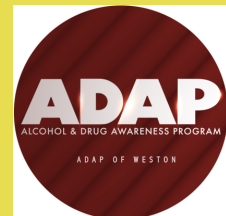


A Weston Parent's Guide to Helping Teen's Thrive



This guide is brought to you by ADAP of Weston & Weston Youth Services, a department of the Town of Weston

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Parent/Teen Communication Tips:

“Like a relay race with a long overlap in which the baton is passed—lasting at least eighteen years and often longer —our job as parents is to position our children to run their solo laps effectively.” ~Maya Kabat-Zinn

Teens still want and need to feel close to their parents, even as they move towards independence.

Here are some tips for maintaining good connection & communication with your teenager.

- **Start with connection:** Teenagers who have stable, warm, trusting and open relationships with their parents are better equipped to develop independence and grow into responsible adults.
- **Listen more, talk less:** If you're a good listener, your teen will talk to you more.
- **Get curious:** "Tell me more about that." "What was that like?" "What do you think?"
- **Use active listening:** Reflect back what you hear. It works like this: You listen without interrupting, then sum up what you've heard to allow your teen to confirm. It's OK if you get it wrong, your teen will know you are trying to understand and you'll know if you're not "getting it." Try these phrases:
 - "It seems like you're feeling..."
 - "I hear you saying...."
- **Use "Door Openers" Rather Than "Door Closers"** Door openers encourage your teen to talk openly. "Tell me what happened." "What do you think is the right thing to do?" "What happened next?"
- **Control your reaction when your teen talks about hard things:** when parents react too strongly, teens stop talking. Don't freak out when they tell you about the mean kid at lunch, or their friend who self harms. If you do, they are unlikely to share with you next time.
- **Take a Break When Things Get Heated:** Let things cool down. "I want to take time and think about this before we talk." Is anyone too hungry, tired or under the influence? Defer the discussion.
- **Accept and Validate feelings:** Acknowledge their feeling is true for them (even if it doesn't make sense to you). "You're hurt that Sarah did not invite you to the party." "You really don't like your teacher."
- **Ask what your child needs from you.** Do you want suggestions or do you just want me to listen." "How can I help?" Don't assume your child wants advice or "fixing."
- **Don't take the bait to respond to negativity and heat of the moment comments:** Try saying "Ouch" or "that was over the line."
- **Try the 80-20 rule: Keep 80% of your interactions positive, non-directive, & supportive.** That leaves 20% for "Did you do your homework," and "Clean your room."
- **Kind & Firm can go together:** You don't have to yell or shame in order to set a limit. "We agreed on the 11:00 curfew, and you came home twice after midnight. No, you can't go out tonight."
- **If needed, use scheduled time to talk:** Try family meetings or schedule time to talk about difficult topics. This can keep the tension about 'the talk' from bleeding into everyday life.
- **Notice and comment on the good stuff, even when it is hard to find:** "Thanks for feeding the dog." "You were a big help today with ___." If all you talk about is the bad grades or the snarky attitude, your teen may feel that is all you see in them (even when it 's not).
- **When asking your teen to do something they don't want to do, or setting limits:**
 - **Be brief.** When you're saying something your teen isn't interested in hearing. "Remember, no video games before homework."
 - **Be specific.** "Dirty clothes go in the white basket." "Family dinners are required unless you have practice."
 - **Be positive:** State expectations in positive terms- "don't be late," try, "be home by 11:30."

Suggested Resources

- Center for Parent/Teen Communication: Parentandteen.com
- [Communicating With Teens: Child Mind Institute](#)
- What to Say: How to Talk With Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance by Stixrud and Johnson
- I'd Listen to my Parents if They'd Just Shut up, by Anthony Wolf,
- How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk, by Mazlish and Faber

Preventing & Responding to Teen Substance Use

The good news is that there are things that you can do to reduce risks and promote health, safety and well-being for your teen!

Early substance use is a significant risk factor for addiction: The majority of those who have substance use disorder started using before age 18 and developed their disorder by age 20.

The Science says: Parents Matter

Research shows that teens with parents who talk to their kids about substance use risks early and often are significantly less likely to use drugs than those who do not have these conversations at home.

Talk early and often, in developmentally appropriate ways, about substance use and why it matters. ([SAMHSA Talk. They Hear You Campaign](#))

What's in your substance use prevention toolbox?

