newsletter_show.htm?doc_id=5590

Adolescent Substance Abuse: Counseling Issues
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed260364.html

Access to Guns and Other Weapons

How does access to guns and other weapons fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

The availability and use of guns among American youth are causes for national concern. There has been a decline in the rate of violent crime with a weapon, including aggravated assault and murder. However, recent surveys reveal that when asked confidentially, high school students believe that the level of violence has remained constant since 1993 [9]. One survey of selected inner-city students showed that 25% reported carrying a weapon in school at some point. As many as 40% of the students carried a weapon outside of school ([48], pp. 10–11). Murder using guns is the second leading cause of death for all youth between 15 and 19 years of age ([8], p. 4). It is also the leading cause of death for African Americans [37].

Guns also play a role in suicides. Of the children ages 19 or younger who were killed in 1996, as many as 50% committed suicide. The rate of teen suicides involving a gun increased 39% between 1980 and 1994 ([37], p. 9). While black adolescent males have a high risk for gun-related homicides, white adolescent males have a high risk for gun-related suicides. When teens have easy access to firearms in the home, these risk factors go up [8].

Parents and families should be alert to signs that their teen may not feel safe at school and that the child is not coping well with those feelings. Boys in particular may not know how to tell their parents about their fears. They may think that talking about their feelings would decrease their "macho" image or increase their risk of harm from peers. Sometimes a parent's first clue that a teenage son is frightened is the discovery that he is carrying a concealed weapon such as a club, knife, or gun. Other early indicators of fear include frequent headaches or minor illnesses, frequent requests to stay home from school, or, in extreme cases, refusing to go to school. Parents may also want to pay special attention to teenagers who change their regular route of going to or from school in order to avoid confrontation.

One way to start a discussion on this sensitive topic is by sharing a newspaper article about school violence and asking the teenager if he or she has any friends who have experienced school violence. Another important strategy is to work closely with school staff to implement safe neighborhood and school strategies. When parents are a presence in school, it helps send the message that safety matters.

> *The proliferation of guns in many communities, combined with a popular culture that often glorifies violence and weapon use, makes many parents who have guns at home today feel the need to take additional safety measures to protect their children from gun violence.*

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) traces the most recent increase in juvenile violence to the early 1980s. The 1980s was a time when crack cocaine was introduced in many urban communities [38]. According to the OJJDP report, more juveniles involved in drug trafficking began to carry guns. Consequently, other inner-city gangs and juveniles who may not have been involved with the drug industry felt the need to obtain guns for their own protection [37]. Current information shows that the upward trend in juvenile crime peaked in 1993 and has been gradually declining or remaining steady over the past 7 years.

Easy access to firearms is not exclusive to any particular group of teenagers. A study of 569 teenagers in an urban, ethnically diverse, "safe" high

school (with no prior incidents of gun violence) showed that 51% of the students reported easy access to guns. As many as 49% said they knew someone who had been killed by gunfire ([8], pp. 10–11). In the same study, teenagers who experimented with drugs or alcohol were found to be more likely to have access to guns. Many rural youth have traditionally had access to guns and knives but may be more likely to view them as tools to help with jobs involved in rural living.

Many adults in the United States grew up in households with guns and were taught about gun safety by their parents and the other adults in their families. However, now there is a proliferation of guns in many communities. When that is combined with a popular culture that often glorifies violence and weapon use, many parents who have guns at home today feel the need to take additional safety measures to protect their children from gun violence [20; 41]. If parents choose not to remove guns and other weapons from their home, they should make certain that guns are kept in locked cases and out of reach of children. If the family chooses to keep guns at home, and a teenager has access to them, it is critical that the young person be instructed in the responsible use of the weapon. It is also important that parents and other family members model the same responsible behavior related to the use of guns or other weapons. Parents may want to keep in mind that in some areas they may be held liable for their minor child's misuse of a gun or any other weapon.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's access to guns and other weapons?

