



RAISING HEALTHY TEENS

PARENT RESOURCE GUIDE



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RAISING HEALTHY TEENS

Introduction: Raising Healthy Teens



Raising Healthy Teens is a public health initiative sponsored by Providence Mission Hospital. Our purpose is to help parents raise healthy teens in South Orange County so they reach their full potential by not letting drugs, alcohol, and mental health concerns get in the way of their education or future success. We offer ways that parents and families can help teens do well in school, resist risky activities such as drinking and using drugs, and achieve sound mental health.

Raising Healthy Teens supports the belief that parents are the strongest influence in a young person's life and that positive encouragement and interactions with adults have the greatest impact on healthy youth development. The campaign empowers parents and adults to have conversations with young people about substance use—and encourages them to continue to have these conversations as they grow up. Research shows that children whose parents have open and honest conversations with them about the risks of alcohol and drugs are much less likely to use them.



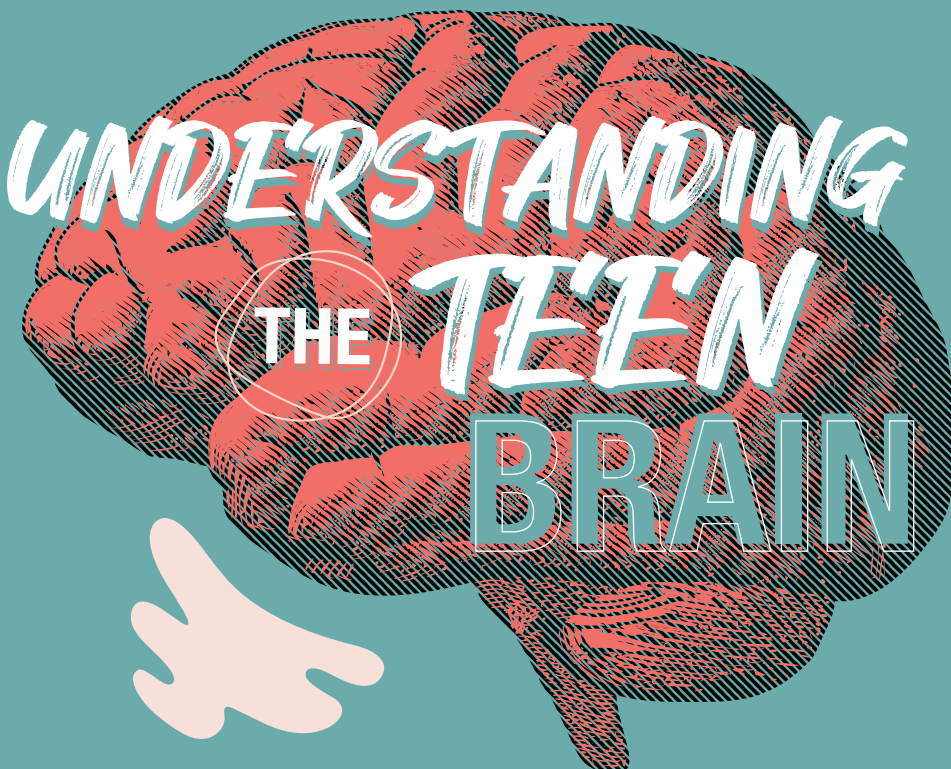
Helping You Help Your Teen



So, how can we best support you in supporting your teen? You might not have had time to brush up on what scientists now know about the impact of alcohol, marijuana, e-cigarettes, and prescription drugs on the teen brain—or how the pressure to be the best at everything has on teen mental health—but we have. In this Parent Resource Guide, we've collected the most important facts and tips we know so you can have the most up-to-date information.

Here's some more good news: We don't have to wonder about the things that increase or decrease the likelihood of teens using drugs and alcohol. Researchers have studied this exact question. Here's what they found: Teens need encouraging adults, responsible friends, and a feeling of connectedness. They need opportunities outside of school to learn and develop new skills and interests (like music, sports, theater, youth groups, and volunteering). They need to feel valued by and valuable to the people around them. The teens who have a passion, a sense of purpose, and perseverance are more likely to be resilient in the face of challenges and to make healthier choices.





