

Take the Time

A guide for important discussions to have
with our teens.

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ELLINGTON YOUTH SERVICES' PERSPECTIVES & GOALS:

A trusted adult is someone who helps, listens, cares for, spends time with, is patient with a child and makes the child feel safe. A parent is a trusted adult who is responsible for a teen's daily care (food, shelter, etc.) and also enforces guidelines, sets limits, and teaches boundaries. This guide book is for any individual who falls into either of these categories.

A teen is a child who is being introduced to adult freedoms but cannot be expected to function like an adult. A teen can prepare for adulthood when a parent encourages the teen to work through a problem alone BUT allows them to come back when it's too hard. Teens are faced with more challenges that can be overcome with resiliency.

We want the expectations of our teens to be that they can face challenges and make decisions on their own. Our image of a safe home is somewhere that teens can fully experience the challenges that come with being a person. It is a parent's job to keep their kids safe and healthy. When we use the word safe, we are referring to the experience, the space, the people, etc. that allow a child to live through messy emotions and difficult situations. When we use the word healthy, we are referring to the resources that teens have access to—the information that they use to make decisions. We want parents to 1. Be a resource their teens trust and 2. Have confidence in their own abilities.

Adults know that life is not always happy. Teens have constant exposure to things (news, social media, etc.) that are not happy. Yet, we parents do everything we can to keep our children happy. This booklet is a guide for parents to:

1. Alter the conversation from "I'm here to make you happy" to "I'm here to keep you safe."
2. Support their teens while they go through unhappy moments.
3. Prepare their teens for future unhappy moments.

The discussion topics included in this guide book are few compared to all the difficult conversations parents could possibly be having with their teens. The conversation starters are broad compared to the potential seriousness of the situation. We intentionally did this because every conversation is an opportunity for growth. Plus, parents know their teens best...do what works for you!

BEFORE WE BE START I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS:

Do you think about how you parent or are you more in “auto-pilot”?

Do you approach parenting in a way that feels natural to you?

Do you think about what you want for your child’s future, and parent in a way that will lead to those goals, or do you focus on the parenting moments as they occur and feel the future will work out for your child?

These questions are meant to help you self-reflect. We hear that we are role models for our children but are we always intentional? The contents of this guidebook will remind parents how crucial it is to look into yourself. Throughout the sections, you will be reminded of your actions directly impacting the choices your children make. It seems that our teens are not listening but they are watching. We want the questions to help you understand why you have to be self-aware as a parent. “Do as I say, not as I do” no longer applies because children learn from modeled behavior.

One more question: Do you have high self-esteem?

Why does this matter? Your children hear you talk about yourself. Your children observe how you treat yourself. Your children witness how you take care of yourself. You are setting the example of how they will treat themselves!

What is low self-esteem? It is when an individual views themselves as inadequate, unloveable, undeserving of good things, and unworthy. When low self-esteem is formed this negative view skews and takes over your thought process, and can result in self-destructive behavior.

In teenage years, self-esteem takes a hit as teens are exploring their identity in harsh social environments and figuring out where they “fit in”.

Now, how do we help with self-esteem issues, for ourselves and our children? The answer is self-care. Self-care is discussed a little bit throughout this guide and we at EYS stress how important this is for everyone. A big piece of self-care that parents should be practicing and teaching their children is SELF-WORTH.

Self-care has become a cliched term... But our definition of self-care covers more than bubble-baths and hiking. Our goal of practicing good self-care includes changing your inner dialogue with yourself; to give yourself meaningful and loving words.

When you fail at something, do you say “I suck, I will never amount to anything?” or do you speak optimistically and say “I’m proud of myself for trying.” This is a question to ask your kids as well! When they say the wrong answer in school, disappoint you, get a bad grade, etc...how are they speaking to themselves?

Treating yourself to a bubble bath or working out is great! But what is your inner-dialogue when you are doing these things? Are you saying “I need to work out because I dislike how my body looks.” Or when you take a bubble bath are you saying “I don’t deserve this, I could be doing so many other things with this time”. If you are not speaking positively, then you are not receiving the benefits.

What do you think you are teaching your kids when you say things like, “I need to work out cause I don’t like how my muscles are so small.” or “I need to eat healthy and work out cause I hate how my body looks.” You are modeling that negative views towards oneself are only fixed by changing oneself’s body. Negative self-talk is, unfortunately, an easy example to understand with the prevalence of eating disorders in teens.

“Research has shown that around 50% of young 13 year old American girls reported being unhappy with their body. This number grew to nearly 80% by the time girls reached 17 years of age. Research conducted in the U.S showed that around 25% of male children/adolescents were concerned about their muscularity and leanness, by expressing a greater desire for toned and defined muscles” (Linardon, 2021).

How can we help? Change the narrative. Let’s try! Say “I want to work out and eat healthy so I am strong and feel healthy.” and “I want to take a bubble bath because I deserve 20 minutes to decompress my mind.”

Try not to be overwhelmed! Simple changes can make a huge difference.

What you verbalize, you internalize. Even if you do not believe it, say it. When you are sending negative thoughts to yourself, your brain then searches for proof of this in your life/surroundings. And the same is true about the positives! This is human nature.

Practicing affirmations is a perfect example of self-care. These are great to teach kids when they are young. Anyone can practice and change that narrative in your mind. Saying daily affirmations like “I love myself,” “I am loved” in your head or, even better, out loud is what this can look like. Practice with your kids too! And if you feel this is something your teen needs to work on: something simple you can do is place a sticky note on their mirror saying “I am deserving of happiness.” (Pinterest has great ideas)!

You are teaching your child to be confident! Confidence stems from true self-worth: a belief and pride in your achievements and abilities. Confident people have self-assurance that contributes to inner calm. They show composure and don’t brag or act superior to others. Arrogance actually stems from insecurities and low self-esteem.

“Confidence is when you believe in yourself and your abilities, arrogance is when you think you are better than others and act accordingly. You could say that arrogance is false confidence and that the person displaying it is overcompensating for their inner inadequacies.” -Stewart Stafford

Ultimately, we want our children to love themselves and value their worth. Compassion for others comes from having compassion for ourselves.