Tool #1: Stay Connected! The *Connecticut School Health Survey* found that teens who reported having meals at home with family, feeling love and support from parents, and having parents who asked about their whereabouts when not at home showed the lowest prevalence of risky behaviors including alcohol and drug use, motor vehicle safety and risky sexual behaviors. (CT DMHAS)

Tool #2: Be clear to your teen that you don't want them drinking or using drugs. "Our expectation is that you don't use drugs or alcohol." (See *If You Suspect Teen Drug Use* for tips on responding when you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol)

Tool #3: Have rules, but not too many. Be clear and consistent about the limits you do set. Teens will push back: expect it and stay calm when they do. "...with most teens, if parents don't overreact to each transgression but keep their rules in place, they will have a teen who obeys the rules, if imperfectly, and the rules, though tattered in places, will hold up." Anthony Wolfe, PhD, author of *I'd Listen to My Parents If They'd Just Shut Up*.

Tool #4: Share power when you can: Involve teens in setting rules and decision making as much as possible; shared power does not mean equal power, but young people do best when their opinions are respected as they are guided toward maturity. [Search Institute shared power video](#)

Tool #5: Adapt rules and limits as your child ages and matures. The curfew for your 13 year old will be different than the curfew for your 17 year old. Be open to revisit rules and expectations as your teen gets older, allowing for age appropriate autonomy, especially if your teen has shown good judgment.

Tool #6: Safety First: Consider a safety 'code word': Choose a word or phrase that your teen can text or say to tell you they need help getting out of a risky situation. [The Code Word Strategy](#) and for teens: [Escape Tricky Situations With a Code Word](#) (Parentandteen.com) Tell your teen that you want them to come to you if they are unsafe for any reason and need help.

Tool #7: Encourage healthy habits & self care: Focus on health and wellness, and support your teen in developing healthy habits re: eating, sleeping and screen time/social media. [11 self care tips for teens and young adults](#)

Tool #8: Find opportunities to educate your teen about the risks of drug and alcohol use including the dangers of taking prescription drugs that aren't prescribed, the danger of mixing drugs, and the risks of using street drugs. Find facts to share with your teen: [teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/drug-facts](#)

Tool #9: Get curious about your teen's experience: Deeper understanding leads to deeper connection **and** increased influence: What makes it appealing to use? How can you get that need met some other way (for example, some teens use marijuana to help relax or use alcohol to ease social anxiety.)

Tool #10: Encourage healthy risk taking: Taking risks is a natural part of teens' identity development. Guide your teen toward healthy challenges to help them satisfy a healthy desire for risk-taking and bolster their confidence and leadership skills.

Find more information about commonly used substances at:

Drugfree.org's comprehensive [Drug Guide for Parents](#)

OR [NIDA's Commonly Used Drugs chart](#)

Suggested Resources

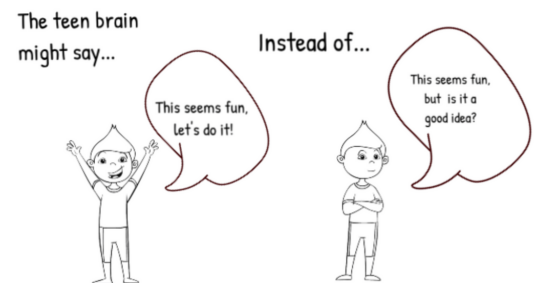
- [Partnership to End Addiction](#) has many great resources including:
 - Parent helpline: Text CONNECT to 55753 or [schedule a call with a parent support specialist](#)
 - [Marijuana Talk Kit: How to talk to teens about marijuana use and risks](#)
 - [Info. for prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery](#)
 - [A free parent Skill-Building Course Addressing Teen Substance Use](#)
- [SAMHSA Talk. They Hear You](#): Parent resources
- [NIDA for Teens](#): Drug facts, addiction videos, & more
- [Stop Medicine Abuse](#): resources to prevent teen cough medicine abuse
- Newtown Parent Connection: [regional Hope & Support Groups](#) for parents concerned about their teen or young adult's substance use.
- CT 24 hour substance use treatment helpline resource line: substance use treatment. (800)-563-4086
- [The 20 Minute parent guide](#) from [Center for Motivation and Change](#), for parents concerned about a teen or young adult's substance use

The amazing teen brain

Teen Brain Facts:

- The teen brain is not fully developed until about age 25.
- The brain is not growing in size but strengthening and integrating connections and "pruning" some connections; neuroscientists call this 'remodeling.'
 - [See 1 minute video about brain remodeling w/ Dan Siegel, MD.](#)
- Brain development happens from back to front: The frontal lobe (prefrontal cortex) behind the forehead is the LAST to be fully connected. It's the part of the brain in charge of things like impulse control, judgment, and emotional regulation.
- Because the prefrontal cortex is still developing, teenagers might rely on a part of the brain called the amygdala to make decisions and solve problems more than adults do. The amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggression and instinctive behavior.
- The brain science helps explain why teen brains are open to incredible learning and growth & ALSO vulnerable to harm and at higher risk for developing addiction. Your teen may still be incredibly smart and competent.
- Not an excuse but an explanation: "Well, no," you have to say, "your brain is sometimes an explanation; it's never an excuse." Frances E. Jensen, MD, *The Teenage Brain*

Some experts compare the teen brain to a fancy sports car with faulty brakes: The parts of the brain that might urge, "slow down, be careful," are developed AFTER the part that says "faster, faster."



"...most people recognize that the early years 0-3 constitute a period when the brain is especially influenced by experience. What new research is telling us, is that adolescence looks like a second period of heightened brain plasticity. And to me what this means is that we really need to pay careful attention to the kinds of experiences that we provide young people, because the experience that they have during adolescence may have a profound effect on how their brain develops and therefore a profound effect on the rest of their life." -

Dr. Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity*

Suggested Resources

- The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults, Frances Jensen, MD
- Age of Opportunity, Laurence Steinberg MD.
- Dan Siegel, M.D.: [Video about the Teen Brain](#) and book: *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the teenage brain*
- Learn more about the teen brain: NIMH.gov / Handout: [Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know](#)

Vaping 101 for parents

- Electronic nicotine delivery systems go by many names. The most common is “e-cigarette,” but the brand JUUL is popular with youth and “JUULing” is also used as a common verb for all e-cigarette use.
- Another popular new e-cigarette system is Puff Bar: What are Puff Bars?
- E-cigarettes are devices that operate by heating a liquid solution to a high temperature so that it produces an aerosol that is inhaled.
- These liquid solutions, sometimes called e-liquids, almost always include nicotine, flavoring and a humectant, such as propylene glycol, to retain moisture and create the aerosol when heated. While many of the flavorings and humectants used in e-liquids have been approved by the FDA for oral consumption, they haven't been approved for inhalation. Their health consequences when aerosolized are unknown.
- Some vaping products contain (or are modified to contain) marijuana or THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. Vaping marijuana can be difficult to detect as there is no smoke, minimal odor and the vapor produced dissipates rapidly.
- **Partnership to End Addiction Vaping guide for parents**

IF YOU THINK VAPING IS COOL, THINK AGAIN
THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT VAPING

FACT It's not just water vapor. You inhale particles of toxic chemicals and nicotine.

FACT Almost all vaping liquid contains highly addictive nicotine; ingredients in counterfeits are unknown.

FACT Your brain isn't fully developed; nicotine has been linked to longterm memory and attention problems.

FACT Vaping has been linked to severe lung illness and deaths; vaping products aren't regulated, so labels may not be accurate.

FACT In Connecticut, possession or use can result in school and legal consequences if under 21.

FACT Vaped marijuana oil can have dangerous concentrations of THC, which can damage the developing brain.

FACT Friends who vape or smoke can harm YOU. Their exhale is full of volatile compounds, exhaled nicotine and other toxins.

 **NEED HELP TO QUIT VAPING?**

Ask a trusted adult for help.

Call the Connecticut quit line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Simply text DITCHJUUL to 88709 for tips and support through the free e-cigarette quit program by www.truthinitiative.org

Parents who want to help young people quit can text QUIT to 202-899-7550, a text program from www.youthinitiative.org

What can parents do about vaping?

- Use the same strategies you would use to prevent use or reduce harm regarding use of any substance. See prevention tool box on page 3.
- Get curious about why your teen is vaping: What does this do for you? What makes it fun? What makes it hard to stop? Let the answers guide your response. Does your child need help developing healthy coping skills? Help in quitting this addictive substance? Help managing anxiety or depression?
- Use the facts on the vaping postcard to guide your conversation.
- If your teen is vaping and would like help quitting, offer quitting help resources—in the postcard above. Note: The 1-800-Quit Now hotline has some supports that are not available for teens under 18.

Opioids 101 for Parents

The Opioid crisis/risks of prescription drug abuse for teens



WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a group of drugs that include synthetic opioids like fentanyl, illegal drugs like heroin, and legal prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine. Prescription opioid pain medications can be helpful when used correctly under the guidance of a healthcare provider, but misuse can lead to dependence and addiction.