UNDERSTANDING THE TEEN BRAIN

Raising teens can be challenging. Sometimes you might wonder why they do things or make decisions that don't make sense. It's because the rational part of the teen brain is still maturing. In fact, their brains aren't fully developed until age 25. Teens think with the emotional part of their brains and often act impulsively, even when they are smart and doing well in school.



The front part of the brain, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last brain regions to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning and controlling impulses. Because these skills are still developing, teens are more likely to engage in risky behaviors without considering the potential results of their decisions. Although adolescence is a vulnerable time for the brain and for teenagers in general, most teens go on to become healthy adults.

As nerve-racking as it is for parents of teens to deal with their unpredictable behavior, it should be comforting to know that so much of what's happening with your teenager is normal and a necessary part of their development as they move into adulthood.

Know the Facts:

Alcohol

The legal age to drink alcohol in California is 21. This is based on the fact that a young person's brain is undergoing rapid growth and changes well into adulthood. Using alcohol during this developmental period can actually rewire the brain for addiction. Research shows that when teens start drinking alcohol at a young age, they are more likely to continue the habit into adulthood. In fact, teens who begin drinking before age 15 are six times more likely to develop a problem with alcohol later in life than those who begin drinking after age 21.

There are many reasons why teens drink, including the social pressure to fit in, the idea that most of their friends are drinking, or because they simply don't realize how harmful it can be to their developing brain and body.

Q&A

Why is the drinking age 21?

The age limit for alcohol is based on research showing that young people react differently to alcohol; their bodies respond twice as quickly as adults, and they have a hard time knowing when to stop.

What's the big deal?

Alcohol impairs teens' judgment and lowers their inhibitions. They do things they otherwise might not do and are more likely to get into dangerous situations such as driving under the influence or riding with an impaired driver. Underage drinking can also affect social development, especially if teens rely on alcohol as a means of coping.

Studies show that young people who use alcohol may have difficulty making lasting friendships.

Can parents teach their teens how to drink responsibly by giving them small amounts?

There's no evidence that this approach actually works. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. When teens feel they have their parents' approval to drink, they tend to drink more often and in larger amounts.

When parents have concrete, enforced rules about alcohol, young people drink less.





Health Risks of Alcohol



Alcohol disrupts sleep. Alcohol can interfere with sleep patterns by reducing time spent in deep, restful sleep.



Alcohol is a diuretic causing the body to lose important vitamins and minerals required for athletic performance.



Alcohol disrupts the muscle-building process as alcohol is metabolized first, pushing aside other nutrients needed for muscle recovery.



Alcohol spikes the production of cortisol, the body's stress hormone, which impairs thinking, raises blood pressure, decreases bone density and muscle tissue, and increases abdominal fat.

Know the Facts:

Marijuana

Because a young person's brain is still developing until their mid-20s, using marijuana during this time can permanently damage the structure of their brain, specifically the areas dealing with memory and problem solving. Regular marijuana use by teens can lead to an IQ drop of up to eight points. Students who use marijuana regularly (defined as once a week or more) tend to get lower grades and are more likely to drop out of high school.

There are physical and mental health consequences for young people who use marijuana under the age of 24, while the brain is completing important development. Using marijuana during this time can actually rewire the brain for addiction as it interferes with the brain's reward center. Early marijuana use increases the risk of becoming dependent on other substances.

Q&A

How strong is today's marijuana?

Today's marijuana is almost 300% stronger than it was in the 1980s and can contain around 18% THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) – the main psychoactive ingredient. This high level of THC poses a greater risk for young people and has been linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.

It has also led to an increase in emergency room visits for increased heart rate, psychosis, vomiting, and panic attacks.

How does marijuana impact driving ability?

Marijuana reduces the ability to do things that require concentration, quick reactions, and coordination. These skills are impaired for at least four to six hours after using marijuana, long after the "high" is gone. The effects are made worse when combined with alcohol.