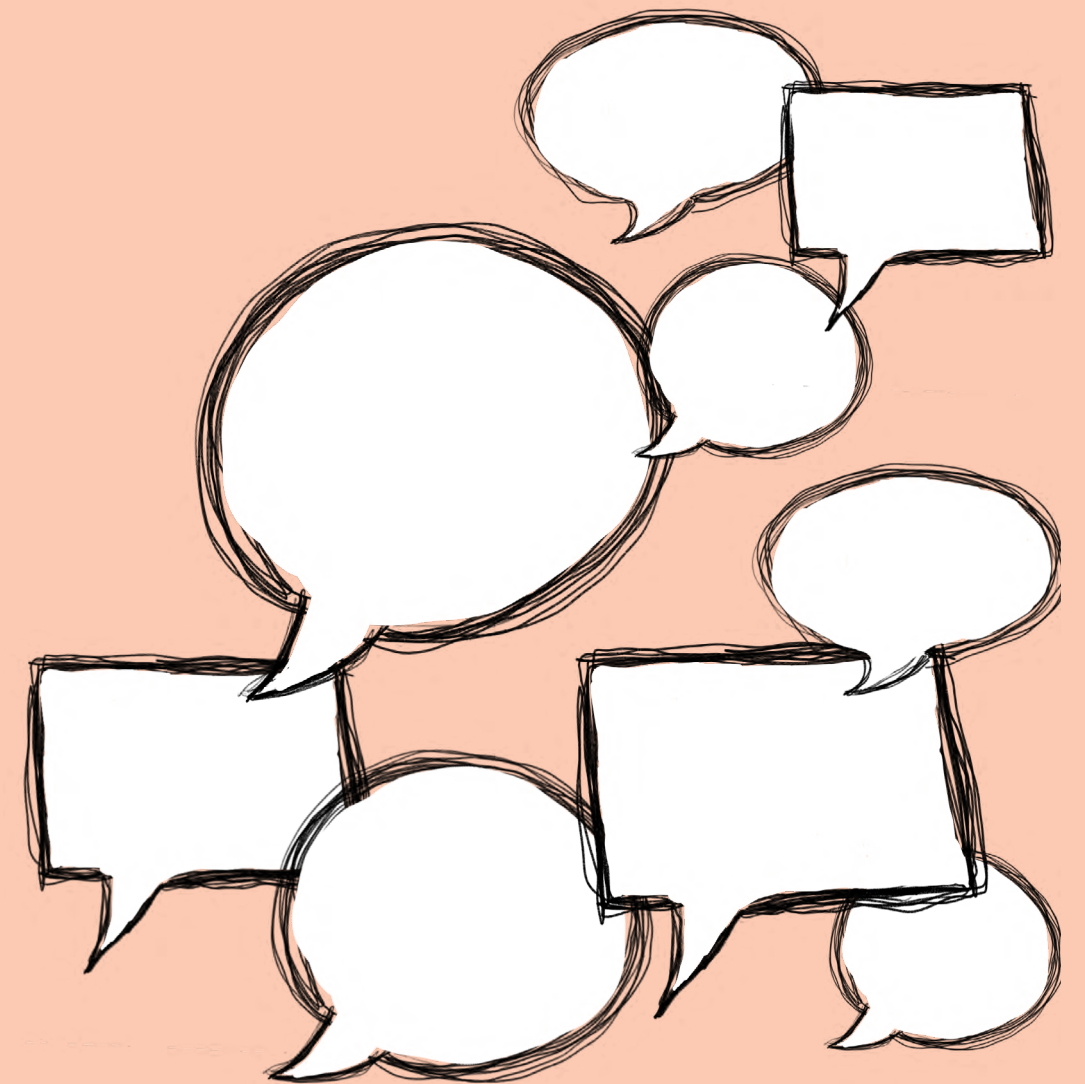
Breathe. This is a lot! Remember, there is no perfect parent and children do not need us to be perfect! You taking the time to read this and self-evaluate shows that you care. We are all humans and can feel overwhelmed, you do not have to be in this alone. Plus, creating a support system and reaching out for help are always options - and - please remember that when reading through this guide.

DISCUSSION TIPS

Feeling uncomfortable is normal. Although we want to avoid uncomfortable conversations, they can give you the chance to guide your teen towards sensible and responsible decisions.

Listed below are general tips and tricks to use when having difficult conversations with your teens. Apply these tips to all the topics covered and beyond.

1. Be patient and ready to listen.
2. Avoid criticism and encourage an open dialogue.
3. The goal is to have a conversation, not to deliver a lecture.
4. It's okay for your conversation to take place over time, in bits and pieces.
5. To be effective, you will need to find the balance between being sensitive and firm. Try to adapt to the changes faced by your teen. Be willing to talk openly and respect differences of opinion. And, accept that the decisions you make will sometimes be unpopular with them.
6. You are not perfect and accept that you will make mistakes, and acknowledge when you do! Show your teen it's okay to make mistakes and we can take responsibility and grow from it.
7. If you don't know how to answer a question it is okay to do some research together.
8. Try not to dismiss ideas as "wrong", rather encourage debate —this helps young people come to his or her own understanding.
9. Choose your timing wisely. Think about when your teen is most likely to be in the right headspace before bringing up a difficult or awkward topic. Also remember that a formal sit-down may be intimidating or overwhelming for your teens. Doing some kind of activity while you talk can help this (taking a walk, cleaning up after dinner, etc.).
10. Remain calm. No matter what your teen says, try not to get angry or act judgmental. If you feel surprised and not sure what to say, simply state that and say you may need time to think.
11. Provide resources. Sometimes with these topics one of the best things you can do for your teen is to guide them to *reputable* resources to get *good* information.



ADOLESCENT BRAIN

Words by John Lally: An Ellington Resident, Executive Director of Today I Matter (T-I-M), named after his son Timothy. He is also a nurse practitioner and has been working in psychiatry and addiction for over 30 years.

“As a parent, most of us, at one time or another, have puzzled over the behavior of our adolescent child and wondered “What were they thinking?” Their behavior may have been impulsive, showed poor judgment, and seemed unreasonable. We may reflect on our own youth and remember things we did that make us cringe in retrospect. These are common concerns recognized throughout history. Fortunately, as we mature through our twenties, our thinking becomes more reasoned and thoughtful. This is not just because we have more experience in life, but research has shown actual changes in the brain that can account for this.

