

AMERICAN HIGH

Parents' Guide

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A LETTER FROM PAT MITCHELL

Dear Parent:

AMERICAN HIGH is an extraordinary television series. Created by Academy Award nominee R.J. Cutler, AMERICAN HIGH offers a rare, inside look at life from the teen perspective.

In AMERICAN HIGH, two documentary filmmaking teams chronicled a year in the life of 14 teens in a Chicago area high school. In addition, each of the teens had video cameras to record their own daily lives and private feelings. The result is not just a remarkable window into the lives of teens, but also a frank, gripping and often poignant depiction of the teens' parents and the daunting challenges they're facing in raising teens.

As a mother of a teenager now, and having raised another, I immediately felt a sense of gratitude for what I had learned from watching AMERICAN HIGH. The father of one of the teens in the series told the press, "watching the series is like the anthropology of our family...it made us look at issues in a completely new light...one that probably saved our relationship with our son."

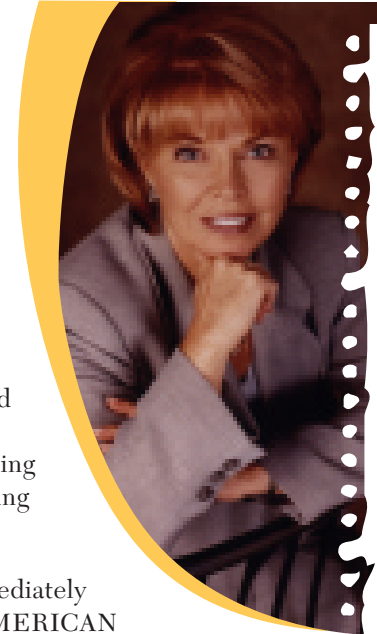
We at PBS believe this series can be meaningful for you, as well. And, to deepen your viewing experience, we have created this AMERICAN HIGH Parents' Guide. With insights from parenting experts and psychologists, the Guide uses the real life stories from AMERICAN HIGH as catalysts to help you better understand the world through your teenager's eyes. Plus, the Guide provides a wealth of ideas to support you in what is arguably the most difficult relationship on earth: parent and teen.

I hope you find AMERICAN HIGH and this Guide valuable. PBS and our member stations are proud to bring you television that has impact well beyond the screen.

Sincerely,



Pat Mitchell
President and CEO, PBS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE SERIES

In AMERICAN HIGH, Academy Award-nominated filmmaker R.J. Cutler follows real students through one year at Highland Park High School outside of Chicago. The 13 episodes combine the students' video diaries with interviews and fly-on-the-wall footage for a unique in-depth look at the lives of teenagers and their families. AMERICAN HIGH brings the viewers into the kitchens and living rooms of parents and teens enduring the struggle and the triumph that is growing up. From fall term to graduation, AMERICAN HIGH depicts a true and sometimes startling picture of adolescence—no actors, no scripts, just life.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The first section of the guide, AMERICAN HIGH Closeups, is intended for use whether or not you have watched the series and includes insights into the critical issues of adolescence so frankly and vividly portrayed in AMERICAN HIGH—**parent/teen communication, teen friendships, academics, divorce, drugs and alcohol and sexual identity**. Included is up-to-the-minute research on these issues as well as expert advice, parenting tips and additional resources.

The second section, **Viewing & Discussing American High**, is designed to be used in viewing the series episode by episode. It includes brief descriptions of each program, related parenting tips and ideas for a follow-up discussion with your teen.

YOUR FEEDBACK MEANS A LOT TO US! Please tell us what you think of the AMERICAN HIGH series and Parents' Guide. What parts of the guide were most valuable and how did you find out about it? Did it prompt you to watch the series?

Email us at americanhigh@tpt.org

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Off-air taping rights of AMERICAN HIGH are available to educators for one year following each broadcast.



Being A Teenager Today

By Annie G. Rogers, Ph.D.

Rogers, a psychologist whose research focuses on adolescence, is an Associate Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

It's no secret that times have changed. Today's teens are growing up in a cultural landscape that bears little resemblance to the protected sphere in which their parents and grandparents came of age. Gender roles are changing and the "nuclear family" of the 1950's has given way to a world in which teens are raised by single parents, married parents, step-parents, grandparents, gay and/or lesbian parents—or some combination of the above.

Routinely, popular music and films expose teens to violent, sexually-charged lyrics and images. And, through access to the Internet, teens are exposed to sexually explicit material, including pornography. Adolescents are vulnerable to physical violence as part of their everyday experience, even in relatively protected communities. One in four boys in America carries a weapon or a gun for his own protection, believing no other protection is available.

Compared to their parents, today's teens have better medical care and nutrition, a wider range of life choices and more money and purchasing power, but also greater academic pressures and greater access to drugs and alcohol.

WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE

For teenagers today, the physical signs of puberty appear earlier than at any other time in history, primarily due to changes in nutrition and medicine. Girls, who mature two years earlier than boys on average, may appear to adults and peers to be considerably older and more capable of good judgment than they really are.

This trend toward earlier physical maturation is coupled with pressure to become sexual even in the early teen years, for both boys and girls.

What's more, as their adolescent bodies are changing, so are their minds, enabling them to begin thinking abstractly and philosophically, to question and challenge long-held beliefs and rules as they struggle to find their "place" in the world. Teenagers, now eye to eye with adults (or taller than we are), try on new ways of talking, walking, and testing their own authority and power in relationships. They can be incisively sarcastic, outrageously righteous, and arrogantly dismissive since their own utopian thinking has been so far largely untested by life experience. They can also be remarkably perceptive and accurate about adult fallibility and mistakes.

“ Right now I'm kind of, like, very into, you know trying to figure out who I am. ”

—Kaytee

Teens also begin to feel emotions more vividly and intensely than they did as children and are capable of more mutual and deeper relationships. The intensity of feelings can be frightening for teens, in part because they do not really understand that even the strongest feelings will shift and change with new experiences. Adolescents, like the rest of us, want their feelings to be taken seriously and want some ray of hope that the truly terrible feelings will shift with time and new experiences.

A new capacity for self-reflection makes teens vulnerable to paralyzing self-consciousness, the feeling that the entire world is watching and judging one's behavior or achievement, and that there will never be another choice or chance.

In short, adolescence is a period of intense physical, sexual, intellectual, and emotional growth, and parenting your teen as he or she navigates this critical phase of their development is far from easy. But it can also be enormously rewarding. Adolescents bring a fresh perspective on the world and on us as adults. They keep us on our toes, sharpen our wits, and challenge us to be honest with ourselves and with them. Research has shown that teens want active, invested parents. So have fun together, remember what a trial you were at this age and try to enjoy this time in your parenting as much as you can.

“ I don't want to get older...I don't want to turn 18. I'm stressed out about that. ”
—Kiwi

PARENTING DO'S AND DON'TS

DON'T:

- Take your teen's challenges to you personally; accept them and respond to them.
- Doubt your wisdom: you have a right to help inform your teen's decisions. Even though adolescents think they have all the answers, young people often do not have the judgment and experience to make the best decisions for themselves.
- Give up your parental authority: you can respect your teen's concerns and opinions while sharing your experience and judgment with them.

DO:

- Find out more about your teen's daily life, including friends, hobbies and hangouts.
- Make time for your teen: set regular routines, like family meal times, and try to give your teen some one-on-one time, particularly if you have other children.
- Encourage real conversations with your teen—but be prepared to hear the truth!
- Admit when you make a mistake (parents occasionally do!). Conflict is part of any vital relationship. When you've had a really hard talk, make an agreement that each of you will think more about what you've said, and talk again soon.