In Colorado, marijuana-related driving deaths increased more than 66% after the state legalized marijuana in 2013.



Health Risks of Marijuana



The risk of a heart attack is several times higher after using marijuana, which increases blood pressure and causes the heart to beat about 50% faster.



Using marijuana reduces oxygen in the blood, forcing the body to work harder to perform normal functions.



Marijuana use affects hormones in boys and girls and interferes with testosterone production.

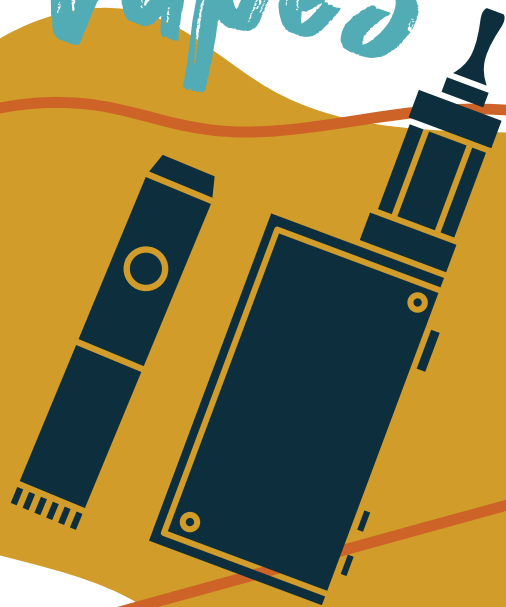


Young people may think that marijuana helps with anxiety. The chemicals found in marijuana mimic one of the brain's neurotransmitters, which makes the user feel good, yet it reduces the amount the body makes on its own. Once dependent on THC, they will feel good when they are using it, but they may feel anxious and depressed without it.



Marijuana smoke contains many of the same toxins and carcinogens as tobacco smoke and causes the same respiratory illnesses. It deposits four times as much tar in the lungs as tobacco because it is unfiltered and inhaled more deeply.

Know the Facts: E-Cigarettes & Vapes



Because a young person's brain is still developing until about age 25, it is easier for them to become addicted to nicotine, a dangerous substance found in tobacco products and e-cigarettes. Nicotine is absorbed quickly into the body and goes directly to the brain and activates areas of the brain that make one feel satisfied and happy. Both smoking and vaping nicotine put teens at risk for becoming lifelong smokers. Using nicotine during the teen years can rewire the brain to become more easily addicted to other drugs. It can also have long-lasting effects on brain development, making it harder for teens to concentrate, learn, and control their impulses.

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, vape pens, or e-cigs, are devices that heat liquid into an aerosol that is inhaled. This e-liquid often contains nicotine along with many other harmful ingredients. Vapes may look like pens, USB drives, or highlighters and may be used for highly concentrated marijuana and other drugs.

Q&A

What's in them?

E-cigarettes may contain more than 2,000 chemicals, including propylene glycol, found in antifreeze; diacetyl, a chemical linked to lung disease; benzene, found in car exhaust; and heavy metal particles, such as lead. These chemicals are particularly harmful when they are heated and inhaled directly into the lungs, bypassing the body's filtration system.

Why are they marketing to young people?

Vapes come in flavors that appeal to kids because the younger they use them, the more likely they will become customers for life. Teens are more sensitive to nicotine and can feel dependent earlier than adults. About three out of four adolescents who try tobacco products will end up addicted to nicotine as adults.

What are the signs that someone is using an e-cigarette?

Flavored e-cigarettes may give off a sweet smell of fruit, mint, or bubble gum. The chemicals found in them may result in a dry mouth, cough, and even nose bleeds. Being virtually odorless and smokefree, they can be hard to detect. Finding chargers or empty e-liquid containers may also indicate that a family member is using them.



The Dangers of Second and Thirdhand Smoke



Secondhand smoke from vapes contains nicotine, volatile organic compounds, and other harmful chemicals which can cause cancer, asthma, and heart disease.



Thirdhand smoke is the residue left behind on surfaces and in the air contaminating everyone that comes into contact with it – and is especially dangerous for young children and animals.