Our brain goes through a rapid development and maturation process during childhood and into young adulthood. We sometimes marvel at babies and toddlers as we observe the speed and progress of their intellectual process. New parents are often amazed at how smart their child is as they notice the almost daily improvement in intellectual skills and problem solving.

The typical process of brain development is not maximized until a person reaches their early twenties. PET scans have shown evidence that the last section of the brain to mature is the frontal lobe, located just behind the forehead. This area is responsible for executive functioning; reasoning, impulse control, and judgment. During adolescence, the frontal lobe of the brain remains underdeveloped, resulting in behaviors that show less than optimal executive functioning. They are less apt to accurately consider future consequences of their actions and less inhibited to avoid questionable behaviors. Left to its own normal maturation process, these abilities will improve to maximum efficiency in young adulthood...”



ADDICTION

"...Most chemical substances that are psycho-active, (effects on mood, thoughts, or emotions), including nicotine, alcohol, opiates, tranquilizers, methamphetamine, cocaine, and others, can cause disruption in the frontal lobe functions. Even though a single use of a substance can have temporary effects, repeated uses of these chemicals can cause long lasting impairment. This reduction in impulse control, reasoning, and judgment put the individual at risk for developing a substance use disorder and/or addiction. As their impairment progresses, the ability to use reason and good judgment about the harmful effects of substance use diminishes, making continued use more likely.

There are many other factors in developing an addiction, such as genetics, social influence, family behavior, emotional stamina, and availability of the substance. Impairment of the frontal lobe function compounds all of those other risk factors. Though there is no definitive prediction of which individual may go on to develop an addiction, science has shown that any introduction of a substance with an addiction potential, can possibly lead to addiction. In addition, the evidence shows that the earlier a person is introduced to potentially addictive substances, the more likely that person is to eventually develop an addiction. It is a very rare occurrence for an individual, whose first use occurred after full brain maturity, to develop an addiction to a substance. The overwhelming percentage of addicted individuals started using substances in their teens.

Any use of a substance in the developing brain is like playing "Russian Roulette," with the individual risking the chance that they may eventually progress to a full blown addiction. Every addicted individual started out with the thought, "This is just once, I know I can handle it." Research supports that the longer an individual can postpone use of an addictive substance, the less likely will be the development of an addiction."

"According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health, there were 1,372 deaths by overdose in 2020 alone, and of those deaths 80 were ages 15-24 years old. According to the National Department of Public Health, more than 70,000 Americans died from drug-involved overdose in 2019."

Additional information & resources:

portal.ct.gov/dmhas

www.drugabuse.gov

www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/addiction/drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early/

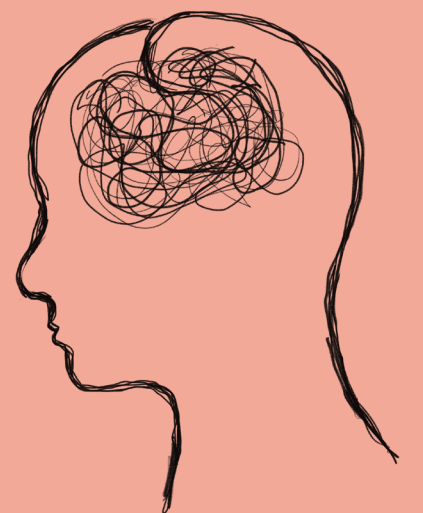
www.samhsa.gov/

Conversation Starters:

"We have a history of addiction in our family, do you have any questions about it?"

"Have you learned about addiction or your brain in school?"

"I'm sure you've seen how the media portrays addicts, do you think this is realistic?"



Conversation Starters:

"What are some stressors in your life?"

"It seems there is a stigma around mental health. why do you think that is?"

"I've noticed [...], if you are struggling, I hope you know you can come to me... when you are ready."

"How are you... really?"



MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health has no racial, ethnic, financial, or social boundaries; meaning that every person is impacted by mental health directly or indirectly. Likewise, life will always have unimaginable situations that every person has to face. Whether it be a family member, a coworker, a neighbor, or first-hand, every person has mental health related experiences. Mental health conditions are becoming more relevant while the impact of mental health issues on others remains high.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

John Lally explains:

"Mental illness exists on a continuum. We all experience fear, anxiety, and sadness, but for some these feelings feel more intense and overwhelming. It is normal and human to experience these emotional states, We should not demonize people who struggle with them. Kids need to be taught that we all have these feelings and, by reaching out and talking to others, they can learn to manage these difficult emotions. Lastly, it is important to remember that most people with mental (emotional) illness are not dangerous to others, but more likely to harm themselves. Many of us feel overwhelmed at times and think of not wanting to be alive, to escape the emotional turmoil, but even these thoughts and feelings can be helped by talking with someone who cares."

All the topics that we will cover in this discussion guide go hand and hand with mental health. It is very easy for teens to find unhealthy ways to cope with underlying mental health issues – which then negatively affects their futures and their relationships. Teaching and practicing healthy coping strategies at home is crucial. Please remember that all emotions and feelings are okay and healthy, this includes anger and sadness. What is significant is how we express them and work through them.

A common myth when it comes to talking about mental health is that if you ask someone if they are suicidal, you will put that idea in their heads. That is completely false and has been proven so by numerous studies. According to the CDC: "suicide is the second-leading cause of death among ages 10-34 and the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S."

This is a topic that must be discussed and, at Ellington Youth Services, we have unlimited resources surrounding mental health. Please check out our website or reach out!

Additional information & resources:

youth.ellington-ct.gov

uwc.211ct.org/categorysearch/mental-health/

portal.ct.gov/dmhas

www.nami.org/home

www.samhsa.gov

www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/mental-health/

www.preventsuicidect.org/

youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health

VAPING

It's never too late to start talking with your teen about the risks of vaping. As teens age, they make more decisions on their own and face greater temptation and peer pressure. Though it may not seem like it, teens really do hear your concerns. It's important you help them understand what cigarettes and other vaping products are, and why they shouldn't use them.