Young people often misunderstand risks of prescription drug abuse, and assume that a drug is safe if it's prescribed by a doctor. In the case of prescription opioids, receiving a legitimate prescription for these drugs during adolescence is associated with a greater risk of future opioid misuse, particularly in young adults who have little to no history of drug use.

Talk to your teen about the risks of prescription opioid misuse. If opioids are prescribed to your teen, talk to your doctor about how to reduce risk of addiction or misuse. *Public Act 17-131 (2017) lowered the limit on opioid prescribing from 7 to 5 days for minors.* Prescribers can prescribe opioids for more than 5 days for minors as long as they document as required in the patient's medical record. Another feature of this legislation is that the prescriber must explain to the patient the reason an opioid is being prescribed and risks associated with opioids.

? Q&A

Q. MY DOCTOR PRESCRIBED ME OPIOIDS. DOESN'T THAT MEAN THEY'RE SAFE?

A. Prescription opioids—when used long term or incorrectly—can cause the brain to become reliant on the drug and are addictive.⁹

Q. IF I USE OPIOIDS, WILL I BECOME ADDICTED?

A. Prescription opioids can cause physical dependence when used as directed or addiction if misused; illegal opioids such as heroin are also highly addictive. People who regularly use prescription opioids or heroin often develop tolerance, which means that they need higher and/or more frequent doses of the drug to get the desired effects.¹⁰



WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE MISUSING PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS?

Young people may misuse prescription opioids for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, and wanting to fit in. Another reason teens and young adults may decide to take prescription opioids is because they can be easier to get than other drugs. Studies show that 53 percent of people ages 12 or older who obtained prescription pain medication for nonmedical use obtained them from a friend or relative.



SAMHSA's Talk They Hear You campaign
Talking With Your Teen About Opioids

Opioids 101 for Parents

Overdose & safe disposal of medications



Naloxone (Narcan) is a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. In CT there are regular free community naloxone trainings, and they often include a free naloxone kit.

Email info@thehubct.org for dates & locations.

Public Act 14-61: *An Act Providing Immunity To A Person Who Administers An Opioid Antagonist To Another Person Experiencing An Opioid-Related Drug Overdose:* the person administering naloxone to someone who overdoses is protected from civil liability and criminal prosecution.

The DEA has a campaign called One Pill Can Kill to educate about the danger of counterfeit pills containing Fentanyl. These fake pills can lead to a fatal overdose, even with one pill. Teens often have no idea this can happen. Sharing this with your teen might save a life.

Prescription drug drop boxes are an easy way to safely dispose of unused or expired medications, preventing theft or future misuse.

The Weston Police Department has a drug take back box in the lobby, at 56 Norfield Rd., for 24/7 easy, no-questions-asked disposal.

Directions for Disposing of Prescription Medicines and Over-the-Counter (OTC) Products



Marijuana 101 for parents

“The most critical issue for teens is that THC disrupts the development of neural pathways.”

— **Frances E. Jensen, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents***

Marijuana is not a benign drug for teens. The developing teen brain is vulnerable to addiction and impairment from any drug use. There is also evidence that regular marijuana use may contribute to the development of serious mental health disorders in some teens. For more about the unique risks that marijuana poses to teens: AACAP [Marijuana and Teens](#).

Talking about marijuana with teens can be complicated. There are specific dangers related to marijuana concentrates and edibles. Here is some helpful information for parents to understand the risks and have the conversations:

- [Marijuana: What You Need to Know to Help Protect Children, Teens and Young Adults](#)
- [How to Talk About Marijuana](#)
- [Partnership to End Addiction: Marijuana Talk Kit](#)
- [What do Parents Need to Know about Edibles, Ask Lisa podcast](#)

Ways Marijuana is Used: A Guide for Parents



CT Marijuana Laws – July 2021

But mom, it's legal!

False! Marijuana use remains illegal for persons under 21 years of age.

CT Senate Bill 1201 was signed into law in June 2021 legalizing recreational marijuana in the State of CT [Find details of the law at ct.gov](#) Marijuana remains illegal for people under 21

Connecticut Social Host or "House Party" Law (2012)

If it happens in your house- YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE: Social Hosting of underage drinking parties is illegal in Connecticut.