Know the Facts:

Prescription Drugs



Using powerful medications during the teen years can interfere with important brain development and may rewire the brain for addiction. Not only are teens at greater risk of becoming addicted to prescription medications, but misuse or abuse of prescription drugs also increases the risk of using and becoming dependent on other addictive substances.

Boys and girls tend to misuse prescription drugs for different reasons. Boys are more likely to take stimulants to get high, while girls try to make up for lack of sleep or to lose weight. Some young people may take prescription drugs to self-medicate when symptoms of depression or anxiety have gone untreated.

Q&A

What is prescription drug misuse and abuse?

Prescription drug misuse is taking medication without following the medical instructions or without a prescription. Examples include taking a higher dosage than prescribed, mixing with alcohol or other drugs, or using medication intended for a specific purpose (e.g., nausea) for something else (e.g., to alleviate a headache). Prescription drug abuse happens when medications are not only used inappropriately, but for the sole purpose of experiencing the feelings associated with the drug, such as euphoria or relaxation.

Why do teens misuse and abuse prescription drugs?

Teens use prescription drugs for a number of reasons, such as pain relief from an injury, to deal with the pressures of life, because they like the way it makes them feel, or because they think it will help them with schoolwork. In fact, one in four teenagers believe that prescription drugs can be used as a study aid.



Effects of Commonly Abused Prescription Medications

1/5

OPIOIDS – Vicodin, OxyContin, or codeine are prescribed to relieve pain and can cause drowsiness, nausea, and constipation. In 2016, one in five deaths among young people were related to opioids.



DEPRESSANTS – Valium or Xanax are prescribed to relieve anxiety or help with sleep. They can cause slurred speech, fatigue, low blood pressure, disorientation, lack of coordination, and seizures.



STIMULANTS – Adderall and Ritalin are prescribed for treating attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They have side effects in common with cocaine use, such as paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures, and an irregular heartbeat. High doses can cause heart failure and seizures.

TALKING TO YOUR TEEN

Helping You Help Your Teen

If you talk to your teen directly and honestly, they are more likely to respect your rules and advice about alcohol and drug use. When parents talk with their children early and often about healthy behaviors, they can protect them from many high-risk behaviors including alcohol and drug use.

Teens look to their parents for acknowledgement, support, and understanding. A teen needs their parents to believe in them and support their interests so they don't use alcohol and other drugs while their brains are still developing.

Talking with your teen about drugs and alcohol can be hard, but these are some of the most important conversations to have. The following tips can help set the stage for an effective conversation with your child. Kids who learn about the dangers of drug and alcohol use early and often are much less likely to misuse them than those who do not receive these important messages at home.



TALKING TO YOUR **TEEN**:

ALCOHOL



OTHER

DRUGS

Be Patient and Ready to Listen

Be prepared to do more listening than talking – it should feel like a conversation, not a lecture. It will be helpful if you can keep an open mind and show your genuine concern and interest. Ask open-ended questions rather than just “yes” and “no” questions. It’s okay for your conversations to take place over time.

Start the Conversation Naturally

Teens will likely be more receptive to a relaxed approach as opposed to anything that feels like a formal “sit down” meeting. Rather than saying, “We need to talk,” you might ask your teen what he or she is encountering with their friends. **LET YOUR TEEN KNOW THEY’RE BEING HEARD.**

Talk Openly About Your Family History

If there is a history of addiction in your family, then your child has a greater risk of developing a problem. Discuss this risk with your child as you would with any other illness.

Be Positive

Be attentive, curious, respectful, and understanding. If you approach the situation with shame, anger, or scare tactics, your conversation may not be very productive. For example, let your teen know that you are on their side and that you are here to support them.

Set Clear Expectations

Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules – and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken. Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use alcohol and drugs.

If Your Child Is Interested in Drinking or Using Drugs, Ask “Why”

And ask what might happen if they do. This gets your teen to think about their future – and some of the possible negative consequences of drinking or using drugs. For example, they may be late to practice or do something stupid in front of their friends. If you suspect that your child has been drinking, share your concerns without sounding accusatory. For example, “I have noticed your grades are dropping, and that you are hanging out with a new crowd.” Focus on concerning behavior and why it worries you.