School counselors and administrators, police, psychologists, mental health professionals, and representatives of community groups involved in violence prevention programs are good sources of information and support for parents who want their teen to make responsible choices about weapons.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Schools Attack the Roots of Violence
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed335806.html

An Overview of Strategies to Reduce School Violence
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig115.html

Saying No to Guns—It's Not Enough: An Interview with Marjorie Hardy
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700b.html

Youth and Guns
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/gun.htm

Preventing Juvenile Gun Violence in Schools
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/gunfree.htm

Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence
http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/fs9993.pdf

Children and Firearms
http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/firearms.htm

Kids and Guns
http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/178994.pdf

Campus Security and Violence Education
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/campus.htm

Peer Influences

How do peer influences fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Vulnerability to peer pressure—being swayed by the demands and dares of friends—peaks during the early teen years [50]. Although the strong influence of friends during adolescence is a given, harmful influence from peers is not an inevitable outcome. Friends can encourage one another to do well in school, to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and to refrain from sex. Just as easily, friends can encourage one another to engage in risky, antisocial activities and to reject academic achievement [21; 32]. In fact, some research supports what conventional wisdom tells us about "bad company": Associating with deviant or antisocial peers encourages increased delinquency ([11], p. 833).

Gangs are the modern-day version of antisocial peer groups [11]. Not surprisingly, one of the early warning signs that a teen is having trouble is association with gangs or groups of friends who support antisocial values and behaviors. Gangs gain momentum by causing fear and stress among students and in the neighborhood. Only a small percentage of teens join gangs, and relatively few gang members participate in violence. Yet, in three-fourths of the murder and assault acts committed by youth, the perpetrators are likely to be gang members. Gang violence today is deadlier than in the past, when violent disputes were fought with fists, switchblades, or chains. Today, the weapons of choice are guns and automatic weapons. In some cases, drive-by shootings have replaced schoolyard fights, increasing the likelihood of hurting innocent bystanders [2].

While parents cannot pick their teenagers' friends, they can have a powerful indirect effect on the influence of their teen's friends in two primary ways. First, parents can monitor and exert some control over the friends their teenager spends time with. In fact, the influence of parental monitoring on teens' association with "the wrong crowd" has been discussed extensively in research. Parents who are unaware of where their child is, who their child is with, and what their child is doing leave their teenagers more susceptible to antisocial peer pressure [12].

However, parental monitoring is most successful when the teen experiences it as *caring*. In effective monitoring, parents take a genuine interest in their adolescent's activities within the context of a kind and warm relationship. As a result, teens are less likely to view their parents' interest as being intrusive. This is a vital distinction for teenagers who need increasing autonomy from their parents for healthy development [10].

> *Parental monitoring is most successful when the teen experiences it as caring—parents taking a genuine interest in their adolescent's activities within the context of a kind and warm relationship—rather than when it is intrusive.*

A second way that parents influence their adolescent's choice of friends is by providing guidance about where their teen will spend time. Parents can encourage teens to spend time in safe areas of the neighborhood, school, or religious community during the day, after school, and on the weekend [50]. Some parents may have few options to move from one neighborhood to another or to choose the school their child attends. However, parents working cooperatively can have a strong influence on creating a positive community and school culture.

Teenagers who have had an early pattern of aggressiveness or rejection by friends are more likely to join an antisocial peer group [11]. Some research suggests that learning difficulties, such as attention

deficit/hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) or conduct disorders (CD), increase a teenager's risk for later aggression and delinquency. The risk may increase because of the difficulty ADHD youth may have with controlling their impulsive behavior [11; 34]. However, aggressive and delinquent behaviors are not an inevitable outcome of these conditions. In fact, new research indicates that effective parenting at home and consistent attention to learning problems in school can reduce or even eliminate these risk factors [11].

Who can parents talk with when they are concerned about the influence of their child's peer group?

