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Help for Troubled Teens



Beyond Normal Adolescent Rebellion:

Help For Teens In San Diego

By Kathryn Rudlin, LCSW

Are you the parent of a teenager that is doing poorly in school, threatening to run away, or has become increasingly defiant? Perhaps your teen is anxious all the time, rarely comes out of their room, or refuses to talk to you.

Teens are notorious for challenging parents, but perhaps the biggest challenge of all is knowing when your teenager is struggling to deal with difficult adolescent issues; struggles he or she can't manage alone. The teen years are a time of dramatic changes; many experience difficulty, but an important part of parenting this age group is figuring out when your teen is in real trouble.

Fortunately, San Diego offers a vast array of therapists and programs committed to helping teens, and their families. If your teen is exhibiting behaviors you are concerned about it may be time to get expert advice from a professional who truly knows teens.

Therapy for Teens

Nicole Kahn, MFT, is a therapist in private practice who enjoys working with at-risk teens because she recognizes how "isolating and confusing adolescence can be."

Based on her experience she believes parents need to be concerned about any significant or sudden changes in a teens' behavior, which she describes as, "not showing up like them self, including a drop in grades, obvious changes in friends or suddenly becoming more isolated or irritable." She readily acknowledges that changes in mood or behavior are common in teens and that it's "the extremes" parents need to watch for and be concerned about."

As a therapist she suggests parents try to give teens plenty of space while continuing to engage with them as often as possible. "Keep the lines of communication with your teen open, respect their boundaries," she advises. She acknowledges this can be difficult and is different in each parent-teen relationship.

I asked Nicole to discuss how parents can know when it's time to consult a therapist for help with their teen. She believes supporting teens starts at home and suggests asking other family members for help in talking to a teen having difficulties. Often parents are not equipped to handle teen problems on their own and "a third person is needed to help diffuse the situation and get to the root of what is going on for the teen."

Nicole has a warm and engaging style, she explained her approach to working with teens as follows: "I enjoy supporting and encouraging teens to make sense of this time in their life. It's often important to identify what their behavior is trying to express and if there's a better way to do so." She involves parents in her work with teens, while being careful to keep her communications with the teen confidential.

In considering the final message Nicole wanted to share with parents she said, "Changes in behavior should set off an alarm for parents. It's easy for parents to feel angry and want to be tougher on their teen." "Instead," she suggests, it's more helpful to get curious, to wonder what your teen is trying to say through their behavior."

Programs for Teens

Pamela Hansen, LCSW, talks enthusiastically about providing help to teens at the program where she's worked for over 9 years, San Diego Center for Children. She echoes the wisdom that "drastic changes in behavior in teens, anything unusual or out of the ordinary" is important for parents to pay attention to.

Pamela suggests trying to talk directly to a teen about your concerns, choosing a time they are receptive to doing so. Another option is to get an objective opinion from an adult who knows your teen well. If a parent isn't sure how concerned to be about their teen consider talking to an adolescent therapist, in order to get their expert perspective and help in identifying what steps to take.

"It's hard not to take things your teen does or says personally and react out of upset or anger," she points out. "Consider talking to a school counselor, church pastor, or getting referrals from your insurance company or health care provider."

At the Center, one approach to helping teens is to constantly reinforce their positive behavior, rather than focusing on the negative, which can become a habit when teens are making bad choices,



behaving poorly or getting into trouble. A full range of programs is offered by the Center to include 5 day-treatment programs across the county, 3 residential facilities and exciting, and innovative therapeutic programs in music and recreation.

When I asked about the residential programs Pam explained that sometimes getting distance from family and peers helps teens' to evaluate themselves and the changes they need to make. "Often this can help the family communicate better and re-negotiate their relationship." Continuing to share her perspective on taking care of teens she added, "when in doubt seek professional help. Parents tend to under react because they feel uncomfortable or because of the stigma that is sometimes associated with mental health issues. It's important to put your ego aside and, do what's best for your teen."

Music Therapy for Teens

Davida Price, IMF, MT-BC is a music therapist and psychotherapist who combined her passion and skills and came up with an unusual approach to helping teens, a method she refers to as "rock and roll therapy." Through her program, Bliss Music Therapy, she draws on the healing aspects of music and the interest most teens' have in rock and roll.

Listening to and playing music provides a path to "exploring your inner emotions" she explains. "I've developed this approach from working with teens in psychiatric hospitals and seeing the positive ways they respond. Teens identify deeply with music and can be very expressive through songs and musical instruments."

I was intrigued by this approach and asked Davida to describe how she actually works with teens through the medium of music. "During adolescence, teens are usually very expressive through music, it defines who they are and who they hang out with – it's a type of language for them. In therapy it can be used as a tool to get inside their personality and explore their interests, it can be a very emotional process."

From years of experience as a musician, as well as teaching music to others, Davida has seen for herself what research has proven; that music affects every part of the brain, strongly influencing our emotions. Through the use of music therapy she is able to help teens explore who they are and make positive changes.

Davida described in more detail how this process of encouraging teens to write song lyrics and create music works. "There are several ways to help teens use language that then unfolds into music. For example, it can be used as a device to feel better; I often help teens develop a 'theme song'. A song that puts into words who they are and what they like about themselves. Then they can listen to the song anytime they feel sad or need a self-esteem boost."

She continued by describing other ways music therapy can help a teen cope. "Perhaps a teen is angry about a situation. He could write a song, add music to the lyrics and then he could rip it into shreds as a way to express his anger or as a way to let go of some of that anger." Davida offers individual music therapy to teens as well as groups that use music to explore difficult emotions such as anxiety, depression and anger.

~It takes courage to acknowledge when your teen is having problems. Fortunately you are not alone – in San Diego there are many passionate, qualified professionals close by and ready to help.

Investor's Corner

*By Melissa Day and Linda Pasas,
Realtors and Real Estate Investors*

Women are known for being great at multi-tasking. You juggle many balls in the air without missing a beat. But if you take on too many balls, it can become exhausting – and the thought of slowing down is something you hesitate to consider. So, how can you tackle everything on your "To Do" list and still have time and energy to focus on your real estate investments? Chances are, you decide to work with an "expert" in the field and have to rely completely on their knowledge. That means you have to trust that expert completely – unless you have tools and skills of your own to create checks and balances. The key is... you have to find the time to do this in addition to your numerous other tasks!

We highly recommend learning just enough to keep your expert in check. The best way to do this without feeling a need to master the trade is to have tools you can access for a quick check. Below are a couple of free tools you can use to get a general feel for the real estate market and your local area. These will save you time and give you an opportunity to keep juggling your many tasks while still feeling confident about your real estate investments!

Get Statistics and Overall Market Data!

www.finestexpert.com – An amazing real estate analysis tool.

* Save hours of crunching - it is all done for you.

* Learn the true profit potential of each flip opportunity.

* Know the cash flow and cash-on-cash of any property nationwide.

* Easily determine the best properties and financing scenarios.

Get Detailed Stats and Data Related to a Specific Property!

www.spatialmatch.com/nextage - Visually see the relational perspective between **all** things important in your real estate decision making process!

* 12+ million businesses

* 130,000 schools

* Demographics and Statistical Data

* Local News and Home Value Reports

Enjoy using these free tools to become a more informed investor and you'll definitely save time and money while you're at it!

For more information about using these tools, contact Melissa Day at: 619-797-LIST or Melissa@NextageRealty.com.