Teach Them How to Say “No”

Kids who don’t know what to say when someone offers them alcohol or other drugs are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Help them be prepared by role-playing different scenarios they might encounter. Let them know that they can always use you as an excuse. For example, “No, my parents signed me up for the drug-testing program at school.”

Offer Empathy, Compassion, and Support

Let your child know you understand teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but that alcohol and drugs are not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems. Let your child know that they can come to you for support and guidance. Model healthy ways of coping with stress such as exercising, eating well, and getting enough sleep.

Give Them the Facts

Don’t just leave your child’s anti-drug education up to their school. Educate yourself so you can share the most up-to-date information with your teen. Let them know how important it is to protect their brains during these years of growth and development.

Answer Their Questions: Alcohol



“UNDERAGE DRINKING IS NOT A BIG DEAL. THERE’S NO REASON TO WORRY.”

The age limit for alcohol is based on research that shows that young people react differently to alcohol. Teens get drunk twice as quickly as adults, and they have more trouble knowing when to stop. Drinking even a small amount can cloud your judgment and may cause you to put yourself in a risky situation where you or someone else gets hurt.

I don’t want this for you.

“I ONLY DRINK ONCE IN A WHILE. WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?”

Thank you for your honesty. I appreciate that you can be open with me about this. Right now, your brain is in the middle of a really important growth phase. Drinking during this time can actually interfere with this process and make you more prone to addiction. In fact, research shows that taking your first drink in your early teens puts you at a much greater risk of developing a serious problem with alcohol or other drugs later in life.

“I KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO DRINK AND THEY SEEM TO BE FINE.”

I am hoping you will make your own choice and I am here to help you with that. According to schoolwide data, most teens in South Orange County don’t drink or use drugs. It’s a good thing because alcohol can cause permanent damage to your brain, particularly as it relates to memory, motor skills, and coordination. It is a leading factor in sexual assaults. And it is a factor in the three leading causes of teen deaths, which are car accidents, homicide, and suicide. I am not saying this to scare you. I want you to have the facts about alcohol’s effects.

“DID YOU DRINK/SMOKE WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?”

When I was young, we didn’t know nearly as much about the risks involved. We now have more research showing how harmful it is to drink and smoke during the teen years when your brain is still developing.

Answer Their Questions: *Marijuana*



“MARIJUANA IS LEGAL NOW IN CALIFORNIA, SO IT’S OKAY FOR ME TO TRY IT.”

It’s still not legal for anyone under 21. This age limit is meant to protect adolescents from its harmful effects. Your brain is completing some very important development and using marijuana at this time can interfere with this development, specifically the areas dealing with memory and problem solving. Today’s marijuana is almost 300% stronger than it was when I was growing up. This is a real concern for me.

“MARIJUANA IS A NATURAL PLANT. THAT MEANS IT’S OKAY.”

Just because it is “natural” does not mean it’s safe. Because it is still federally illegal, there are few regulations ensuring that it meets safety guidelines. The strength and potency of marijuana varies, and it often contains a large amount of pesticides, fungus, and even lead. Now that it has become “big business” funded by large tobacco companies, there is not much that is “natural” about it.

“IT HELPS WITH MY ANXIETY.”

I am sorry you are feeling anxious; I know that’s a difficult feeling. While marijuana may make you feel relaxed while you are using it, it can actually make you feel worse in the long run. A chemical in marijuana, THC, mimics one of the brain’s neurotransmitters that makes you feel good – reducing the amount your body makes on its own. Once you’ve become dependent on THC, you’ll feel good when you’re using it, but you won’t have enough of your own chemical messengers to feel good when you are not using it. Can we think of some other ways to help you relax?