Other parents, school counselors, police, psychologists, and mental health professionals are good sources of information and assistance for parents concerned about these issues. Contacting local community groups such as recreation departments and faith-based organizations can help parents work within the community to develop activities that encourage healthy friendships and discourage gang activities.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Gangs in Schools
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig99.html

Understanding Violent Acts in Children: An Interview with Dr. Edward Taylor
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/featu998.html

Does Moving Have a Harmful Impact on Children?
http://npin.org/pnews/1996/pnew996/pnew996n.html

Are Our Boys All Right?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew300/int300a.html

How Parents and Peers Influence Children's School Success
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900e.html

Gangs: From Social Groups to Violent Delinquents
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/monographs/uds107/gang_gangs.html

Peers, Parents, and Schools: Two Views on How They Affect Student Achievement
http://www.edsource.org/pub_edfct_peers.html

Gangs: Parent Resource Guide
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/gangs/docs/parent1.htm

Early Warning, Timely Response
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html

If a Child Threatens to Run Away, Should Parents Be Concerned?
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew198/pnew198f.html

Gangs
http://www.ncjrs.org/jjfact.htm#gangs

Is Youth Violence Just Another Fact of Life?
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/apa.htm

Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1995/drgirl95.html

Student Dress Codes
http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest117.html

Living with Adolescents: An Interview with Reed Larson
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew100/int100a.html

What to Expect from Your Teenagers
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew398/pnew398i.html

If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Parents and Teachers Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/rober97b.html

Gang Activity at School: Prevention Strategies
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/monographs/uds107/gang_contents.html

Dating Relationships

How do dating relationships and violence fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

In our society, most teens, and even some preteens, begin exploring relationships with members of the opposite sex. This early "going-together" behavior, such as sitting together in the lunchroom or talking on the phone, is usually harmless and may in fact be helpful in developing healthy friendships in later life. However, sometimes teenagers are pressured by friends, the media, or family members to act out in inappropriate ways and develop intimate relationships before they are developmentally ready. Relationships that start out as innocent friendships can become destructive. Dating violence is "a pattern of repeated actual or threatened acts that physically, sexually or verbally abuses a member or a couple who are dating" ([39], p. 5). One form of dating violence is date rape, a sexually aggressive act that includes attempted or forced intercourse between a dating couple. Date rape is believed to account for 60% of all reported rapes ([39], p. 5).

> *Dating violence is 'a pattern of repeated actual or threatened acts that physically, sexually or verbally abuses a member of a couple who are dating.'*

Conservative estimates tell us that physical aggression occurs in at least one in five of all dating relationships ([49], p. 467). In one recent study on the rates of dating violence for high school boys and girls, researchers discovered that 36.4% of girls and 37.1% of boys reported some physical violence in their recent dating relationships. Over 40% of both males and females said that the dating abuse occurred in a school building or on school grounds. Furthermore, girls reported that 40% of the time when they experienced the abuse someone else was present. However, fewer than 3% of males and females in the study reported the abusive incident to someone in authority (e.g., police, counselor, or teacher). Six percent said they told a family member, 61% told a friend, and over 30% told no one about the incident of dating violence. These data support the finding that dating violence is significantly underreported ([30], pp. 1–4; [36]).

An often-overlooked aspect of dating or relationship violence is in same-sex relationships. New findings suggest that violence in same-sex relationships is as prevalent (25–33%) as in heterosexual relationships ([6], p. 5). However, people who are in same-sex relationships are less likely to report abuse and may not be taken seriously if they seek help. Victims of same-sex relationship violence are also less able to get legal protection from their abusers because in some states, restraining laws do not cover same-sex violence ([6], p. 9).

Research on dating violence indicates that patterns of abusive behavior may begin early in a person's life. Patterns of violence in a dating relationship may lead to patterns of violence between marital partners later on. Children who witness family violence and are exposed to corporal punishment are more likely to use violence with peers and with romantic partners later in life, continuing the cycle of abuse [30; 49]. Other factors that have been shown to predict dating violence and that are likely learned within the family include:

- acceptance of partner violence as an appropriate response to conflict [40; 49];
- high levels of conflict in the dating relationship [40];
- alcohol and drug use that are believed to lower one's prohibitions against the use of violence [40; 49].