The term 'vaping' refers to the action or practice of inhaling and exhaling the vapor produced by an electronic cigarette or similar device. While teens may inhale several different substances through electronic cigarettes, some of the most common are marijuana and flavor liquid with nicotine.

According to the CDC's National Youth Tobacco Survey: "1 in 5 high school students reported vaping in the past month."

Most teens start vaping due to curiosity, because friends and family vape, the appealing flavors, to do vape tricks, or because they think it's cool or want to fit in. Over time, vaping can become habit-forming as they use it to address other needs such as relief from boredom and anxiety.

Some may become addicted to nicotine and continue vaping to avoid withdrawal symptoms. This is especially dangerous if vaping is being used to cope with anxiety, depression, etc. because it is teaching your brain that vaping is the solution - instead of healthy coping strategies.

There is a common misconception that vaping is completely harmless. The truth is, vaping is not safe, especially for teens and young adults. According to SAMHSA: "66 percent of teens think their vaping instrument only contains flavored liquid." What many don't understand is that these liquids may also contain toxic substances such as formaldehyde, diacetyl, and acrolein. Inhaling these chemicals can significantly harm their lungs. Many vaping liquids also contain nicotine, which can be very addictive for teens and young adults, and can seriously impact their brain development. Exposure to nicotine at a young age can make it easier for teens to get hooked on vaping and using other tobacco products.

Additional information & resources:

www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/vaping/

portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Prevention-Unit/Prevention-Unit/TPEP-Home-Page

www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/tobacconicotine-vaping

drugfree.org/drugs/e-cigarettes-vaping/

Conversation Starters:

"Are a lot of kids vaping at your school?"

"What do you think about vaping?"

"What do you enjoy about vaping?" or "How does
vaping make you feel?"

"Are you vaping to help cope with anxiety?"

If yes, discuss some healthier ways to cope



Conversation Starters:

"Have you known anyone addicted to painkillers?"

"Do you remember the feeling of being on pain killers after
[...]"

"Have you ever thought about taking my prescription pain
meds?"



Additional information & resources:
[www.drugfreect.org/prevention/change-the-script-campaign/
liveloud.org/](http://www.drugfreect.org/prevention/change-the-script-campaign/liveloud.org/)
connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/library/article.aspx?hwid=tp17749#tp17750
youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse
www.drugabuse.gov/
www.samhsa.gov/find-help/atod
www.hhs.gov/opioids/prevention/index.html

OPIOIDS & DRUGS

When talking about drugs with your teens, share that their safety is your priority and that this is a judgment free zone. And remember that as the conversation progresses. Teens are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. The conversation will go a lot better if you're open and show your concern for their well-being.

Show you are a good source of information about alcohol and other drugs. You want your teen to make informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs with reliable information about its dangers. You don't want him or her to learn about drugs from unreliable sources. Establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information.

Talk about opioids and help them understand what prescription opioids are and why they shouldn't misuse them. Prescription opioid misuse includes taking someone else's medicine, using medicine in a way other than prescribed, taking medicine to get high, or mixing medicine with alcohol or other substances. Oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine are some of the most commonly misused prescription pain medications.

Young people may misuse prescription opioids for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, and wanting to fit in. Another reason teens may decide to take prescription opioids is because they can be easier to get than other drugs.

For some, opioid use begins as a way of coping with anxiety, anger, depression, or boredom. Preteens, and teens in particular, may struggle with depression and anxiety but do not recognize it or want to talk about it. Parents often assume there is nothing wrong if their children do not discuss their feelings. Being high can be a way of simply avoiding the problems and challenges of growing up.

Using prescription opioids long term or incorrectly can cause the brain to become reliant on them and quickly lead to addiction. In fact, dependence on prescription opioids can happen in just 5 days.

According to SAMSHA: "after alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, prescription drugs are the most commonly used/misused substances among Americans ages 12 and older. In 2019, more than 567,000 youths ages 12–17 and 1.8 million young adults ages 18–25 reported misusing prescription pain medication in the past year."

Other types of drugs that teens may be misusing and is important to be knowledgeable about include:

- » Inhalants (for example, gasoline, ammonia), the use of which is often referred to as "huffing"
- » Depressants (for example, barbiturates, benzodiazepines), sometimes called "downers or roofies"
- » Stimulants (for example, amphetamines, cocaine, methamphetamine), sometimes called "speed, uppers, blow, or crack"
- » Narcotics (for example, morphine, heroin, codeine, oxycodone [Oxycontin], hydrocodone/acetaminophen [Vicodin]), sometimes called "cody or dope"
- » Hallucinogens (for example LSD, "mushrooms"), sometimes called "acid or shrooms"
- » Dissociative anesthetics (for example, phencyclidine/PCP, ketamine), sometimes called "lovely, K, or vitamin K,"
- » Club drugs (for example, Ecstasy), sometimes called "X"

As a parent, your teen looks to you for help and guidance in working out problems and in making decisions... including the decision not to use drugs. Even if you have used drugs in the past, you can have an open conversation about the dangers. Whether or not you tell your child about your past drug use is a personal decision. But experience can better equip us to teach others by drawing on the value of past mistakes. The biggest point to make clear is the effects on the brain; you care about their health and safety.

CANNABIS

The psychoactive drug comes from the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds of the Cannabis sativa or Cannabis indica plant. It is a drug that contains close to 500 chemicals, including THC, a mind-altering compound.

Teens use cannabis for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, and wanting to fit in with friends. Some use it to cope with anxiety, stress, and even depression.

Cannabis can be consumed in a variety of ways—including smoking, vaping, oils, teas, and edibles.

Cannabis use is prevalent among teens and young adults, and according to SAMHSA's 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: "an estimated 3.3 million youths ages 12-17 reported using marijuana in the past year"

When talking to teens about cannabis it is common for them to bring up how it is becoming legal for medical and recreational use, so it is not 'a big deal'. If this conversation happens make sure you stay relaxed so your child feels okay to talk about it with you. A good way to respond is to say that yes, some people use it as medicine or to relax, but should only be doing so as an adult. It is very important for your child to understand a legal age has been set for a reason, and it needs to be respected.