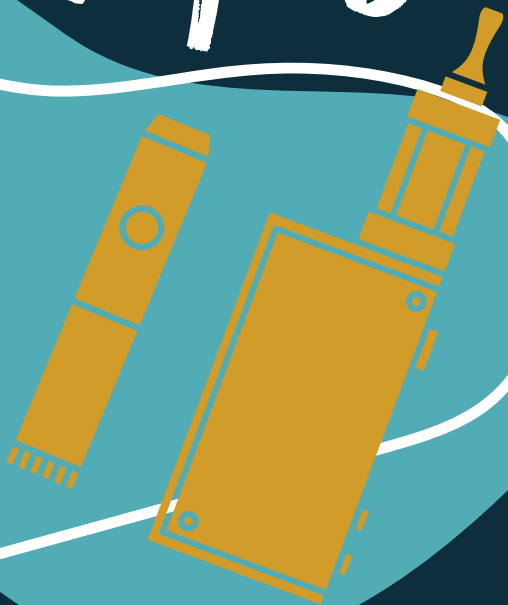
“WOULD YOU RATHER I DRINK ALCOHOL? MARIJUANA SEEMS SAFER.”

Honestly, I don’t want you doing anything that can harm you. I’m interested in knowing why you think marijuana is safer than alcohol. There’s a lot of misinformation out there about marijuana and it’s important to understand that marijuana is as dangerous as alcohol on the developing brain. Teens who begin using marijuana often have difficulty with emotions, lose motivation for school, and jeopardize lifelong friendships. Right now, neither option seems like a healthy choice.

“DID YOU SMOKE MARIJUANA WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?”

I did not know a lot about the impact of drugs and alcohol on the developing brain when I was your age. I may have made some choices that I am hoping you won’t repeat. I’m hoping that we can have an open conversation and learn about it together.

Answer Their Questions: *E-Cigarettes* & Vapes



“WHY DON’T YOU WANT ME TO USE E-CIGARETTES?”

E-cigs might seem like a safer way to smoke, but they’re not. A lot of people think that they contain mostly flavored water and are harmless. But, in fact, the heated vapor contains all sorts of harmful chemicals that are inhaled directly into the lungs. Even breathing secondhand e-cigarette vapor is dangerous. I’m glad we’re talking about this because it’s a concerning trend, and I want you to have the facts.

“I THOUGHT E-CIGARETTES DIDN’T HAVE NICOTINE – JUST WATER AND FLAVORING?”

I used to think that too. But many e-cigs have large amounts of nicotine – even if the packaging says otherwise. While vaping produces no actual smoke, the poisonous vapor has been found to contain more than 2,000 ingredients – including propylene glycol, formaldehyde, arsenic, and cadmium. These are chemicals that can cause cancer and damage your lungs.

“WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?”

Your brain is still growing and changing, and it will be until you’re around 25. Smoking before then hurts your brain’s development and increases your chance of becoming addicted. Using nicotine at your age may make it harder for you to concentrate, learn, or control your impulses. I want you to know these things because nothing is more important to me than your health and safety.

“AREN’T E-CIGARETTES SAFER THAN CONVENTIONAL CIGARETTES?”

Because your brain is still developing, studies show that it isn’t safe for you to use any product that contains nicotine, including e-cigarettes. Whether you get nicotine from an e-cigarette or a cigarette, it’s still highly addictive and not good for you.

Answer Their Questions: Prescription Drugs



“I DON’T KNOW WHY WE’RE EVEN HAVING THIS TALK.”

This may not be a temptation for you now, but you may encounter someone offering you something that is harmful for your body down the road. If and when that happens, I want you to feel well equipped with the facts – for yourself or if you ever need to help a friend.

“WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?”

As a teen, your brain is enormously flexible, learns rapidly, and contains more neurons than an adult brain. That’s why the teen brain can more quickly become addicted to medication or other drugs.

“YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND. I AM UNDER A LOT OF STRESS RIGHT NOW.”

I hear you are feeling very overwhelmed, but I don’t want you making choices that can hurt you. I want you to be able to cope with life’s ups and downs in a healthy way. If you are under a lot of stress, then let’s brainstorm some ideas on how to reduce your stress. If you think it would be helpful, we can speak with a professional for more guidance.

“EVERYONE DOES IT. IT HELPS WITH MY ANXIETY.”