Both teen boys and girls are at risk of developing relationship patterns that can be potentially destructive. Family experiences and peer and media influences have a strong influence on how young people

handle their dating relationships. Our society frequently sends conflicting messages about what attributes are important in young men and women. For example, teenage boys are encouraged to be courageous and strong but may overstep appropriate expectations. Teen boys may be at significant risk of developing behaviors of dominance and aggression toward girls while restraining their emotions and behaviors related to empathy and compassion. For many young men, finding appropriate patterns of behavior in their relationships with young women becomes a difficult and confusing balancing act [25].

Parents' major contribution is to set the example of a healthy relationship by modeling respectful behavior with each other, or, in the case of single parents, in their own relationships.

A large percentage of dating violence occurs on school grounds or college campuses. In response, many schools have started programs intended to prevent dating violence within the larger context of school violence prevention [29; 30]. Over the past few decades, we have increased our support and understanding for the issues that may negatively impact young women in their relationships. However, the support groups or mentoring for young men facing relationship difficulties is comparatively limited.

Parents play an important role in helping their children understand dating relationships. One way parents can support healthy dating relationships is by encouraging teenagers to go out with their friends in groups of boys and girls. Having fun in groups helps teens to delay "couples" dating, at least until the teen is 16 years old. Many teenagers who realize that they don't have to have a boyfriend or girlfriend and that their parents think it is healthy just to have good friendships are actually relieved. It frees them from the stress of trying to imitate the dating relationships they have seen on TV or witnessed among older teens. Parents' major contribution is to set the example of a healthy relationship by modeling respectful behavior with each other, or, in the case of single parents, in their own relationships [49].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about dating relationships and violence in their child's life?

Other parents, teachers, school counselors, and community professionals who organize activities for teenagers are good resources for information and assistance. If you are concerned that your teenager may be involved in a violent relationship, you may wish to talk with psychologists and other mental health professionals, staff at local shelters for battered women, or rape crisis centers.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Dating Violence: Why Does It Occur and How Does It Fit in the Cycle of Violence?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700c.html

Teaching Guide: Dating Violence
http://www.nnfr.org/adolsex/inform/adolsex_violtg.html

Fact Sheet on Dating Violence
http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/yvpt/datviol.htm

Love Doesn't Have to Hurt
http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/teen/homepage.html

Sexual Assault Information Page
http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/saInfoPage.html

Trust Betrayed
http://www.wvdhhr.org/bph/trust/

When Love Hurts: A Guide for Girls on Love, Respect, and Abuse in Relationships
http://home.vicnet.net.au/~girlsown/

Successful Transitions from Adolescence to Young Adulthood

How do successful transitions fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

For most teenagers in our society, the transition from secondary school to work or college actually begins around their sophomore or junior year in high school. The years from 15 through 19 are important as teens begin to anticipate when they will be graduating from high school and what they will be doing after graduation. Many teenagers in our society hope to attend college, while others plan on post-high school job training. Still others plan to join the workforce immediately upon graduation. If a family has moved frequently, it may be difficult for a teenager to get to know adults outside of school who can advise them about careers. Working closely with the school to find career-related internships becomes even more important.

Most teens need opportunities at school and outside of school to learn how to prepare, assess, plan, and carry out meaningful tasks.

Easy access to career and employment counseling is essential at the high school level. Juniors and seniors who have investigated their college or work options through visits to colleges or participated in summer or after-school internships are likely to be better prepared for taking the next step beyond the structured high school experience. In a constantly changing work environment where there is a growing demand for more education and more technology, choices can be confusing. Parents and teens may find these years stressful [45].

Parents can help by talking about career options with their teen. Parents can work with their teen and the school staff to make sure that students receive support, information, and counseling. Students need to be clearly informed about what courses and credits are needed for graduation, for work preparation, or for further education. An uncertain future beyond secondary school and inadequate mentoring can put an adolescent transitioning out of secondary school at risk for a variety of difficulties [46].