If they ever come to you with a question or concern about cannabis and you do not know the answer, do not lie. This is a great opportunity for you both to learn together and do some research.

Additional information & resources:

www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana

www.cdc.gov/marijuana/index.htm

[store.samhsa.gov/?v=substances&f\[0\]=substances:5444](http://store.samhsa.gov/?v=substances&f[0]=substances:5444)

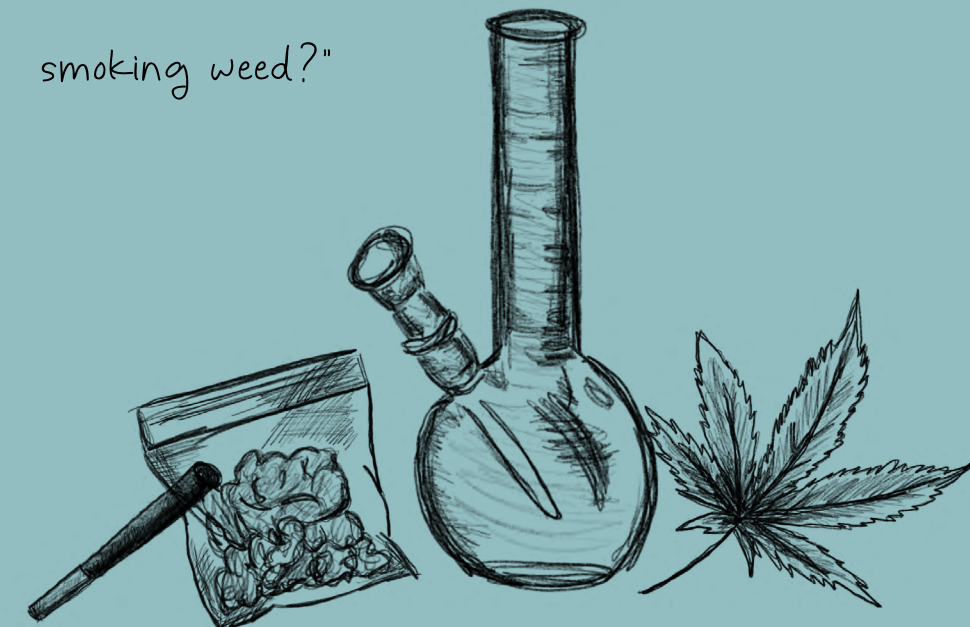
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/marijuana/

Conversation Starters:

"How do you feel about the recent legalization of weed?"

"Why do you think some people say smoking weed is safer than drinking alcohol?"

"Have you been to any parties where they are smoking weed?"



Conversation Starters:

"Why do you think it's illegal for kids under the age of 21 to drink alcohol?"

"What would you do if you were in a car and the driver had been drinking?"

"Have you been to a party where there is drinking? Were you tempted to try?"



"Have you ever thought that I drank too much, or acted differently when I drank alcohol?"

ALCOHOL

Don't assume your teen knows how you feel about drinking, send a clear and strong message that you disapprove of underage drinking.

Young people are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. Reinforce why you don't want your child to drink.

You want your teen to make informed decisions about alcohol with reliable information about its dangers. You don't want him or her to learn about alcohol from unreliable sources. Establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information.

Young people are more likely to drink or use other drugs if they think no one will notice. Show that you're aware of what your teen is up to, but do this in a gentle and genuine way and try not to pry. Ask about friends and plans because you care, not because you're judging—you are more likely to have an open conversation.

Even if you don't think your child wants to drink, peer pressure is a powerful thing. Having a plan to avoid alcohol and drug use can help children make better choices. Talk with your children about what they would do if faced with a difficult decision about alcohol and drugs.

Set a Good Example:

- » Parents and guardians are important role models for their children—even children who are becoming teenagers.
- » If you do drink: show what drinking responsibly looks like (not binge drinking, having a designated driver, etc.).
- » If you have a couple glasses of wine to relax - make it clear to your teens that this is an unhealthy coping skill and dangerous for the developing brain. You do not want to give them the idea that drinking could help with their own stress.

Because alcohol is easy to obtain and socially acceptable, it is a very popular way of self-medication for stress, anxiety, depression and underlying mental health issues. These poor stress-management skills fuel binge drinking. According to the CDC: "most people younger than age 21 who drink alcohol report binge drinking, often consuming large amounts." The CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that "in the past 30 days, 29% drank alcohol and 14% binge drank."

Binge drinking can be especially dangerous for teens because it can impact how the brain handles stress in the future. As we get older we learn how to cope with stress and anxiety and teach our brains when to do so. But with teens who binge, their brains do not learn to cope. Eventually the brain and body become unable to distinguish between a small stressor and something that could be life threatening; causing the brain to be on high alert and more reactive resulting in increased binge behavior.

Additional information & resources:

connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/library/article.aspx?hwid=tp17749#tp17750
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/underage-drinking/
portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Prevention-Unit/Prevention-Files/Underage-Drinking
www.niaaa.nih.gov/
drugfree.org/drugs/alcohol/
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Parenting a teen is not easy—especially when it comes to helping them navigate their way through relationships. When talking about relationships with young teens, be open and allow them to explain their own values and expectations for healthy relationships.

Before having these conversations you need to think about the pressure and the risk teens face. Teens face new and increasing pressures about sex and dating *especially* when it comes to media. There are constant comparison games going on for teens in social settings and through social media – comparison that causes constant stress.

To reduce the chances that your teens will engage in behaviors that will put them at risk, it is most important to communicate honestly *and* openly. Parents are the most significant influence on a teen's decisions about relationships – you want to be the main source of information when it comes to things like sex, relationships, HIV, STDs, and pregnancy. Instead of misguided information from peers and social media.

If and when your teen shares personal information with you, try not to overreact– keep in mind that they may be asking for your input or want to know how you feel. Let your teen know that you value their opinion, even if it is different from yours. You are there to 1. listen and 2. offer advice if they want it.

So what makes a relationship *healthy*?

Respect is the foundation for healthy, happy and safe relationships. In mutually respectful relationships there should be safety, support, individuality, equality, trust and communication.