Parent/Teen Communication

Morgan's Story

Morgan pounces into the kitchen and waves the video camera in his dad's face. Most days, Morgan's father deflects Morgan's antics with a good-hearted joke. This morning, Dad has had it. "You're an absolutely obnoxious kid and everything that's good about you only surfaces with people outside this house," his father fumes. Morgan shrugs and turns to his mother on the other side of the kitchen. "Anything you got to say, Mom?" he yells out. "Shut that thing off," his mother commands before slamming the door. "Like I said," Morgan tells the camera. "My mom and dad are real (bleep)." from episode 2, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TEENS

Teenagers on AMERICAN HIGH spend a lot of time talking to friends about every detail of their lives, but not much time talking to their parents. In many families, parent/teen conversations are one-way—with parents doing the talking and teens grudgingly doing the listening. This fact ironically highlights one of the things that teenagers most need from their parents—to be listened to.

Avoid too much "P"

Teens are less likely to open up and talk to parents who talk at them. In their book, *Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers*, authors Elias, Tobias, and Friedlander say "Too much 'P' is bad for you and your teens." Among the words they use to define "P" are punishing, prescribing, proclaiming, pontificating, passing judgment, and predicting. Teenagers typically react to such behavior by displaying anger and irritation, withdrawing, becoming defensive, and acting out. Such strong emotions can often interfere with rational and logical thought and action.

What teens want

What teens really want when communicating with their parents is to feel that their parents are "on their side," that they understand who they are, will advocate for them, and give them the freedom to pursue their dreams. Some of the reasons teens give for not opening up to their parents are that parents try to solve their problems instead of just listening; or parents say they're "just going through a phase." In gener-

al, girls tend to talk with their parents more than boys do, and both girls and boys tend to talk more with their mothers than their fathers.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Listen to your teen

The most important thing you can do for your teen is to listen to them. Listening may not be as easy as it sounds. Good listening requires paying full attention, without distractions or interruptions, making eye contact, asking clarifying questions and repeating back what you hear from your teen so he or she knows that you heard correctly. It's important, too, to wait until your teen is finished talking before you respond or offer your opinions

did you know?

- Teenagers rated "not having enough time together" with parents as a top issue for them.
- Kids are more likely to turn to their friends when their parents seem unable or unwilling to advise them about something, such as sex.
- When asked by researchers, teenagers cited lack of communication between adolescents and their parents as the single most common reason for teen pregnancy.

or judgements. It is very easy for parents to lecture or talk about themselves and what they did as teens, but this only slows conversation instead of advancing it.

A good rule in talking to teens is to use sentences that start with "I" rather than sentences that start with "You." For example: "I feel really annoyed when you don't return the car on time and don't respect our family rules." Rather than "You're so irresponsible. You never return the car on time."

Getting your teen to talk

If you find yourself getting monosyllabic responses to questions, this is often because the question is one that can be answered simply with a "yes," "no," "nothing," or "fine." Try starting a conversation with questions that are more open-ended. Ask your teen what he or she thinks about something or someone in the news; what they learned that day in their American history or science class; or why they like a particular movie. Talk about what's going on in your life. Tell a joke. Ask for your teen to help you with a computer question or something else that he or she is knowledgeable about or even for advice about a work situation. Then wait and be patient. It takes time to learn to be a good listener and for your teen to get used to talking to you.

Some times are better than others for good conversation—driving together in a car is a good time to talk, as is sitting in a waiting room, during a meal or after watching a favorite television show together. Teenagers also need to have opportunities to express positive emotions, to laugh, play games, and have fun with their parents.

Go from "Manager" to "Consultant"

One reason why parent/teen communication can be difficult is if parents continue to treat their teenager as a child. Author Michael Riera talks about how, except in cases of health and safety, parents of teens need to shift from acting as a "manager" to acting as a "consultant," offering advice and suggestions rather than telling kids what to do or doing things for them. Riera says that with the consultant model, parents can avoid the two most common errors in parenting teenagers, "treating them like children (over-parenting or over-managing) and treating them like adults (underparenting or

abandonment)." Instead, a consultant (the parent) helps the consultee (the teen) to deconstruct the problem, reframe it and then brainstorm for solutions. It is then up to the teen to take responsibility for the decisions he or she makes.

TEENAGERS AND CONTROL

A major source of conflict in parent/teen communications is the issue of control. Controlling can often be indirect by surrounding your teenager with a shower of comments, suggestions, opinions, warnings and lectures. Authors of *Parent/Teen Breakthrough: The Relationship Approach*, Mira Kirshenbaum and Charles Foster advise: "Ask yourself whether your teenager has been acting secretive, or sullen, or rebellious, or angry. Many parents think this kind of behavior either is a sign that something is wrong with their kid or is an inevitable part of adolescence. Well, it isn't. Most of the time it's a sign of a normal teenager's reaction to a controlling parent." Rather than controlling your teen, Kirshenbaum and Foster suggest that you develop a "relationship approach" with your teenager, acknowledging that this is the beginning of an adult relationship that will continue throughout your lives.

For more information:

- *Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers: Parenting with Love, Laughter, and Limits* by Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., Steven E. Tobias, Psy.D. and Brian S. Friedlander, Ph.D., Harmony Books, 2000.
- *Parent/Teen Breakthrough: The Relationship Approach* by Mira Kirshenbaum and Charles Foster, Ph.D. Plume, 1991.
- *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers* by Michael Riera, Ph.D., Celestial Arts, 1995.
- www.parentingteens.com/communarchive.shtml offers articles on parent/teen communication.



Teen Friendships

Kaytee's Story

Usually, Kaytee bounces around the room, singing, strumming her guitar...laughing. Tonight, the high school junior slumps onto a couch, pulls her knees to her belly and moans. No quick fix can stop her sobbing. She proclaimed her love to Teddy and he shrugged his shoulders. "It's completely horrible. And I don't think anyone could feel, like, understand...could possibly understand. It's the worst thing ever," Kaytee despairs. A friend sits next to her on the couch and whispers gently as she strokes Kaytee's shoulder, "I'm sorry. I know." from episode 5, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT'S IT LIKE FOR TEENS

For teens like Kaytee, friends might not eliminate the hard times, but they can help take away some of the sting. When young people experience the joy, sadness, pain, anger and fun that goes along with growing up, their friends are the ones most likely to be right along with them.

Friendships take on a whole new meaning in high school as teens begin to separate from their parents and seek out an independent identity. It is also through their friendships that many teenagers learn how to be in a romantic relationship. Often teenagers make friends of the opposite gender, which helps them learn about each other without the pressure of "dating." In their book, *Parent/Teen Breakthrough*, Mira Kirshenbaum and Charles Foster explain: "Having friends, getting wrapped up in friends, is one of the main ways your teenager finds out who he or she is. Friends provide a kind of workshop for your kid to putter around in, experimenting.... Teens and their friends complain about things to each other and reveal their failures and weaknesses. But then they avoid doing something that most parents do: they don't criticize or try to change each other."

Cliques and Groups

Being a teenager involves learning about who you are and where you fit in. High schools are well known for their cliques—"jocks," "nerds," or "hippies" are a few that seem to transcend the

generations. By affiliating with a particular group or clique, teenagers often find a way to belong. Authors Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levin describe the benefits of belonging to a clique: "The clique is the setting in which the adolescent learns social skills—how to be a good friend to someone else, how to communicate with others effectively, how to be a leader, how to enjoy someone else's company, or even how to break off a friendship that is no longer satisfying."

Popularity

Being seen as popular or unpopular can be a serious litmus test for many teenagers. In AMERICAN HIGH, Abby speaks of being in the "popular" crowd, which she says is "like a family" to her. In contrast, Suzy wonders what it would

did you know?