Many teens have part-time jobs during their school years. Some research suggests this experience can be productive or harmful, depending on the number of hours worked per week and the type of employment. Teens who work fewer than 20 hours a week during the academic year at jobs where they feel they are learning new skills report that their grades improve. They also become more punctual and dependable. Girls report increased self-reliance, and boys report enhanced self-image when they are mastering new skills that are likely to help them in the future [31]. However, teens may have difficulty if they try to balance school work, family life, and social life with a part-time, unrewarding job that exceeds 20 hours weekly. Some research suggests that teens working more than 20 hours per week may become less interested in school and be at increased risk for engaging in delinquent behavior, earning poor grades, and having poor self-esteem and substance abuse problems [51].

The transition from secondary school to young adulthood is critical. Research shows that there is an increased risk for violence in teens' lives when that transition is not successful. Data from the National Youth Survey show that violent offenses for both young men and women tend to peak at around age 17 and continue at high, but declining, rates until age 25 ([11], p. 792). The evidence suggests that young people who can establish a healthy structure for their lives, including a stable work and family life, tend to stay out of trouble or end previous involvement in delinquent activity [11].

Through his research with teenagers, Professor Reed Larson has found that many teens, including high school honor students, are "not invested in

paths into the future that excite them or feel like they originate from within. A central question of youth development is how to get adolescents' fires lit, how to have them develop the complex skills needed to take charge of their lives" ([27], p. 170). Larson particularly focuses on the development of initiative in young people, defined as enthusiastically directing one's attention or energies toward a challenging goal. Initiative is a core requirement for many aspects of positive youth development, including creativity, leadership, altruism, and community participation.

Turning 18 does not necessarily make a young person capable of handling all aspects of adult life.

Children and teenagers are rarely given meaningful responsibilities in our society. However, when they turn 18, many teens are suddenly required to take charge of their lives to a much greater degree than in many other societies. Most teens need opportunities at school and outside of school to learn how to prepare, assess, plan, and carry out meaningful tasks. Teens also benefit from having access to successful adult role models in a variety of adult careers. Many experts suggest that educators and parents need to provide expertly staffed activities throughout the school year. Providing a variety of meaningful activities allows teens to choose among opportunities linked to businesses, professional arts, and civic organizations interested in connecting youth to adult society [27].

The fact that busy parents juggling work and family life may have less time to spend with their children and fewer easy opportunities to communicate with them complicates a teen's transition to adulthood. But research suggests that teens value their parents' views and appreciate the security that the family offers, particularly when the teenager is having difficulty making decisions [46]. In light of some of the compelling research on risk factors with young adults, a new study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development plans to focus on young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. The study will investigate some of the risk factors that are affecting our teenagers and young adults, as well as some of the protective factors that parents, schools, and communities can strengthen to encourage young adults to achieve independence successfully [3].

Parents can have an important impact on their teenager's transition out of high school by encouraging their son or daughter to meet with career counselors to discuss options, to volunteer at a local hospital or recreation center, or to serve as an intern at a local business. Parents may encourage the youth to begin part-time work in a field in which he has an interest and investigate programs at colleges he may want to attend.

Turning 18 does not necessarily make a young person capable of handling all aspects of adult life. The transition to independence is a *process* during which teenagers continue to benefit from the regular communication, guidance, and support of parents or other caring adults.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's successful transitions from high school?

Other parents, teachers, school and college counselors (including community college counselors), professionals in specific areas of interest to your teenager, and local community volunteer services are good resources for information and assistance.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Models of Adolescent Transition
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00008/n00008.html

Parents and the School-to-Work Transition of Special Needs Youth
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00159/n00159.html

Making the MOST of Out-of-School Time: Technology's Role in Collaboration
http://npin.org/library/1999/n00095/n00095.html

Preparing Middle School Students for a Career
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00061/n00061.html

How to Prepare Your Children for Work
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00071/n00071.html

A Better Map
http://npin.org/library/1999/n00089/inside.html#map

Trends and Issues: Youth Apprenticeship
http://eserver.org/literacy/youth-apprenticeship.txt

The Peer Effect on Academic Achievement
http://www.heritage.org/library/cda/cda00-06.html

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