Before you enter a relationship you need to love and value yourself. When you are lacking in these areas it is very easy to seek validation and self-worth in a partner, but you will not find it. Self-respect, self-worth, and self-love all have the word self in it because this is something we only have in ourselves. After you value and love yourself you will see that you: deserve to be treated with respect, want to surround yourself with people who appreciate and support you, and have every right to make decisions that are healthy and keep you comfortable and safe.

Boundaries are important to instill in all aspects of our lives. Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed. Each person has different boundaries on what's okay or not okay. Treat others how they want to be treated and if you're unsure, ask them directly what they're okay with. It is critical that parents teach their teens to respect and adhere to the word 'no' when uttered by one of their peers. Respecting 'no' relates to sexual behavior BUT it encompasses much more.

According to the CDC: "Nearly 1 in 11 female and about 1 in 15 male high school students report having experienced physical dating violence in the last year. About 1 in 9 female and 1 in 36 male high school students report having experienced sexual dating violence in the last year."

If you are unsure how to bring up this conversation–make the most of "teachable moments." Use TV episodes, movies, music lyrics, news, community events or the experiences of friends to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships. Bringing up a friend's relationship is another way to have this conversation and discuss how to be an 'upstander'. Teach teens how to stand-up for friends when they observe unhealthy treatment of their peers.

Parents are role models for what your teen sees as a healthy relationship. You have the opportunity to discuss or demonstrate what respect, self-respect, and boundaries can look like.

Conversation Starters:

"What do you like most about yourself?"

"How can you give respect to yourself?"

"What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries?"

"What are you or your friends' dating relationships like?"



Additional information & resources:

www.loveisrespect.org/

thatsnotcool.com/

youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence

www.teendvmonth.org/

www.cdc.gov/injury/features/dating-violence/

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

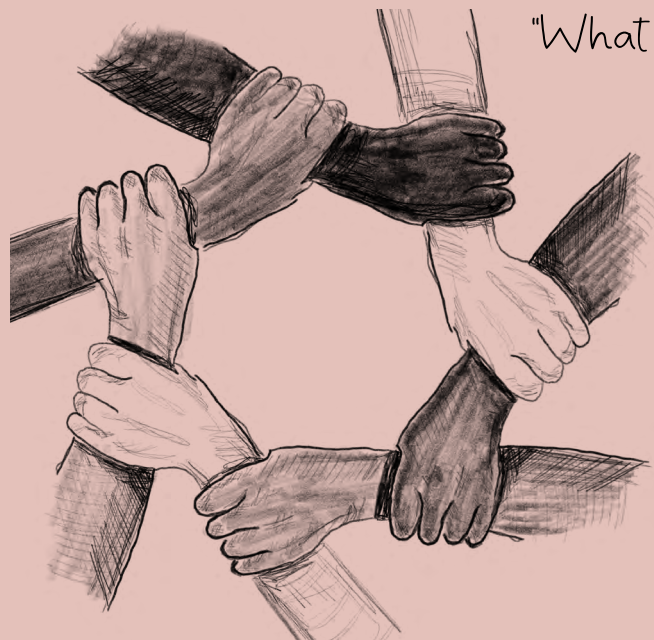
Conversation Starters:

Accept that your child will say discriminatory things, and that doesn't mean your child is racist. Don't over-react to their comments or questions. BUT, don't ignore it either. the key is responding in a non-judgemental way. Don't be afraid to apologize for something they've said, and when appropriate, privately talk to your child about their language. There are also a few key phrases that will help:

"Let's talk about that for a minute ..."

"What made you notice that?"

"What made you say that"



The fear of bringing people's differences up is real – it's real for you, AND it's real for your teens.

The anxiety of talking about race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and disability, for example, can all come from a lack of communication in our own childhoods.

It can also come from the fear of sounding offensive. The solution is very simple: get informed, learn the language and terms, and grow some confidence about the topics. Talking about people's diversity does heighten children's awareness; it gives them a maturity about things like race and disability.

A lot of kids don't have the freedom of *not being aware* of their differences. Not having to consider how those around you will treat you because of your skin color, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or faith is what is known as "privilege".

Don't be afraid to apologize for something your child may have said that is discriminatory or non inclusive and, when appropriate, privately talk to them about their language. Also don't be afraid to apologize for something you've said - in front of your kids. It is also okay if your teen is the one to point out your non inclusive language; let them know that they are right!

According to the National Center of Educational Statistics: "1 in 5 (20.2%) students report being bullied. The reasons for being bullied reported most often by students include physical appearance, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation."

Teach your teens how to use inclusive language by discouraging and avoiding "labeling". This will require some practice, because you likely use labels like race all the time. Use people's names or use the most neutral descriptors possible. Be specific.

When talking to children about disability, emphasize strengths. Don't ignore disabilities. Pretending they are not noticeable is a disservice to both those with disabilities and your teen. Teens notice physical and intellectual disabilities in other children and adults. What they don't automatically do is judge them as a weakness or strength. It is up to you to help build a non-judgemental response to the differences. This is best achieved by focusing on people's strengths. This is what is meant by "seeing past someone's disability."

Seek out diversity in the media. Your kids may understand that what they are seeing on the TV or seeing in books is not reality, they do pick up on stereotypes or false messages about race or culture. It is important to step in and make sure you challenge stereotypes - and this can turn into a teachable moment!

Additional information & resources:

youth.gov/youth-topics/disabilities

www.parents.com/kids/responsibility/racism/teaching-diversity-to-your-kids/

www.aldenhabacon.com/13-tips-how-to-talk-to-children-about-diversity

RACE & CULTURE

Research shows that young people who actively explore their racial and cultural identity have higher self-esteem and are more likely to do better academically, emotionally and socially over the long term.

This age is a critical period for adults to engage teens in a dialogue about important issues such as race and racism. Parents can help teens develop a healthy view of others and discuss their views about the world. Teens are aware of racial differences and also want to discuss this topic, but often are not engaged in conversations about it.

According to the American Psychological Association: "among people of color, more than 2 in 5 (44%) report discrimination is a significant source of stress in their life, compared with 38% of people of color who said the same in 2019. Looking at races individually, Black Americans are the most likely to report discrimination as a stressor (48% vs. 43% Hispanic, 42% Native American, 41% Asian and 25% white)."