- Studies of adolescent friendship show that while peer influence may reveal itself in clothing, hairstyles, language, and substance abuse, parental influence is most important in the long run in choices of career and religious values.
- Teenage boys spend more than half their waking hours with other teenagers and less than five percent of their time with either parent.
- A study showed only 20 percent of friendships between fourth graders lasted as long as a year while 40 percent of friendships formed by the same students in tenth grade proved to be enduring.

be like to be a popular person, which she considers to be "a totally other race of human being." In reality, however, there are popular and well-liked teens across the full spectrum of cliques and groups within any high school, and most teenagers feel that they fit somewhere in the middle. And research shows that both "popular" and "unpopular" teens do well in college and beyond.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Respect your teen's need for approval from friends

Recognize that your teen may want to spend more time with friends and less time with you. Try to find other ways to stay involved and connected to your teenager's life. Get to know your teenager's friends by inviting them to your home and attending social events at which they are present. Attending sporting events and other after-school activities is a good way to do this, and teens usually appreciate their parents' participation.

Talk about teasing and exclusion

Teasing and exclusion are often a part of high school life, but many teens don't want to talk about being teased or excluded because it's too painful for them or they don't want to hurt their parents' feelings. Nevertheless, try to talk to your teen about how it feels to be excluded or left out, as well as the reasons why some people belittle or exclude others: because of ignorance, low self-esteem, and the need to feel important. Encourage your teenager to show sensitivity and support to those who have been left out, and to look for opportunities to stand up to prejudice.

Withhold judgement

Parents sometimes express concern about the crowd that their teenager is hanging out with or the person their teen is dating. One strategy is to withhold judgment and try to find out why your teenager likes the person or the group. If you are concerned that your teenager is in an abusive relationship, if you have a really bad feeling about the person or group, or if your teen won't let you meet his or her new friends, first try talking directly to your teen about it. If the problem persists, you may consider seeking professional counseling.

TALKING ABOUT SEX

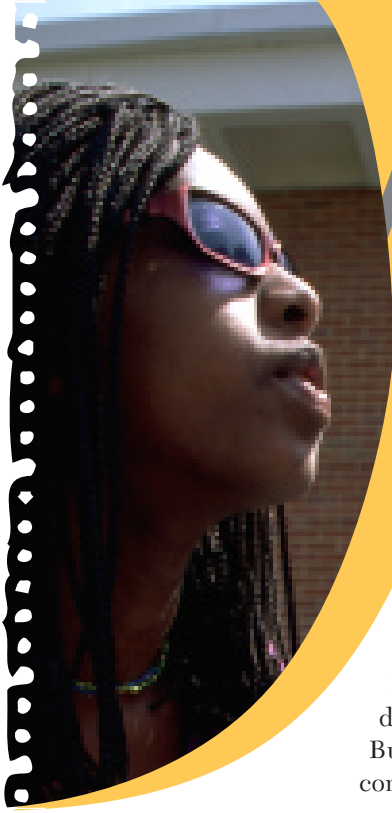
Parents are undoubtedly concerned about sexual relationships when their sons or daughters are romantically involved. Even if you find it embarrassing or difficult, try to talk with your teen about romantic relationships and about sex. Adolescent psychiatrist Lynn Ponton suggests: "In talking with teens about sex, it is important to be direct, use simple language, and admit your own embarrassment. In general, teens don't like jokes about sex unless they are telling them, so begin slowly in this area.... It is preferable for parents to talk about feelings and lessons they've learned through experience without disclosing specific personal details. Ask teens for their opinions, don't just give them yours."

For More Information:

I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Women's Lives by Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Teen Love: On Friendship by Kimberly Kirberger and Colin Mortensen, HCI, 2000.

Teens can find advice and support on a variety of topics, including issues of friendship, at <http://teenadvice.about.com/teens/teenadvice/>



Academics

Their Story

The camera cuts from face to face of AMERICAN HIGH students and no one is smiling. "Work and work and work! There's no break," Abby cries, throwing her arms in the air. "I'm really worried about my grades," Anna frets. "There's so much pressure," she sighs, closing her eyes.

Robby sums up his sentiments on grades and schoolwork with one simple motion: he flops his head against a pillow, faking that he's passing out.

from episode 4, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TEENS

Many teens are able to take their academics in stride and get good grades. But for others, doing well in school is a constant struggle.

Research shows that the transition into ninth grade is a 'make or break' time for teenagers, according to pediatrician and author Eli Newberger. Teens know that their educational choices and academic performance in high school will impact college and career options and this can often be a source of stress for them.

Newberger adds that if the challenge of schoolwork intimidates students, "they may take up with peers who are experimenting with high-risk activities." Even teens who are goal-oriented and doing well in school may experience pressure from parents to keep getting high grades. If they feel that it's difficult for them to live up to their parents' or families' high expectations of them, students may be tempted to cheat.

Why Teens Get Low Grades

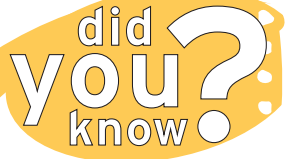
There are many reasons why students may do poorly in school—emotional or family problems, a learning disability, too many extracurricular activities, family or job responsibilities, transitioning from junior to senior high, discouragement over past performance, not feeling challenged, ineffective teaching, and/or lack of direction or motivation. Students who are low-achievers are often stigmatized and sometimes humiliated in the classroom. When students believe that expectations are very

low, they are not motivated to achieve beyond that level.

Sometimes failing grades are temporary and improve when a parent intervenes or when the student recovers from a family or personal trauma. In other cases, teenagers can get stuck in a downward spiral of low grades and may need help. In a recent survey, 48 percent of teens interviewed said they'd like to talk to their parents about schoolwork.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Teens need their parents to set and enforce realistic limits, stay involved in their school lives, guide them to choose courses that challenge and interest them, and monitor their performance.



- *Teens who exhibit more than one of the following characteristics will likely need assistance from parents and teachers: attention problems, poor grades, retention in one or more grades, absenteeism, lack of connection with school and community activities, behavior problems, lack of confidence, and limited goals for the future.*
- *A parenting style that combines warmth and support with limit setting and supervision is more likely to encourage academic success in teens than permissive or authoritarian (overly strict) styles.*

According to author Anne S. Robertson, parents can help by advocating for their teens. This doesn't mean doing their homework for them, but paying attention to the courses they select, encouraging them to challenge themselves academically, participating in the PTA/PTO or other parent activities at the school, and talking with other parents or school officials to learn more about the school's academic requirements and options.

Stand on the Sidelines

Doing well in school is often easier for students who are organized and motivated. You can help your teen establish a routine, set priorities, and organize his or her work and other activities.

Parenting columnist John Rosemond suggests that parents should stand on the sidelines, providing encouragement and support without becoming too emotionally or actively involved in their teen's schoolwork. This can be difficult for some parents, especially if they have very high expectations for their children.

Watch for Signs

Failing grades are often a signal of other more serious problems that your teenager might be experiencing. Don't hesitate to contact your teen's guidance counselor or teacher to set up a meeting to discuss poor grades. Some teens respond to counseling, tutoring, having more structure, and/or a change in their academic environment. You may need to arrange for an academic and/or psychological evaluation, and consider making changes in your teen's courses or teachers.

Put grades in perspective

Many teens think that grades show how smart they are, and that they therefore have no control over their grades. You should let your teen know that paying attention in class, studying and doing all the required research and reading are as likely to contribute to good grades as natural ability or interest in the subject. "Research shows that successful students believe that their grades are the result of ability and effort," note authors Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levin.

Parents should let their teenagers know that while grades are a measure of both aptitude and effort, grades don't measure who they are or will be. Michael Riera, author of

Uncommon Sense for Parents of Teenagers, warns that if parents focus too heavily on grades, they may inadvertently encourage cheating behavior.

