



How To Recognize A Teenager In Trouble

Every teenager goes through ups and downs during their adolescent years, but certain behaviors may indicate your teen is in trouble and need of your help. The warning signs below can help you differentiate between what is normal teen behavior, and what may indicate drug/alcohol abuse, depression or other problems.

Warning Signs

- A change in friends. Suddenly abandoning old friends for new peers who you know nothing about or who are acceptable to you. Also, significant loss of interest in any activities outside of the time spent with their “friends.” Sudden drop in school performance. A child who has previously performed well in school is suddenly losing interest in school and grades are plummeting.
- Extreme mood swings or changes in behavior. Mood swings are common during adolescence because of the fluctuating hormones of puberty. But, if your child is going from being deeply depressed to extremely happy, you need to figure out what is going on. Other examples: Unreasonable fits of anger, very defiant and disrespectful, exhibits hostility towards family members, very withdrawn and barely communicative, wants to be left alone all the time, radical changes in eating or sleeping patterns.
- Keeping secrets or lying. Is your teen telling you lies about significant things like where they’ve been or who they’ve been with? Are they lying about their grades, getting into trouble in school, cutting classes, disappearing for long periods of time without explanation?
- Depression. Is your child unusually quiet or sad? Have they been more withdrawn than usual? Have they changed their relationships with friends, their lifestyle, their eating habits, eating or sleeping habits, or cleanliness? These are just some of the indicators that beg you to talk to your child and make sure that everything is okay.

What to Do

There are numerous other warning signs of a teenager in trouble. If you have noticed major physical, emotional, social and school changes in your teenager, it is important that you take action right away, before the problem gets worse and the consequences for your child grows greater. Please contact your teenager’s pediatrician and/or follow-up with a mental health counselor for additional evaluation.

Note: Professional help should be sought immediately if a person is experiencing suicidal thoughts. Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.