

Safe kids Healthy kids Happy kids

Why Teens Make Bad Choices

Teens know right from wrong. If asked, most teens will give you correct answers to lessons they have learned. But often, when teens are stressed and emotional, bad choices just happen.



Why do teens:

- Drive too fast,
- Hurt others,
- Bully their peers,
- Cheat,
- Steal,
- Drink alcohol,
- Ride with drivers who have been drinking,
- Take drugs, and
- Engage in risky sexual behavior?

Studies show that a teen's brain is still maturing well into their mid 20s. The section of their brain that regulates behavior and impulse control is not fully mature. They lack the self-control that comes with adulthood.

Teens, 16 to 17 years of age, are:

- Impulsive,
- Aggressive,
- Emotional, with highs and lows, and
- Sensitive to peer pressure.

Teens are risk-takers. They are less likely to think about other courses of action or long-term results of their actions. Also, teens take greater risks when their friends are watching.

Peer pressure is often the driving force behind many bad choices. Even though they know the choice is bad, they decide to "go with the crowd" rather than to do what is right.

Studies inform parents that around age 16, teens have a tendency towards violence. However, most gain self-control as they reach adulthood.

Also, teens may have trouble reading facial expressions. They may misinterpret emotions on faces. For example, they may think a person is angry instead of scared.

What does this information mean for parents? *It is not enough to just give teens information. Parents must help teens make wise decisions.*

Help your teen choose good friends. If your teen "follows the crowd," make sure the crowd makes good choices.

Limit unsupervised group activity. Allow kids and friends to gather in your home when you are present. Make sure parents are present when your teen visits a friend's home.

Pay extra attention when teens' emotions are "running high." Homecoming, prom and graduation make teens vulnerable to risky behaviors and bad choices.

Place limits on driving. Studies show that 54% of teen car crashes occur on weekends. Seventy-two percent were between 3 p.m. and midnight.

Supervise your teens. Know with whom and where they are going.

Seek help for your teen if she displays violent behavior. Counseling provides positive coping and behavior skills.

Brought to you by Parent Help Line and St. John's Children's Hospital



Call the Parent Help Line. Help is just a phone call away.
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week
www.parenthelpline.org