Riera recommends that parents emphasize the "process of learning." Ask your teens what they find challenging or interesting about an assignment or course, rather than how they did on a test. Initiate conversations about the content of their courses, books they've read or what they think about issues like Apartheid or the Vietnam War. Focusing on specific issues builds mutual respect and encourages learning. Asking your teenager to explain something to you helps them feel empowered and confident.

DEFINE SUCCESS

Realizing how their performance in high school shapes and impacts their adult life can bring relevance to teens' current academic endeavors. Talk to your teen about what "success" means to him or her.

Some questions to ask include:
What would you like your life to be like in ten years?
What will you be doing?
Where will you be living?
What kind of lifestyle would you like to have?
What kind of education and experience will it take to get there?

For More Information:

The National Parent Involvement Network provides resources for the process of parenting and about family involvement in education. Contact 800/601.4868 or www.npin.org.

Ending the Homework Hassle by John K. Rosemond, Andress McMeel Publishing, 1990. This book offers practical ideas to help you help your child with homework skills.

"How Can I Be Involved in My Child's Education" by Lynn Liontos. Online, 1994. Available: www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/involved.html.

"What Can Parents and Teachers Do If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School?" By Robertson, Anne S. Online, 1997. Available: www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/fail.html.



Drugs and Alcohol

Pablo's Story

Liquor bottles and junk food litter the kitchen. Joints are being passed around the living room. Throughout the house, high school students drape themselves across the floor, the furniture and each other. Pablo, a Highland Park High School senior and the party's host, offers guests Vodka martinis. "Is there no merit in actually witnessing a party while sober?" a partygoer asks philosophically. "Yes," Pablo answers. "It's called Junior High." from episode 5, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TEENS

Drugs or alcohol affect most teenagers in the United States in one way or another. Whether or not teens choose to drink or do drugs themselves, they participate in drug education classes, observe peers who drink or do drugs, deal with peer pressure, take in an ongoing barrage of media messages about drugs and alcohol, and hear repeatedly about celebrities struggling with drug addiction. They are also bombarded with messages about how both over-the-counter and prescription drugs can fix just about any ailment.

What teens are doing

Most studies show that at least half of teens have used alcohol in high school. Many teens report experimenting with alcohol before age 13. Most older high school students who drink say they are able to purchase alcohol themselves or can easily find someone to buy it for them. There appears to be somewhat less drug use than alcohol use among today's teens although teens sometimes use inhalants such as household cleaners or mouthwash. Teens are also trying some dangerous drug and activity combinations such as combining crack, ecstasy, or another speed equivalent with drinking and dancing. This can lead to severe dehydration and in rare cases, death.

Why teens drink and do drugs

Teens turn to drugs and alcohol for many reasons: to feel or act like adults, appear cool, fit in with their friends, combat loneliness or boredom, lose their inhibitions, cover up feelings of inadequacy or depression or to just have fun and feel

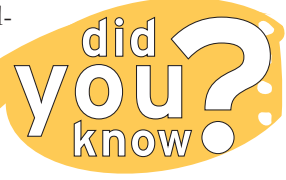
good. Some teens also feel and respond to strong peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Open the lines of communication

The most important thing you can do to help your teenager make responsible decisions about drugs and alcohol is to have good communication. Teens need to feel that they can come to you for information and tell you how they are being affected—even if they are drunk or have broken the rules.

Many experts believe that the "just say no" or zero tolerance approach is ineffective and may make teens feel that they cannot



- In 1999, one half of high school students (48 percent of female students and 52 percent of male students) reported drinking during the previous 30 days
- The leading cause of injury and death among teenagers is auto crashes. Alcohol is involved in nearly half of the fatalities.
- Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug in the United States and tends to be the first used by children and teenagers. A majority of those who try marijuana do not go on to sample other drugs.
- In 1999, 47% of high school students had used marijuana during their lifetime.

talk to their parents if they are having a problem related to drugs or alcohol. If the lines of communication are open, you can help your teen develop and practice strategies for staying drug and alcohol free, especially in response to peer pressure in various social situations. Forbid teens from attending unsupervised parties and let them know how you feel about alcohol and drug use.

If your teen seems to be doing fine, but you suspect that your teen is using drugs and alcohol, talk to him or her about it, remembering that teens probably know more about these substances than you do. But what they don't really know is how using drugs and alcohol might compromise their future or their relationships. Rather than preaching, be sincere and tell your teen how it makes you feel, how frightened you are or how betrayed you feel. If your teen is drinking, you may want to consider taking away driving privileges until he or she stops.

Educate yourself and your teen

When teens do drugs they don't always know exactly what they are putting into their bodies. Talk to your teen about health issues related to drinking and drug use:

- research has shown that the adolescent brain is still developing and is therefore more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol and drugs
- alcohol and drugs cause impaired judgment and slower reflexes, which can lead to serious car and other accidents
- many drugs can be highly addictive.

While information is useful, it may not be enough to keep many teens from trying and using drugs and alcohol, so ongoing communication is critical.

Be a role model

Pay attention to your own drinking and drug use—notice what you are modeling for your child. If you drink alcohol, drink with discretion. If there is alcoholism in your family, your child may have a genetic susceptibility to alcoholism. Talk to your teen about how alcoholism in the family has affected family relationships so that he or she can make an informed choice about drinking alcohol. You can expand the conversation to talk about the drug abuse or alcoholism of a

movie star or other celebrity. Discuss the reasons why you both think the person uses alcohol or drugs and think of other ways this person might be able to achieve what he or she is looking for.

Many parents of teenagers have some conflict about whether or not to tell their teens if they used drugs themselves as teenagers or adults. Some experts believe that honesty is always the best policy, and certainly if you

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR TEEN'S BEHAVIOR IS BEYOND "NORMAL"

by Carol Maxym, Ph.D.

Many parents are concerned about their teen's behavior and wonder whether it has gone beyond the "normal" range. You know your teen best. Some warning signs that your child may be in trouble include:

- your teen is no longer the familiar person you know; --your teen lies often or constantly;
- your teen suddenly loses or gains weight, his or her grades, friends or activities change;
- other children in the family seem afraid of the teen or wary of inviting friends home;
- you and your spouse or partner are arguing more and it's generally about your teen;
- you feel that you are often being manipulated and
- you find yourself excusing, justifying and rationalizing behavior and attitudes that you know are not o.k..

Slipping grades and new friends alone may not signal a problem. Different clothes and language, different hours, a weight gain or loss—any of these alone may or may not signal that your teen is in trouble. But, put into context, one next to the other, it often becomes clear that there is a problem. If your gut flips when you have to talk to your teen, if you spend most of your idle time worrying about your teen, your teen has probably gone beyond the realms of "normal" teen behavior. Let yourself know what you know.

have a trusting relationship with your teen, it would be appropriate to share this information. Others believe that you need not volunteer the information unless asked directly. There is no consensus about what is best in this situation, and parents must decide what they are comfortable with and how best to communicate what is important to them.

Teen drinking in your home

Some parents of teenagers think that allowing their teen to have a party with alcohol under "controlled" circumstances is preferable to having their teen at an unsupervised party. This is never appropriate—and with good reason. Parents can be held legally liable for actions that occur when they permit underage drinking in their home. On *AMERICAN HIGH*, Kiwi's mother was very clear when she told him that she would not permit him to have a party with alcohol at their house because alcohol is illegal at his age and she is legally responsible.

Look for signs of abuse and addiction

In some cases, teens abuse alcohol and/or drugs to a point where parents need to take urgent actions to change the situation. A recent teen survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse showed that 61% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 are at moderate or high risk for substance abuse.