Help your teen explore these racial differences- it may sound intimidating, but it doesn't have to be! These conversations can start by asking about their social group and the settings where they spend the most time. Racial differences within social settings provide students with an incredible opportunity to learn about others. Two students attending the same school, sitting next to each other in the same class probably have entirely different experiences and world views. That conversation can then include who we surround ourselves with and that it is a choice that we make.

Parents of children of color have likely already had conversations about race before their kids become teenagers. Regardless, such conversations should not stop with teenagers, rather become building blocks.

White children may go longer before conversations about race happen at home or at school. Parents of these children can encourage their kids to simply listen and remain curious when interacting with people of different races.

Learn about other cultures! Learn together about people from other places and cultures. Read books, watch movies, listen to music, and learn about celebrations that aren't part of your own traditions. Attend cultural fairs and museums that highlight stories, art, and the history of people who are different from you. An essential part of having respect for people who look different from you and come from a different background than you is founded on taking time to learn!

Once again, teach your kids how to use inclusive language by discouraging and avoiding "labeling". This will require some practice because you likely use labels like race all the time. Use people's names or use the most neutral descriptors possible. Be specific.

Additional information & resources:

www.apa.org/res/parent-resources/
nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race

lptutoring.com/talk-teens-racism/

www.parents.com/kids/responsibility/racism/teaching-diversity-to-your-kids/

Conversation Starters:

"How do you choose who will be your friend?"

"How diverse or segregated do you think the students are
at your school?"

"How diverse is your social group?"

"Do teachers ever talk about race and culture?"

"What can you learn from the experiences of people of a
different race?"



Conversation Starters:

"I hope you know that I may not fully understand, but I support you"

"Do you have any friends who are in the LGBTQ+ community?"

("yes" or "no" is an okay answer, do not push for names)

"Have you ever questioned your sexual identity?"

"Why do you think those who are apart of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to be bullied or are more likely to die

by suicide?"



LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Please do not skip this section if your teen is not a part of the LGBTQ+ community. These conversations are valuable either way. Teaching our children to celebrate differences is an important lesson to learn if you want them to be kind and respectful humans.

General knowledge to know: LGBTQ+ stands for: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and plus. The plus sign expresses inclusivity for additional identities like gender fluid, nonbinary, pansexual, asexual, and agender. Those letters mean something a little different to each person who uses them, but they are important for representation and inclusion. Inclusivity is a core piece of the LGBTQ+ community. And know that you don't have to know everything and explain everything perfectly. It's okay to answer your kid's question with "I'm not sure, let's figure that out together!" And it's okay to Google terms you're not sure how to explain.

It is important to express that just because someone is 'different' or in the LGBTQ+ community while you are not - it does NOT mean anything is wrong with them.. we celebrate differences. There is not a right or wrong way to be, we need to provide unconditional love and support for whoever our child wants and needs to be.

Teens who are questioning their identity need support. They are likely unsure of who to talk to and how to talk about their feelings. They may be subject to bullying or feel shame because they perceive themselves as 'different'. Explicitly supporting your child is crucial if they are to feel safe and protected. Engage and respect by listening, asking questions, and empathizing. If they have 'come out' to you, ask their permission before discussing it with others. It's important that your teen can trust you to honor their privacy. Educate yourself and find local support groups for yourselves and your teen.

When it comes to LGBTQ+ topics, straight adults too often sexualize the topic and jump to the conclusion that these conversations need to involve sex. If your child asks why those two women are getting married, all your response needs to be is... "because they love each other".

According to the Trevor Project School Climate Survey: "86% of LGBTQ+ youth reported being harassed or assaulted at school. High school students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are more than four times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to their heterosexual peers. Transgender adults are nearly 12 times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population. 40% of LGBTQ+ respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months."

You do not need to be an expert on this topic, and it is completely okay if you get overwhelmed. The main goal here is that your child feels like they can be their most authentic self. Because they will have a better chance at success and stability; they will also be more likely to be an ally for someone who is trying to do the same.

If this topic goes against your moral or religious beliefs I strongly suggest checking out these resources:

www.believeoutloud.com/resources/pflag.org/resource/faith-our-families

www.welcomingresources.org/resources.htm#aigf
ok2bme.ca/resources/kids-teens/lgbtq-and-religion/

Additional information & resources:

youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbt

www.thetrevorproject.org/

ok2bme.ca/resources/kids-teens/

parentinfo.org/article/lgbtq-glossary-for-parents

<https://pflag.org/>

MEDIA LITERACY

Parents of teens are competing the most with technology: screen time over family time and information from social media rather than information from you! It is no longer about getting rid of technology but keeping teens from becoming dependent on it. It is important to remember that for today's teens, technology has been a tool for playing, learning, and socializing. Be realistic, be patient, and do what works for you.

The first subject to address is screen time. In a perfect world, less time on a screen is better. A more attainable goal would be for your teen to have an equal balance between screen-time and life experiences-time. Teens need knowledge about the real world by living in the real world (not watching).

Once you accept that your teens will be spending time on devices, you must make sure their media exposure is safe. As stated above, teens need real life knowledge—especially when a majority of the information they take in is through the media. Teens are vulnerable. Media corporations know this and take advantage of them. Mass media has the power (and lack of shame) to manipulate thoughts and normalize behaviors. But all media share the following: someone created it and it was created for a reason. Understanding that reason (the who and why) is the basis of media literacy (*media includes movies, television shows, apps, video games, music, streaming, magazines, and books).

Media literacy is essential for your teen's safety because of what is happening at this stage of development: increased independence, more experimentation, need for social belonging, sexual development, and formation of identity. We must not forget the age of your teen when considering what they witness through the media. The trend of media and marketing corporations encouraging "kids getting older, younger" is so common that this phenomenon is now referred to as age compression.

But how do you prevent the media's negative impact on your teen's independence and confidence? Like everything else in this booklet, it comes down to safety!

Ads, games, and apps are addictive because they are designed to affect the same parts of the brain that addictive drugs do. Multiple studies connect gaming and the internet to dopamine production and levels of cortisol. No parents want their children being exposed to drugs without knowing of the risks...this is no different. Help our teens stay safe!