Social hosting definition: providing and/or serving alcohol to a young person who is under the minimum age of 21. Social hosting can take place in a party-like atmosphere or by any adult simply providing alcohol to teenagers and their peers. It can even extend to parents and homeowners who are not on the premises and/or did not provide the alcohol. (Responsibility.org)

Connecticut passed its Social Host or "House Party" Law in 2012. This law made the property owner fully responsible for any underage drinking on their property regardless of whether they were aware of it. Allowing teens to drink in your home or on your property can result in a \$2,000 fine, jail time, probation, or even criminal charges

In addition, under this law:

- If a teen has friends over while parents are out and those friends bring alcohol, both the teen and the absent parents may be liable.
- Youth under 21 charged with under age drinking may also be subjected to school discipline, fines and suspension/delay to their drivers license.

What can a parent do to keep parties safe and still allow & encourage healthy socializing? As teens get older, it can be hard to balance age appropriate freedom and opportunities to develop decision making skills with appropriate supervision and safety. **Here are suggestions that can help:**

- Connect with other parents. Get to know your teen's friends and their parents and try to find common ground on social gathering rules.
- Talk to your teen about the social host laws, emphasizing that this is not just your rule, and there are real consequences outside of the family.
- Support alcohol/drug free fun, and healthy risk taking, whenever possible.
- Focus on the risks more than the rules: [Contending with Adult Authority](http://Contending_with_Adult_Authority), Dr.Lisadamour.com

Bullying Basics

The State of CT has an anti-bullying law, passed in July 2002 ([*General Statutes Section 10-222d*](#))

This law requires all public school districts to develop & implement a bullying policy.

All acts of inappropriate and mean-spirited behavior are unacceptable, BUT there is a legal definition of bullying:

- A person is being hurt, harmed, or humiliated with words or behavior
- The behavior is repeated or there's a concern it will be
- The person being hurt has a hard time stopping/preventing
- There is an imbalance of power: The hurtful behavior is being carried out by someone with more power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations.
- **CYBERBULLYING:** Bullying through the use of technology: when someone repeatedly and intentionally harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online or while using cell phones or other electronic devices.

(Pacer.org/bullying)

Suggested RESOURCES

- **[Pacer Center: Teens Against Bullying](#)** has a great handout for teens: [Bullying Prevention 101: A quick guide for middle and high school students](#)
- [Family Online Safety Institute \(FOSI\) Cyberbullying Guide: what cyberbullying is, how to detect the signs, and what you can do to help:](#)
- [Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center: Cyberbullying](#)
- [Stopbullying.gov Connecticut](#)

Parents, school staff, and other caring adults have a big role to play in preventing bullying for little and big kids

- Help teens understand bullying. See the definition above & check for understanding. What's the difference between bullying and mean behavior?
- Tell your teen bullying and mean behavior are unacceptable.
- Make sure your teen knows how to get help. Who do they talk to in school when there is a problem? Is this person accessible to them?
- Keep the lines of communication open. Use open ended questions to understand their concerns. "What happened next?" "You seem sad, what's up?"
- Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends, and protect them from bullying behavior.
- Model how to treat others with kindness and respect.
- Help your child learn advocacy skills: *Advocacy:* Helping others get what they need & *Self-advocacy:* Communicating & taking action to get what you need.

Bullying Basics: Responding when you suspect your child is being bullied:

(Greatergood.berkeley.edu)

- **Manage your own feelings first.** Listen, stay calm, and project assurance that you can handle what they're telling you and help your child be safe.
- **Be empathetic and validate feelings:** "I hear you, that sounds painful" "I'm here with you/for you."
- **Gently elicit the story from your teen.** Be curious but don't interrogate. Once you have the facts, it will help you figure out next steps.
- **Help your child learn the important life skill of self-advocacy,** how to express their wants and needs and to stand up for themselves without aggression. While it's never the responsibility of youth to stop bullying from happening to them, it's important for them to be involved in how the situation is handled. Help your child identify what they would like to happen, and involve them in the decision-making process towards a solution.
- **If cyberbullying is involved, take screenshots** of all offending screens, and help your child block the offender. [Report cyberbullying](#) to the media platform.
- **With the school- first approach the adult in charge of the immediate environment, asking, "what have you noticed?" with a collaborative, "how do we make this better?" approach.** (e.g., the classroom teacher, the after-school teacher). Work your way up the administration as needed.
- **Regulate your feelings when you talk with school personnel.** Your goal is to ensure the emotional and physical safety of your child. If possible, take a collaborative, problem-solving approach that can become a win-win.
- **Spend some extra special time with a teen who has been bullied** or who has witnessed bullying. Surround them with love and support.

ADVOCACY



Helping others
get what they need

SELF-ADVOCACY



Communicating and taking action
to get what you need

Parenting to support Mental Health & Wellness

As a parent, you play an important role in your teen's mental health & wellness:

- Supporting your teen's general self care & wellness
- Identifying mental health issues and seeking help and support as needed
- Keeping the doors open to your teen to talk about the tough stuff- life's challenges, mental health concerns, and difficult feelings.