Carol Maxym and Leslie York in their book, *Teens in Turmoil* say, "there are signs that can tip you off that your teen's use of alcohol and/or drugs (including household products such as inhalants) is a real problem. If grades suddenly plummet, friends change, money is missing from your wallet, or your teen's behavior becomes strange, you and your teen face serious problems that need immediate attention. If your teen suddenly asks you to buy aerosol cans of whipped cream, mouthwash or cough syrup; if there's a frequent smell of incense, disappearance of liquor from your refrigerator, or your teen spends most of his or her time alone, these could also be warning signs of drug or alcohol abuse."

HOW TO CONFRONT A TEEN WHO IS ABUSING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

by Carol Maxym, Ph.D.

If you see or suspect behavior that is wrong, cruel, immoral, illegal, risky or just plain stupid, it is time to confront your teen.

Confrontation has been called the antiseptic that cleanses emotional and psychological wounds, an open and honest statement about the way things are. Parents are often hesitant to confront their teen, worrying that the teen may just get angry, become more defiant or close down whatever communication may exist. In fact, teens tend to respect adults who are courageous enough to tell things as they are.

Don't let confrontation turn into the same old arguments about exactly how late your teen was or if the homework was really done. Don't yell or shout when confronting your teen and never use sarcasm.

Confronting isn't fun. But when parents know there is a reason to be concerned about their child, confrontation is an honest, sincere and caring way to help.

For More Information:

To get help now, call 1-800-662-HELP. The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration provides advice and referrals to individuals about the availability of drug and alcohol treatment services, including referrals to programs in the caller's local area. Operates 24 hours daily.

Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers by Michael Riera, Celestial Arts 1995

You and Your Adolescent, by Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levine, HarperPerennial, 1990, 1997

The Men They Will Become by Eli Newberger, Merloyd Lawrence/Perseus Publishing, 1999

Teens in Turmoil by Carol Maxym and Leslie York, Penguin, 2000

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information provides information about a wide range of drugs and their effects.
<http://www.health.org/catalog/Index.htm>

Alateen is a fellowship of young Al-Anon members, usually teenagers, whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. <http://www.alateen.org/alateen.html>



Divorce

Allie's Story

"I try to keep my relationships with my parents separate. Now it's like I've got two different lives," Allie says, flicking her long blonde hair out of her face and lighting a cigarette. Allie is 17. Over the last year, Allie's dad left home, remarried and fathered a new child. Allie struggles to do all she can to support her mother, maintain a relationship with her dad and his new wife, and show up to class enough to qualify for graduation. Sometimes, the pressure seems crushing. "You can take it," Allie's father assures her. "You're strong." "Says who?" Allie demands. from episode 9, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TEENS

Like Allie on AMERICAN HIGH, more than half of today's teenagers are likely to find their lives disrupted by divorce. In most cases, divorce can be traumatic and painful, resulting in strong emotional swings and frequent conflicts, unavoidable disruptions to daily life, financial instability and deeply divided loyalties. Each teen involved in a divorce copes differently. Some may demonstrate positive coping skills; others will find themselves overwhelmed and barely able to function; others express constant sadness and pain; still others withdraw and don't talk at all.

Allie reacts to her parents' divorce by cutting school and ignoring her schoolwork. As author Tom McMahon notes, "It's common for teenagers to exhibit behavior problems both at home and in school, and to have increased anxiety during the transitional period of the divorce. There is also a greater tendency for teens to experiment with drugs during this time, often as a form of escape. These negative behaviors usually diminish as the family returns to a more predictable routine and stable environment."

Adjusting to Remarriage

Demographers predict that 85 percent of divorced men and 75 percent of divorced women will remarry within three years. The result is that many teens are faced with more changes brought about by one or both parents' remarriage, and the potential addition of step or half-siblings.

Slipping between the cracks

Teens are learning to separate from the

family as a unit in their growth toward independence and divorce poses additional conflicts for them. Teens of divorced parents, according to author Vicki Lansky "often feel the need to align with one parent and become more attached to the idea of upholding the family unit. Some take the opportunity to 'slip between the cracks' and separate all too effectively from the family, avoiding parental discipline or responsibility. In spite of their normal rebelliousness, teens are likely to be very moralistic and judgmental about divorce. They will also believe that parents are very selfish to disrupt their lives this way."

did you know?

- 84 percent of children who lived with a single parent lived with their mothers in 1998
- In 1996 children of divorce were 50 percent more likely to divorce than their counterparts from intact families.
- In 1999 8.6 percent of the population got married and 4.1 percent got divorced.

Helping your teenager through divorce

Long term studies have shown that how parents handle the divorce may have more impact on the child than the divorce itself. About half the families in a recent study by Dr. Constance Ahrons "had bad divorces that caused harm to both the children and the adults. The other half of the families had good divorces that preserved family ties and provided children with two parents and healthy families."

Teenagers need consistent, firm and loving parenting, especially during the difficult times that divorce brings. Try to maintain good communication with your teenager, while continuing to set reasonable limits about curfews, homework and other activities. Teenagers whose parents are in the midst of divorce need these limits to help them feel secure when everything around them feels shaky. This is also an important time for them to have the opportunity to speak to a counselor or another adult who can listen without taking sides. Your teenager's school can often provide counseling without charge.

Maintain routines

If you're going through a divorce, try to maintain normal routines and activities for your teenager and make an effort to attend athletic matches and school events. Make sure that you are alert to potential signs of trouble, such as slipping grades or possible drug or alcohol use, and take immediate action if you notice any of these happening.

Take Care of Yourself

Make sure you have sources of support for yourself. Talk to a friend, family member or therapist about your feelings and the disruption in your life and try to make time to do things that you enjoy too. By taking care of your own needs, you will be better able to parent your teenager during this difficult time. Take enough time to adjust to the divorce, but be ready to let go of your anger and move on with your life.

TIPS TO MAKE DIVORCE EASIER FOR YOU AND YOUR TEEN

- Make a joint decision with your former spouse to be successful as parents even though your marriage has failed. Continue to support each other as parents of your teen.
- Communicate civilly with your former spouse and keep your teenagers' needs and interests foremost. Don't bad-mouth your former spouse—ever.
- Don't use your teen as your lawyer, your therapist, your go-between or your spy!
- Don't make your teen choose between you and your former spouse.
- Be flexible and willing to compromise.
- Get counseling for you and any other family members who need it.

For More Information:

Vicky Lansky's *Divorce Book for Parents, The Book Peddlers*, 1989, 1996

The Good Divorce, by Dr. Constance Ahrons, HarperCollins, 1994

Parents can find information about divorce at www.divorceonline.com www.divorcehelp.com and www.divorcesource.com



Sexual Identity

Brad's Story

American High senior, Brad, looks back at the turning point in his junior year: finals week at Highland Park High School. Brad stops going to classes. His friends wonder why he seems so depressed. His parents ask him what's wrong. Finally, Brad breaks down. "I can't do this anymore. I can't live a different life.... I am who I am!" His mother says, "So...are you gay? You could've just told me." By the next day, his friends, the teachers—everyone—at Highland Park knows Brad's news. This is how Brad came out.

from episode 9, AMERICAN HIGH

WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TEENS

Not all gay and lesbian teens are as fortunate or feel as comfortable in acknowledging their sexual identity as Brad. Gay teens may live in schools or communities where they believe they will be stigmatized and where homophobia is prevalent. Pediatrician and author Eli Newberger explains: "Homophobia incites crude and cruel behavior in middle schools and even more frequently in high schools."

Support from friends

Many gay and lesbian teens, like many heterosexual teens, are reluctant to express their concerns about their own sexuality. Most are likely to declare their sexuality or "come out" with friends first, before family. Friends are a vital source of support for gay and lesbian youth, but many straight teens shy away from showing support, for fear that they too will be labeled gay or lesbian. Teens who can overcome concerns about their image can be strong allies to gay and lesbian friends.