Parents should model media literacy skills. Together, you can research and evaluate the apps, games, and websites that your teen and you use. Analyze media messages, question the intent of the messages, and judge how the information in the messages is used. We are responsible for teaching teens to trust facts more than "hype." You want your kids to trust you more than they trust the media!

The goal is to give your teenager space to name what they're feeling and experiencing. This will lead to empowered and thoughtful behaviors— including the use of devices. Trust your judgment if there's something you know you need to intervene in. Boundaries and safety are important, and there are times you do need to step in.

"For Seattle-based psychotherapist Dr. George Lynn, 80 percent of his patients' issues stem from too much gaming, watching too many online videos, or excessively using social media. As a result, Dr. Lynn is witnessing "a personality syndrome that comes from basically unbridled, uncontrolled use of recreational use of screen media during the day and at night."

Additional information & resources:

aliciafarrellphd.com/parenting/

nhahealth.com/screen-dependency-disorder-the-effects-of-screen-time-addiction/

Conversation Starters:

"Do you think that social media changes how you meet people
in real life?"

"Have any of your friends ever posted something that you
don't think they should have?"

"Are you the same person online and in person?" "Am I the
same person online as I am in person?"

"How many apps do you have on your phone?"

"Do you think there's things about the media that parents of
teenagers don't understand?"



RESOURCES BY TOPICS

ADDICTION

portal.ct.gov/dmhas
www.drugabuse.gov
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/addiction/
drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early/
www.samhsa.gov/

MENTAL HEALTH

youth.ellington-ct.gov
uwc.211ct.org/categorysearch/mental-health/
portal.ct.gov/dmhas
instituteofliving.org/programs-services/child-adolescent-services
www.nami.org/home
www.samhsa.gov
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/mental-health/
www.preventsuicidect.org/
youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health

VAPING

www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/vaping/
portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Prevention-Unit/Prevention-Unit/TPEP--Home-Page
www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/tobacconicotine-vaping
drugfree.org/drugs/e-cigarettes-vaping/

OPIOIDS & DRUGS

www.drugfreect.org/prevention/change-the-script-campaign/
liveloud.org/
connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/library/article.aspx?hwid=tp17749#tp17750
youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse
www.drugabuse.gov
www.samhsa.gov/find-help/atod
www.hhs.gov/opioids/prevention/index.html

CANNABIS

www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/letter-director
www.cdc.gov/marijuana/index.htm
[store.samhsa.gov/?v=substances&f\[0\]=substances:5444](https://store.samhsa.gov/?v=substances&f[0]=substances:5444)
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/marijuana/

ALCOHOL

connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/library/article.aspx?hwid=tp17749#tp17750
www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/underage-drinking/
portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Prevention-Unit/Prevention-Files/Underage-Drinking
www.niaaa.nih.gov/
drugfree.org/drugs/alcohol/
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

thatsnotcool.com/
youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence
www.teendvmouth.org/
www.cdc.gov/injury/features/dating-violence/

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

youth.gov/youth-topics/disabilities
www.parents.com/kids/responsibility/racism/teaching-diversity-to-your-kids/
www.aldenhabacon.com/13-tips-how-to-talk-to-children-about-diversity

RACE & CULTURE

www.apa.org/res/parent-resources/
nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race
lptutoring.com/talk-teens-racism/
www.parents.com/kids/responsibility/racism/teaching-diversity-to-your-kids/

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbt
www.thetrevorproject.org/
ok2bme.ca/resources/kids-teens/what-does-lgbtq-mean/
parentinfo.org/article/lgbtq-glossary-for-parents
pflag.org/

If this topic goes against your moral or religious beliefs I strongly suggest checking out these resources:

www.believeoutloud.com/resources/
pflag.org/resource/faith-our-families
www.welcomingresources.org/resources.htm#aigf
ok2bme.ca/resources/kids-teens/lgbtq-and-religion/

MEDIA LITERACY

aliciafarrellphd.com/parenting/
nhahealth.com/screen-dependency-disorder-the-effects-of-screen-time-addiction/

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CLOSING LETTER

The idea of this discussion guide started when EYS staff including myself were approached by parents with the question, “How do I talk to my teen about...” As the prevention coordinator I saw a perfect opportunity to create this guide.

I am not an expert on these topics. I am trained and passionate about some, but I did not want to overload parents with information or expect for them to become experts! That is why there is ‘additional information and resources’ at the end of each section.

- I had many goals when writing this including to help parents understand: the importance of:
- » TAKING THE TIME to discuss these topics at home,
 - » How the adolescent brain works and why teens may show risky decision making,
 - » Having a general knowledge about all 11 topics,
 - » The connection that they have with their teen,
 - » How they express themselves while communicating,
 - » The behaviors and expectations they model,
 - » Taking care of their own and their teen’s mental health is...*we can not tackle any of these topics without first taking care of our brain.*

And with these topics comes a lot of vulnerability or discomfort for the parent AND the teens. I want parents to create a “safe” space at home to relieve some of the uncomfortable feelings. When I say “safe,” I am referring to the experience, the space, the people, etc. that allow a child to live through messy emotions and difficult situations.

When it comes to prevention, I do not love the idea of instilling fear into your teen. After studying the adolescent brain, there are many reasons why that logic does not work.

Yes, parents should be firm with their expectations at home with things like underage drinking, drug use, etc. but I imagine for parents to also create an environment (and relationship) where their teen feels safe to go to them if they have made a mistake, have difficult choices to make, and are struggling.

My wish is for parent readers to have gained some information from this that can be used to strengthen their relationship with their teen children.

Now, take a deep breath. I appreciate you taking the time to read this guide. Remember that we are all humans and can feel overwhelmed...you do not have to be in this alone. Creating a support system and reaching out for help are always options.

Growing up & going out into the world is a wild ride. Finding your own path is exhilarating. It is truly amazing to watch kids go explore, learn, and grow! This journey must start from a home where they feel seen, valued, accepted, not judged, and loved.

I appreciate you, and always remember you are not alone.

Kayla Condron
Prevention Coordinator
The Town of Ellington Youth Services