These drugs are very addictive because they produce a flood of dopamine - the brain’s “feel-good” messenger. When someone uses drugs to artificially raise their dopamine levels, it damages the brain’s ability to produce it naturally, and it becomes much harder to feel good without the drug. This is one of the things that makes it very hard to stop using drugs. That’s why it’s important that these types of drugs be taken under a doctor’s care, so that they can properly diagnose and prescribe the correct dosage.

“KIDS AT SCHOOL ARE USING ADDERALL TO GET BETTER GRADES.”

I am proud of your hard work and that you earned your grades without relying on stimulants. I understand that there is a lot of pressure to do well. But using a drug to do better on tests (or sports) is cheating and research has shown it is actually tied to getting lower grades. And there are some serious side effects of misusing stimulants. How about we explore other relaxation and time management skills to help you?

THE PRESSURE TO BE **PERFECT**

How Pressure to Be Perfect Affects a Teen's Mental Health



Teens who live in a place like Orange County can feel the pressure to be perfect in many aspects of their lives. There's academic pressure to get the best grades, social pressure to look a certain way, and performance pressure to be the best athlete. Sometimes our children put this extreme pressure on themselves. Other times, the pressure comes from multiple directions— school, home, friends, and social media.

As parents, we might want to dismiss or diminish the intense feelings our teen has about being perfect. But for them, the pressure is very real and needs to be taken very seriously. A teen's mental and emotional health is as important as their physical health.

Perfectionism—the perceived need to be perfect—can contribute to depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug use, and other behavioral health concerns. In short, perfectionism can be harmful to our children's well-being. Social media's portrayal of perfect online lives can add to these feelings. Teens who struggle with perfectionism often turn to alcohol and other drugs as a way to self-medicate. When youth use drugs and alcohol to numb their pain, they miss out on learning healthier ways to work through their mental health challenges.



How Parents Can Help

Parents are the strongest influence in a child's life. It's important to let your teen know you understand these pressures and actively listen to them when they voice what they are going through. It's important to make sure they understand the difference between striving for excellence, which is a healthy goal, and trying to achieve perfection, which is impossible.

Many parents find it helpful to have a family discussion about values and expectations. What's in the best interest of your child's emotional well-being? Is there too much pressure—either from you or your teen—to earn good grades? How do compassion, self-motivation, effort, hard work, and success fit together in a healthy way for your teen and your family?

Providing stability and support to our children by encouraging honest dialogue will help them build resiliency and lifelong coping skills so they won't need to lean on substances or risky behaviors when times get tough.



Resources

Wellness & Prevention Center

949-680-0516 | wpc-oc.org

The Wellness & Prevention Center provides individual, family, and group mental health services in South Orange County. They specialize in serving youth ages 12-25 at easy-to-access locations in schools and in the community. They offer services regardless of ability to pay or insurance coverage.

OC Links

2-1-1 | 211oc.org

By dialing 2-1-1, you will be connected to a live Information and referral specialist who will match you to resources in your community based on your needs. Assistance is confidential and offered in over 170 languages.

Partnership to End Addiction – Helpline for Parents

855-378-4373 | drugfree.org

Call for free confidential conversations with trained counselors for support and guidance on preventing substance use and managing recovery from addiction in English or Spanish. Helpline also offers parent coaching from trained volunteers with lived experience.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Helpline

800-662-4357 | samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

24-hour help including free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English and Spanish.

Center for Parent and Teen Communication

parentandteen.com/seek-professional-help

Information to strengthen family relationships and build youth with character strengths that prepare them for healthy, successful, and meaningful lives. Includes a Self-Care Plan for parents and a Stress Management Plan for teens.



For a full list of local resources
and additional tips:



WEBSITE
RaisingHealthyTeens.org



FACEBOOK
[@RaisingHealthyTeensOC](https://www.facebook.com/RaisingHealthyTeensOC)



INSTAGRAM
[@RaisingHealthyTeens_OC](https://www.instagram.com/RaisingHealthyTeens_OC)

 **Providence**
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