Coming out

Like their straight peers, gay and lesbian teenagers are experiencing a sexual awakening. For young adolescents especially, learning that they are gay or lesbian can be difficult and disturbing, and teens may want to experiment with both straight and gay identities.

Cornell University professor and researcher Ritch Savin-Williams has found that for many teens, coming out can be a lengthy process lasting on

average three and a half to four years. His research indicated that for girls, the process tends to be longer and there is more heterosexual activity prior to coming out. And pediatrician and author Eli Newberger points out that "Many boys who will eventually have well-established heterosexual orientations have at least one homosexual experience as an adolescent... and as many as half of the males who eventually establish a homosexual orientation have experienced heterosexual sex."

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Accept your teen

Learning that their teen is gay or lesbian can be a time of tension and turmoil for many parents. In a recent

did you know?

- *Gay and lesbian students are far more likely to be threatened, abused, or victimized than heterosexual students – 45 percent of gay males and 20 percent of lesbians experience physical or verbal assault in high school.*
- *The problems gay and lesbian teenagers experience in school include isolation, depression, poor self-esteem, harassment, and bullying. If allowed to escalate, the prevailing negative climate can result in suicide or in extremely violent acts directed towards gays and lesbians.*

study, half of parents reacted to their college-age sons' coming out with disbelief, denial, negative comments or silence, and 18 percent responded with acts of rejection. In all likelihood, heterosexual parents have not struggled with their own sexuality to the degree that their gay teen has, making it harder for them to understand what their teen is experiencing.

Some parents who are disappointed or uncomfortable with their teen's homosexuality may be tempted to try and "talk them him or her out of it" or give stern lectures in the hope that they can change their teen's sexual orientation. Other parents ask themselves "What did I do wrong?" communicating to their teen that being gay or lesbian is a terrible outcome of faulty parenting. But according to many experts, including authors Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levin, "current thinking indicates that an individual's sexual orientation is not a conscious or voluntary decision. There is nothing a parent can or should do to prevent a young adolescent from becoming gay or to 'cure' an older adolescent or adult son or daughter of his or her sexual orientation. Attempts to change an individual's sexual orientation exact a heavy psychological price."

Talk to your teenager about sexual identity

Within a home climate of openness and receptivity, gay and lesbian teens will feel encouraged to seek support and acceptance from their parents, and straight teens can be encouraged to be friends and allies to their gay friends. Try to engage in open dialogue about sexual issues with your adolescents, even if these conversations may seem difficult or awkward. If you are parenting a straight teenager, let him or her know that respecting sexual difference is critical and that he or she could play a role in reducing harassment and violence

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR GAY OR LESBIAN TEENAGER

There are specific ways in which parents can help their gay or lesbian teens. In their book, *You And Your Adolescent*, Steinberg and Levin suggest the following four steps that parents can take:

- 1) Tell yourself that this is not the end of the world.
- 2) Reassure your son or daughter that you still love him or her and will help in any way you can.
- 3) Try to understand your child's feelings and lifestyle.
- 4) Meet your son's boyfriend or daughter's girlfriend.

Author Carol Maxym adds a final step: Don't be judgemental.

For More Information:

Homosexuality: What Does it Mean? by Julie K. Endersbe, Mankato, Minn: LifeMatters, 2000

The Sex Lives of Teenagers: Revealing the Secret World of Adolescent Boys and Girls by Lynn E. Ponton, M.D., NY: Dutton, 2000.

PFLAG (*Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*), www.pflag.org is a national organization offering information and support.

American Psychological Association's gay issue homepage: www.apa.org/psychnet/lgbt.html

Viewing and Discussing American High



AMERICAN HIGH offers an invaluable opportunity to see the world from a teen perspective and observe other parents grappling with the daunting job of raising teenagers. This section of the AMERICAN HIGH Parents' Guide is designed to help you get the most out of viewing the series. For each episode in the series you'll find practical parenting tips and conversation starters drawing from real-life situations in the show.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR TEEN

Whether you and your teen watch AMERICAN HIGH together or separately, use the time afterwards to listen to your teen's thoughts and feelings about the show. It is often easier for teens to talk about people and situations they see on television than about themselves. You may both be surprised to discover that the real-life situations from the show are a good way to open up meaningful conversations. To get the conversation started, try asking:

- What did you think of that episode? What stood out for you?

What bothered you?

- Which teen(s) could you relate to? Do you know anyone who is like (a teen in the show)?
- In what ways is the high school in AMERICAN HIGH like or different from your high school? What's going on at your school around (an issue mentioned in the episode)?
- What did you think about the way the kids and their parents interacted with each other?

Episode 1: You Only Live Once

As the fall term gets underway, Morgan declares that his teen years are for rebellion and he ridicules his younger brother for doing his homework. Steady couple Robby and Sarah talk about the changes that will come when Robby goes away to college next year. Kiwi, the football team's star kicker, confides in Anna about his new girlfriend Rachel. Although Anna seems to feel shut out by his new romance, she advises Kiwi on what a girl wants.

BROADCAST DATE: APRIL 4, 2001 (check local listings to confirm broadcast time)

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ●

- Morgan says, "These are the years that you are supposed to go (bleep) wild, blame it all on your parents or society...not have to suffer consequences, have unprotected sex, go do drugs, smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol...hang out with your friends, go do what you want." **What do you think Morgan means about doing these things and not suffering consequences? Does this even approach reality?**
- Sarah says about Robby, "I am so scared...to let him go. I don't want it to be over yet. I want it to go back in time. I want to make things in my life...better. I want to take my time now." **What does Sarah mean when she says she wants to "take time now?" Do you want your life to slow down or speed up?**

PARENTING TIP: ●

Indulge your teenager's whimsical request every now and then.

Teenagers often want to do what adults consider to be outrageous things. When Kiwi asks his mom to shave his name into his hair, instead of saying "What a silly thing to do!" or telling him why he shouldn't do it, Kiwi's mom willingly agrees to his request. In doing so, she shows him that even though she may think it's a crazy thing to do, she loves him and wants to be part of his life.



Episode 2: Who Am I?

Morgan, marginalized by his Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and constantly at odds with authority, finds the situation reversed when he takes a job teaching gymnastics to kids with special needs. Brad, the first "so-called mainstream kid at the high school to come out as gay," strains to find a meaningful niche within his straight social circle. Kaytee, a gifted singer-songwriter, comes to terms with her talent as she completes a demo tape to distribute to coffeehouses.

BROADCAST DATES: APRIL 4 AND 11, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- About working with special needs kids, Morgan says "The joy I got out of them doing it was so much more of a joy than if I got a back flip for my first time." **Why do you think Morgan gets more joy from the kids' success than his own?**
- Brad says, "I don't have any gay friends. I'm me, myself and I in a group of heterosexuals and I really wish that I had other gay friends. I'm missing so much." **What do you think it feels like for Brad to be the only gay kid in his group of friends? Have you ever felt like you were different from others in your group?**

PARENTING TIP:

Praise your teenager

Brad shows his artwork featuring lots of nude male bodies to his father who responds: "I think it's very cool, actually. You did all this? Fantastic!" Brad's father's praise is genuine and specific. Positive reinforcement helps teens feel good about themselves and honest feedback provides them with useful information about their talents and skills. Make sure that your praise goes beyond accomplishments in school or sports to include praise for things such as a caring or compassionate remark, a thoughtful gesture, or making time to participate in a family activity.



Episode 3: Boogie Nights

It's time for Highland Park's annual Dance Show and lots of people want to get involved. Brad's choreography is selected as one of the dances to be performed and auditions are held for the dancers. When Morgan is selected, he must face the responsibility of attending rehearsals and the tension with his girlfriend Salima, who is not chosen. Suzy struggles with her negative body image and is surprised when she makes the show.