Supporting General Self Care & Wellness

11 Self-care tips for teens & young adults from the Clay Center for Young & Healthy Minds:

Minds: including creative expression, downtime, developing coping skills, helping others, connecting with friends, turning off phones and mindfulness and of course, sleep!



“Sleep isn’t a luxury. Memory and learning are thought to be consolidated during sleep, so it’s a requirement for adolescents and as vital to their health as the air they breathe and the food they eat. In fact, sleep helps teens eat better. It also allows them to manage stress.”

— **Frances E. Jensen, The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults**

Teens need sleep! For teens, getting enough quality sleep is *critical* to healthy physical, social and emotional development. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), “...melatonin (the “sleep hormone”) levels in the blood are naturally higher later at night and drop later in the morning in teens than in most children and adults. Teens should get about 9 to 10 hours of sleep a night, but most teens do not get enough sleep. A lack of sleep can make it difficult to pay attention, may increase impulsivity, and may increase the risk for irritability or depression.”

More about teens and sleep: Child Mind Institute:
[How to Help Teens Get More Sleep](#)

Parenting to support Mental Health & Wellness

Data and Good News

A mental health condition isn't the result of one event. Research suggests multiple, linking causes or influences: genetics, environment and lifestyle. None of this means that you're broken or that you, or your family, did something "wrong." **Mental illness is no one's fault.**

Poor mental health in adolescence is more than feeling blue. It can impact many areas of a teen's life. Youth with poor mental health may struggle with school, social life, family life, decision making, and physical health. Mental health problems in youth often go hand-in-hand with other health and behavioral risks like increased risk of drug use, experiencing violence, and higher risk sexual behaviors

First, The Data (note: this is pre-Covid data)

CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009-2019

highlights concerning trends about the mental health of U.S. high school students.

- More than 1 in 3 high school students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019, a 40 percent increase since 2009.
- In 2019, approximately 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan in the past year, a 44% increase since 2009.

According to the CDC: (www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html)

- 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24
- ADHD, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children

The Good News

- Early diagnosis and appropriate services for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental disorders.
- Teens are resilient, and we know what works to support their mental health: feeling connected to school and family.
- Teens are increasingly willing to be leaders in raising awareness and reducing stigma about mental health challenges: *9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma*

Parenting to support Mental Health & Wellness

Identifying Mental Health Challenges in Teens

It can be hard to identify mental health disorders in kids and teens because normal childhood development is a process that involves change.

What's typical teen behavior and what's a reason to worry? Pay attention to behaviors that interfere with your teen's functioning at school, home or socially.

Typical teen?	Warning Sign?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spends more time with friends, often prefers to be with peers• Wants more privacy (Closed doors)• Interests may change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdraws from everyone, including friends• Lack of interest in any interaction outside of closed doors.• Not replacing old interests, lack of interest in anything

Life events can impact mental health and behavior:

Divorce, grief, moving, etc. can cause changes in your child's functioning as a part of a process of adjustment. This may pass with some time and extra support. The criteria for many adolescent psychiatric disorders require problem behaviors or feelings to be present for at least a period of weeks or months. Sometimes it makes sense to watch and wait. Parents can ask for guidance on this from school counselors, pediatricians, or other trusted professionals.

It's not your job as a parent to diagnose your child. If you're concerned, ask for help AND remember, help can come in many forms:

- Ask others who care about your child- what do they notice?
- Talk to teachers or school counselors- what do they suggest?
- Reach out to a mental health professional for support or recommendations
- Help may involve parent coaching, individual therapy, family therapy, support groups and varied interventions

Finding professional mental health help:

- Ask for referrals from your pediatrician, school support staff, or local social services.
- [Chld Mind Institute: The Care Journey- What to Expect on the Road to Care](#)
- [Youth Mental health Project Types of Treatment](#)
- If your teen is resistant to counseling, this article by parenting expert Michelle Mitchell may help: [How to Talk about Counseling: Ideas that can make all the difference.](#)

Active Waiting:

If you decide to wait to get help, keep an eye on the problem and be ready to act if it doesn't improve. This is different than ignoring or denying the concern.

Parenting to support Mental Health & Wellness

Talking about mental health with your teen:

How do you invite your teen to talk to you about the hard stuff?

