

teen talk

Spring 2012

a newsletter for the parents of teens

understanding
your teen

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Do violent video games result in more aggressive teens?

By: Lynn Blinn Pike, Ph.D., The University of Missouri Cooperative Extension

Violent video games have been accused of causing more aggressive behaviors among teenage boys. This has been talked about more lately because teen boys who have been involved in school shootings were also video game players.

Parents often disagree about how to react when their sons play games about war and other aggressive video games. Some parents believe that aggressive games foster violent behavior. Some parents believe that aggressive play is natural for boys and it helps them practice dealing with issues they may face in real life. And finally, some parents believe that playing violent video games provides a boy with an outlet for intense feelings that might otherwise result in destructive acts or fights.

Studying the effects of violent video games on teens is a relatively new idea that began in 1984. Since that time, few studies have found that violent video games result in violent teens. However, parents need to pay close attention to their teens and watch for signs that video games are taking the place of other healthy



activities such as sports, clubs, and schoolwork. As with other teen activities, parents need to monitor the following: where (home or arcade), when, with whom, and how long their teens play. It would be helpful for parents to actually play the more popular video games and make their own decisions about how violent the games are. This would also foster parent and teen communication.

It is not known if violent games result in violent teens or if violent teens are more interested in violent games. But it will pay off for parents to spend time getting to understand this teen activity in order to be able to make effective rules for their family and communicate more effectively about these rules with their teens.



Parenting young teens – What is a serious problem?

By: The Iowa State University Cooperative Extension

Acceptable teen behavior varies with age and differing family values. However, the following behaviors should always be of concern:

- Depressive symptoms that lasts for two weeks or longer
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Unprotected sex

Depression in teens may show itself as sadness, hopelessness, irritability, anger, casual sex, or use of alcohol or drugs. No one behavior means depression; a youth in serious trouble probably will display several symptoms.

The following behaviors are danger signs of depression or substance abuse:

- Unusual failure to do chores, follow rules, arrive home on time
- Loss of interest in goals, activities, or hobbies
- Temper flare-ups
- Rapid change in friends

- Lack of care in personal appearance or hygiene
- Abrupt change in school attendance and grades
- Unusual isolation and withdrawal from family
- Secretive and defensive behavior regarding actions and stealing money or objects

When a teen has both a substance abuse problem and depression, most professionals suggest it's first important to overcome drugs or alcohol, and then treat the depression.



Parenting young teens – What is normal behavior?

By: The Iowa State University Cooperative Extension

It can be hard to tell the difference between normal behavior and problem behavior of young teens. Young teens often take up new behaviors and want to try new things. A teen's dress or actions may look strange or risky, but are completely normal and not a cause for concern. It is considered normal that a young teen:

- Follows fads in clothes, hairstyles, and music
- Comes home 30 minutes to an hour late occasionally

- Spends more time alone or with friends
- Shares less openly with parents or family members

Teens naturally take risks. Trying out for the team or the school play, calling someone for a date, or standing up for their beliefs are all normal, healthy risks. Teens also test the abilities of their rapidly developing bodies and minds. Teens can show great courage, such as risking their safety to save a child from a water accident.



April is Alcohol Awareness Month

*By: Karyn Mendoza, The University of Illinois
Cooperative Extension*

It is once again time to bring awareness to a critical problem in America – alcohol abuse. April is Alcohol Awareness Month, which has been sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) since 1987 to raise awareness about this issue.

Alcohol often leads to problems that impact families such as financial stressors, divorce or separation, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse toward a member of the family and other forms of violence.

We also know the long-term risks alcohol can have on a person's health. The Center for Disease Control states, "drinking can lead to alcohol related liver disease and other unintentional injuries."

If you are questioning whether you or someone you know drinks too much, the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug information (NCADI) has outlined the following questions to ask yourself:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while you were drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hang-over after you have been drinking?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, please consider seeking the advice of a counselor who specializes in this area. NCADI recommends you contact your doctor to explore this further.

Parents, stay vigilant of your child's use of alcohol. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "teens with 'hands-off' parents are at four times greater risk of smoking, drinking, and using illegal drugs as teens with 'hands on' parents." Stay informed about what is going on in your child's life. Maintain open communication and dialogue about this serious issue.

When talking with their children and teens about alcohol, parents need to be open and honest so youth feel safe talking about the issue. Parents should also listen to what their adolescent has to say. Ask them questions and listen. If you are judgemental and critical they may just tell you what you want to hear. As you talk to them, discuss the issues and consequences associated with alcohol use.

Most importantly, if you or someone you care about has an alcohol problem or is impacted by alcohol contact your local Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon/Alateen group for help. Al-Anon and Alateen are geared for adults and teens who are directly impacted by alcoholism.



How can I help my son choose not to be violent in dating relationships?

By: The University of Missouri Cooperative Extension

Studies have shown that boys are more likely than girls to initiate violence in dating relationships and that when they do act violently, it is more likely to cause serious harm to their dating partners. For this reason, it is especially important that we teach our sons to respect girls as valuable human beings and equals. Teach your son appropriate ways of dealing with conflict. Talk to your son about how you expect him to treat his dates. Finally, let your sons know that they are valuable young men who have a lot to contribute.

Parenting young teens – gradually let go

By: The Iowa State University Cooperative Extension

From their child's birth to around age 18, parents gradually need to widen a child's responsibilities. Parents do almost everything for their child during infancy. However, the child gradually learns to do simple things – feeding oneself, walking, making needs known, learning how to dress, and so on. Parents usually are anxious for the baby and small child to do more and are proud of each new milestone. It's easy to forget; however, that young teens also need to continue to do more things for themselves. The long-term goal is for children to learn to live on their own and make good decisions.

Parents who continue to solve their teen's problems for them make it more difficult for their teen to become a responsible adult. Unwanted parental control at this age has outcomes that are not healthy.

Some children with controlling parents never learn to stand on their own two feet. Even as adults, they cannot make decisions and may have trouble living away from home. Others react to excessive control by becoming rebellious. When they no longer live at home, they may behave in ways their parents had tried to prevent. They may use alcohol or drugs, engage in unhealthy sexual activities, or other dangerous behavior. On the other hand, parents who gradually let their young teen take responsibility and solve his or her own problems help prepare that teen for adulthood.



“Adolescence is a period of rapid changes. Between the ages of 12 and 17, for example, a parent ages as much as 20 years.”

~Author Unknown



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