BROADCAST DATE: APRIL 11 AND 18, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Suzy says, "It sucks to be overweight. Can't stick to a diet. No self-control. I put on so much makeup. It's like my security makeup thing." **Why is Suzy so focused on dieting? Where does her body image come from? How do you feel about your body?**
- Brad says "There were certain situations where I would hide exactly who I was. There's a lot of baggage that comes with being gay." **What kind of baggage do you think Brad is talking about? What would you do if you were Brad's friend?**

PARENTING TIP:

Avoid making hurtful or judgmental remarks about your teen's appearance. Many parents find themselves disapproving of a particular aspect of their teenager's appearance—whether it's their hairstyle, a tattoo or body piercing, clothing, or weight (either too fat or too thin). When your teen shows up with something new that you don't care for, try to understand why your teen is expressing him or herself in that way. Ask questions to learn more, repeat your teen's responses to them to show that you're listening, and share your judgments with a friend or spouse rather than directly with your teen.



Episode 4: Pressure High



Facing pressure from his parents and the school for failing gym, Morgan takes solace in his relationship with Salima. But when Salima's grades start sliding as well, her parents forbid her to see him. Allie struggles with the impact of her parents' ongoing divorce and tries to regain a decent academic standing after her disastrous junior year. Allie is torn between her loyalties to each of her parents as she visits her father and his new family. Star football player Kiwi, who has pinned his scholarship hopes on his field-goal kicking ability, is bitterly disappointed when he misses a crucial kick in the team's big game.

BROADCAST DATES: APRIL 18 AND 25, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ●

- After Kiwi fails to make the winning kick, his mother says: "You'll take a hot shower, you'll have something to eat, and you'll feel better." **What do you think about her response? What would you have wanted me to say or do to make you feel better?**
- Allie's mother says about her daughter, "She looks at today; she doesn't look long-term and that's so frustrating as a parent because I have no control." **Why do you think Allie's mom feels she does not have control of her daughter? What do you see when you imagine your future?**

PARENTING TIP: ●

Pay attention to the feelings behind the words.

When Allie talks about the possibility of not going to college next year, her mother is concerned that Allie will never go to college. Rather than stopping to explore the feelings behind Allie's statement, she focuses on her own view of the situation. Often when the underlying feelings are expressed, the teenager feels less argumentative and more understood. Try to put your own needs aside and listen to why your teen feels the way he or she does. If you can get to the source of the problem, you can talk about different ways of addressing it, and it will likely be easier to reach a solution together.



Episode 5: Saints and Sinners



Poetically inclined Pablo and his friend Lisa make an authority-free haven out of her grandfather's empty house. But when Pablo ignores Lisa's one rule for the house and throws a party that trashes the house, he loses Lisa's friendship. Kaytee grapples with her intense romantic feelings for Teddy, a fellow musician. She courageously declares her love for him only to be disappointed by his lack of response.

BROADCAST DATE: APRIL 25 AND MAY 2, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ●

- Kaytee says, "The stupidest thing ever is definitely, like (the) teenage dating process. I hate it. I want to get out of high school and, like, live like a real person." **What is a "real person?" How do you feel about the dating process at your school?**
- Pablo admits that he thinks he can prevent his friend Lisa from bugging him about his own behavior by buying her a few presents. **Has a friend ever tried to "bribe" you to get you to do something you didn't want to do? How did you feel about it?**

PARENTING TIP: ●

Use humor with your teen.

When Pablo borrows his mother's car, she asks him what time he is coming back and he says at 11. She replies: "Okay Pablo—11. Today. Okay? Not 11 tomorrow." Pablo's mother uses humor to get her point across and to let Pablo know that she understands that he may try to manipulate her. Using humor with teens can be very effective, especially in tense situations. And parents are so frequently in a disciplinarian role that humor can provide a welcome respite for teens weary of parents' lectures.



Episode 6: Bustin' Out

Anna is exasperated when her parents try to help with her college applications. Allie struggles with her desire to take a year off and her mother's concern that she go to college right away. Robby chafes under his mother's "control" and flees to his girlfriend Sarah's place. Pablo, trying to secure independence and finance his college, considers joining the Marines though he is an admitted pacifist.

BROADCAST DATES: MAY 2 AND 9, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Robby says "High School? It's stupid. That's the bottom line. A bunch of (bleep) bureaucratic administrators trying to cage in adolescent youth that needs to be running free." **What do you think about the teachers and other people who run your school? How could adults at school make it better for teens?**
- About joining the Marine Corps, Pablo says, "I want to teach my parents that I can live on my own and I will live on my own. And then I don't want...I don't want the strings attached." **What do you think about Pablo's wish? What would it mean to you to live with no strings attached?**

PARENTING TIP:

Make "I" statements.

Robbie is frustrated and arguing with his mother. He wants to go to Sarah's house and she says, "If you leave here, you'll be sorry." Parents often make this kind of response when they are frustrated. If you tell a teen how he or she will feel or be, they are more likely to become defensive. A statement beginning with "you" can be interpreted as judgmental and negative; but a statement beginning with "I" is one in which the parent simply says how they feel. Instead of saying "You're a slob. You never pick up your stuff," try saying, "I feel annoyed when you don't pick up your stuff."



Episode 7: Winter Chill

The college application season is in high gear. Good friends Brad and Abby have a falling out when he is accepted early to NYU and she is wait-listed by her top college choice. Meanwhile, Allie's best friend Brett helps Allie get back on track to graduation after Allie backslides into truancy and fierce arguments with her mother. Morgan's father patiently guides him through his college applications.

BROADCAST DATE: MAY 9 AND 16, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Allie says to her mother "You don't have to bring up this whole 'I'm so disappointed in you.' Because you know what? It doesn't help the situation any better. I feel no support." **What do you think about the way that Allie and her mother interact with each other? What other ways could they each handle Allie's troubles at school?**
- Abby says, "Brad and I have been through a lot. I was the first person that Brad came out to. We're like peas and carrots, you know. We go together." **Which person do you feel that way about? What's different about having a friend who is a girl versus a boy?**

PARENTING TIP:

Encourage your teenager's dreams and passions.

Morgan, who struggles with academics, says he wants to go to Harvard. His father jokingly responds, "Harvard, Illinois. That's about as close as you'll get." When your teenager expresses a desire, hope, dream or passion, stop for a moment and put yourself in your teenager's position. Even if you think the statement is unrealistic or even outrageous, ask questions to learn more about what your teen wants and who she or he is, and see if you can help them figure out how to set realistic goals. Then help them develop a plan to achieve their goal.



Episode 8: Winter Formalities



For Highland Park's Winter Formal, the girls get to ask the guys. Tiffany asks Drew, her longtime crush, and is stunned when he says yes. Morgan and Salima argue as her parents continue to forbid her from seeing him. Suzy refuses to look for a date and concentrates instead on her operatic ambitions. Her perseverance pays off when she makes All-State Honors Choir.

BROADCAST DATES: MAY 16 AND 23, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Tiffany says her parents taught her not to get too close to anyone because "they're just going to leave you in the dust." **What are the risks and benefits of allowing yourself to get too close to someone?**
- Suzy says "I don't want to have any boys distracting me from my goals which are way more important than anything else." **How are romantic relationships distracting? What are possible solutions?**

PARENTING TIP:

Teens have a right to privacy.

Morgan's mother discovers that he has bought a sexy thong as a gift for Salima and she insists that he return it. Morgan is angry and possibly embarrassed by his mother's intrusion into his private life. If you feel the desire to eavesdrop on your teenager's conversation, look in the drawer next to his or her bed, read their journal or open a piece of mail addressed to them, try to restrain yourself. If you want to learn more about your teenager's private life, acknowledge first that you know this is a private part of their life and invite him or her to share, giving them the option not to.