To be honest, no matter what you do, your teen will not tell you everything. That's developmentally normal; teens are *separating from parents and growing towards independent adulthood*. BUT what you can hope for is that your teen will see you as a safe haven—someone they can come to if they need help or extra support or they are at the end of their rope. Your teen is most likely to come to you to talk about the hard stuff if you if their experience is that you **ACCEPT** them for who they are, and you will **LISTEN** to them.

TRY THIS: Listen more, talk less, and try not to jump to fixing too quickly: "tell me more." "What's that like for you?" "Do you want help/advice or just want me to listen?"

The Power of Validation: Validation is a great first step when your teen is upset, angry, sad, etc. Validation means accepting & acknowledging that your teen's feelings are true for them.

- Thanks for letting me know how you're feeling. I'm glad you came to me
- That sounds hard (scary, frustrating, disappointing)
- I hear you're feeling really lonely. Tell me more about what's going on for you.

It can be painful to hear your teen's hard feelings. Remember, if they can't talk to you about it, they still have the feelings but they have to handle it without your support and help.

Next steps might be a call to a counselor, a long chat, or a nap. Sometimes it can be enough to simply have nonjudgmental support, and to be HEARD.

Suggested Resources

- Note: See Local & regional mental health resource page for close-to-home resources
- Dial 2-1-1 in CT for Emergency Mobile youth mental health response
- Kids in Crisis: Emergency shelter, crisis counseling, and community education programs for children of all ages. 24 hour hotline: 203-661-1911
- Youth Mental Health Project: Information, resources, support groups
- NAMI CT: Support and advocacy for people with mental illness & loved ones NAMI Warmline: 800-950-4264
- Child Mind Institute: Resources, information, strategies. (amazing resource)
- The Jed Foundation: Mental Health Resource Center for teens and young adults: I want help or I want to help a friend

Parenting to support Mental Health & Wellness Teens, Stress and Anxiety

Mental health professionals have been raising the alarm that privilege and competitive pressure can be toxic rather than protective and that a hyper focus on achievement could be hurting kids. Researcher Suniya Luthar, Ph.D. found that teens going to highly regarded schools in affluent areas were doing poorly in areas of mental health and substance use. "Many students attending high-achieving schools do well. But similarly to other at-risk situations, these students face a higher probability of experiencing stress-related problems without proper support."

What can you do as a parent to protect your teen's well-being in a competitive school environment:

- **Talk to your teen about your values around success and achievement.** What does it mean to be successful? Consider this quote from [Challenge Success](#), "...when society becomes too focused on narrow definitions of success (like grades, test scores, prestige, and performance), kids have less space to develop the skills they need to become resilient and engaged learners and to grow into healthy young adults."
- **When you talk about future plans, post high school and beyond, let your teen take the lead.** Let her envision different paths to a good future. Be curious. "Can you tell me more about that?"
- **Make it clear that you love and accept your child for who they are, outside of any achievements, awards or honor roll grades.** Of course it's great to say this directly, but there are also other ways to send this message:
 - Notice the non-achievement based good stuff
 - Ask about things other than grades and goals
 - Let him overhear you talk about his kindness, sense of humor, help around the house, mad baking skills, etc.
- Maintain what [Challenge Success](#) calls PDF (Playtime, Downtime and Family time) for big and little kids.
 - [PDF for teens handout](#)
- **Help your teen understand stress- how stress is sometimes good and when it can be bad.** Lisa Damour, author of *Under Pressure*, explains this in her NY Times article, [How to Help Teenagers Embrace Stress](#): "I liken the demands of school to a strength-training program. Everyone understands that lifting weights to the point of discomfort is the only way to build muscle; the process of developing intellectual ability, including the ability to manage the stress that comes with it, works just the same way." Teens can often handle, and thrive, with heavy academic loads and intense schedules but recovery has to happen somewhere.