Episode 9: Homeward Bound



Allie feels torn between her mother's resentment and her father's desire that she attend his upcoming wedding. Morgan is upset when he comes home to find his mother has given his beloved three-legged hamster away and his father had to put their ailing cat to sleep.

BROADCAST DATE: MAY 23 AND 30, 2001

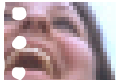
TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- While at her father's wedding, Allie reflects, "My parents were honestly a love story...they really were such a great couple. I don't know where it went wrong." **What do you think makes a "great couple?" Do you know any? What could happen to make a "great couple" break up?**
- Morgan says "I want to have that bond with my parents but I just can't. You can't... get so far apart and then expect to come right back like that." **What do you want our relationship to be like now? How would you like us to have an adult/adult relationship?**

PARENTING TIP:

Involve your teen in family decision making.

Morgan comes home from school to find that his parents had the ailing family cat put to sleep. They might have believed they were sparing him from pain, but instead he felt hurt, angry and excluded. Teenagers are maturing enough to be involved in family decision making. The next time a decision needs to be made about something that affects your teenager directly, make the decision together.



Episode 10: Spring Broken



Over Spring Break, a group of twenty-one seniors escapes to the Bahamas. With no adult supervision, many of the kids in the Bahamas are partying with alcohol. While Abby drinks and bonds with a new friend, her best friend Shanna prefers not to party and reconnects with her old friend Allie. Meanwhile, the high school band goes on a highly supervised trip to China. They deal with the pressure from their bandleader to perform at their highest level ever.

BROADCAST DATES: MAY 30 AND JUNE 6

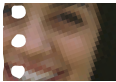
TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Jenny says about the Bahamas trip, "As clued in as, like, even my parents might be, they have no clue as to what the hell goes on here." **Are there things you feel you need to keep secret? Why?**
- After a bad performance in China, bandleader Dr. Hile tells the students, "You are so self-absorbed, you need to sort out your personal lives and think about the group." **What do you think about what Dr. Hile says to get kids to improve their performance? Why do you think it made them perform better?**

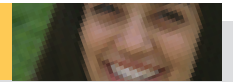
PARENTING TIP:

Ask, don't tell.

Shanna's mother says that she knows the kids are going to drink on their spring break. She hopes that if they get drunk, they'll get so sick they'll never do it again. As it turns out, Shanna doesn't get drunk. Try to avoid making assumptions about what your teen is doing or thinking. Instead, ask them questions to learn more. And when you do, try using some of these communication "enhancers": eliminating distractions, making eye contact, and staying silent without interruption until your teenager is finished talking.



Episode 11: Promises, Prom Misses



It's prom time and the kids at Highland Park High reflect on their hopes and fears for the last dance of high school. Tired of Salima's parents' disapproval, Morgan decides they should break up and he attends the prom with someone else. After worrying about who will ask her, Anna goes with a friend from school and is voted Prom Queen.

BROADCAST DATE: JUNE 6 AND 13, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- About the prom, Morgan says, "People all wanted to be grownups and stuff like that. Everybody tried to act like adults when they should be acting like kids because that's what we are.... We should be, like, blowing it out not being all conservative." **How do you see senior prom? Is it a chance to let loose for the last time, or is it chance to begin socializing as an adult?**
- Suzy says, "Even though it's one little night of your life, it seems so pathetic to look back and be, like, 'No, I didn't go to my senior prom.'" **Why is prom such an important part of high school life? Does whether or not you go to prom mean anything for your future?**

PARENTING TIP:

Support your teen through the ups and downs of romance.

When Morgan and Salima break up, his father asks what happened and offers support. Many teens are devastated when they go through a break up. You can help your teen by asking how he or she feels and listening carefully to the responses. Recognize that some teens may not want to talk about the break-up while others may be very emotional for some time. Listen to your teen. Don't offer judgments or opinions about the person or the relationship and recognize that your teen needs time to heal.



Episode 12: War and Pieces

Senior year is drawing to a close. Pablo decides to join the Marines but when he fails the "Past Drug Use" questionnaire, big questions loom about his future. Allie and her mom have a blowout fight and Allie is kicked out of the house. Faced with the possibility of not graduating and increased pressure from his father, Morgan resolves to get it together for the final weeks of senior year.

BROADCAST DATES: JUNE 13 AND 20, 2001

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- Allie says, "I feel like we're lost. I feel like we have nothing. I feel like everything that we've ever worked for has completely been cut. If she could truly understand everything inside of me I don't think we'd be fighting quite like we do." **What do you think has happened to Allie's relationship with her mother? How could they understand each other better?**
- About his mother, Pablo says, "When we fight, it's like we're not even really talking to each other. We say the most hurtful things." **What makes people say hurtful things when they fight? What happens when people say hurtful things?**

PARENTING TIP:

Take care of yourself.

Parenting a teen while in the midst of a divorce can be very stressful. Allie's mother became so frustrated that she went to the extreme of asking Allie to leave home. If you're a divorcing parent, you're less likely to feel frustrated and angry and less likely to resort to extreme measures if you make sure that you take care of your needs and do what you can on a daily basis to reduce the stress in your life. Try to build a strong support network of friends or family members and to connect with other single parents. Make sure you adequately balance meeting your needs with meeting the needs of your teenager.



Episode 13: Finale

Graduation day arrives. Morgan's parents are beside themselves with pride and relief at Morgan's acceptance to college. Then, on the eve of graduation, Morgan is arrested for vandalizing the school and is forbidden to participate in the graduation ceremony. Pablo decides to leave home and live with his father while he figures out what comes next. Brad, Robby and Kiwi relish their good-byes as they celebrate that they're moving on. As the graduates prepare for the ceremony and celebrations with their families, each reflects on the growth of this important year and their dreams for the future.

BROADCAST DATES: JUNE 20, 2001

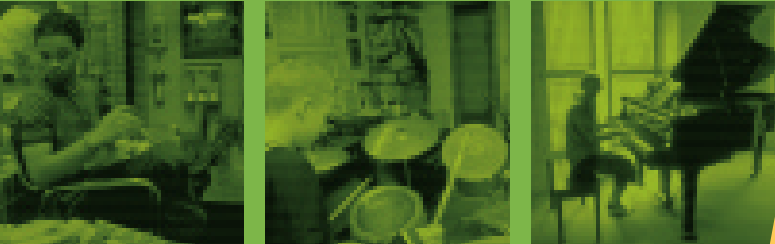
TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

- When Morgan is forbidden to participate in the graduation ceremony, his mother says, "I feel like he robbed me.... It was something that he was supposed to share with a lot of people. It wasn't just his day." **Who do you think graduation is for and why does Morgan's mother feel this way? How will Morgan's mother's feelings affect Morgan?**
- Brad says, "I feel prepared...for college. Graduation, instead of being a sad thing will be happy for me." **What do you think you will miss about high school and what do you look forward to after it is over?**

PARENTING TIP:

Think about things from your teenager's point of view.

Morgan's parents are disappointed and angry that they won't be able to participate in his graduation ceremony. Nevertheless, at the end of graduation day the family goes out for dinner. Sometimes it's difficult to be generous towards your teen if you think they are undeserving, but your teenager will appreciate small acts that show that you can see things from his or her perspective. Try to overlook your anger and disappointment to focus on the most important thing—showing that you love and support your teen, whoever he or she is and despite whatever he or she does.



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...You've still got these strings to your parents but slowly they're being cut.

– Allie

You want to grow up so quick, but when you're older you want to be a kid again

– Abby