Suggested Resources

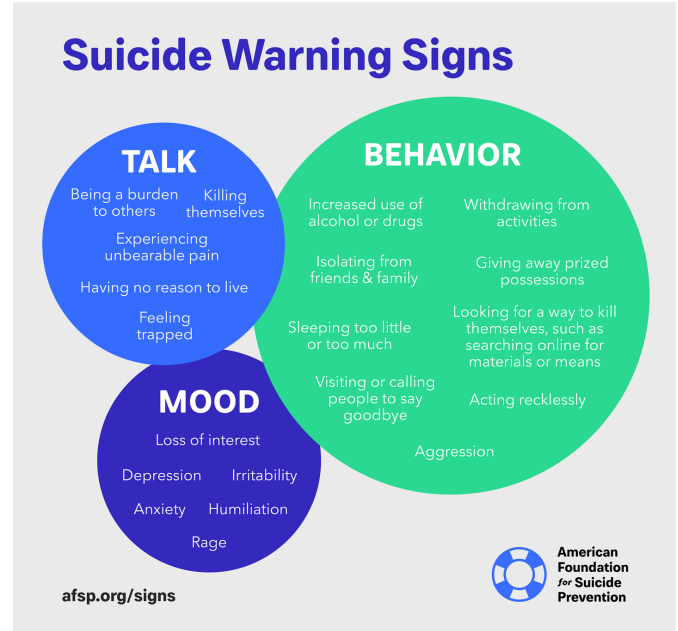
- [Challenge Success](#) nonprofit offers resources, trainings
- [The Price of Privilege](#), by Madeline Levine
- [The Self-Driven Child](#) and [What Do You Say?](#) by Stixrud & Johnson
- [Under Pressure](#), by Lisa Damour
- [APA podcast](#): the Mental Price of Affluence w/ Suniya Luthar, PhD

Youth Suicide Prevention: How parents make a difference

Teen suicide is a growing health concern, and is the second-leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24, surpassed only by accidents (CDC.gov)

Any teen can be at risk for suicide but risk increases if:

- teen has history of depression
- is close to someone who died by suicide
- has had a prior attempt or a recent significant trauma
- LGBTQ teens attempt and complete suicide at a higher rate.
- *Access to lethal means puts teens at higher risk. Guns and prescription medications should always be locked and not accessible, especially to a teen with any of the above risk factors.*



What to Do if You're Worried About Suicide from Child Mind Institute

- Asking directly about thoughts of suicide does not "put the idea" in a teen's head. "Are you thinking of hurting/killing yourself?" is a difficult but critical question: if you don't ask, you won't know.
- If the answer is yes, the risk is higher when their plan is more concrete and accessible. For example, if the plan is to take pills from the medicine cabinet or use a gun they have access to- that is a very high risk situation.
- Validate the feeling: "You are feeling so down right now you can't see a way out," without approving the plan or minimizing the seriousness of the situation.
- Reassure your teen that you are there with them and you will stay to keep them safe.

Finally, if you think your child is in danger of attempting suicide now or soon, call 911 or 211 in CT for youth mental health response. It's very important to take threats of suicide seriously

Help in a crisis for parents:

- Outreach to your teen's therapist or professional mental health supports you have
- In CT call 211 for emergency youth psychiatric mobile crisis
- In an immediate emergency call 911.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI CT): Support groups, warplane: namict.org 1-800-950626.,
- Talk it out line for parents: talkitout.gov 1-833-258-5011

Crisis lines for Teens: (make sure your teen knows these crisis resources:

- Crisis Textline: Text HELP to 741741
- Kids in Crisis Helpline: 203-661-1911 (CT)
- Trevor Project: for LGBTQ youth: 866-488-7386 or Text START to 678678
- National Suicide prevention lifeline: 800-273-8255

Weston Local Resources

There are many local and regional resources to help youth and families.

We're here for you.

- Weston Social Services: financial need & resources. 203-222-2556
- Weston Youth Services: Programs and resources.
- Weston Public Schools: School administration and support staff are great resources for parents and teens. Reach out to your child's school. District office: 203-221-6550
- Weston Police Department: Weston police have a resource officer in WMS and WHS. They can be reached via the school or Weston PD: 203-222-2600
- ADAP of Weston: Local prevention council and Youth Wellness Council for 9-12 graders. westonadapylc@gmail.com
- Sign up for the Town of Weston Everbridge emergency and community alert system [HERE](#)



Regional Help Resources:

- The Hub: Behavioral Health Action Organization for Southwestern CT: Resources, events and community trainings related to suicide prevention, substance use prevention and mental health & wellness.
- The Child and Family Guidance Center: (Bridgeport & Stratford) Behavioral health, parent support, youth crisis response: 203-394-6529
- Adult Mobile Crisis Action Line: for adults, 24/7: 1-800-HOPE-135 (1-800.467.3135)
- Youth Mobile Crisis: Dial 2-1-1 for Emergency mobile mental health intervention in a crisis involving youth
- Turning Point CT: "mission to empower teens and young adults in their search for emotional and mental health." Resources and support.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI CT): Support Groups, advocacy, resources for people with mental illness and their loved ones: (860) 882-0236
- The Rowan Center: A sexual assault resource agency: 24/7 sexual assault crisis hotline 888-999-5545/counseling, advocacy, support groups.