

TEEN BEHAVIOR WHAT TO EXPECT



NORMAL TEENAGE BEHAVIOR

- **Mood Swings:** Hormonal changes and trying to form an identity can lead to unpredictable mood swings. It's common for teenagers to go between happiness and irritability.
- **Desire for Independence:** It's common and normal for teens to push boundaries. This can look like challenging rules, spending more time with peers, or expressing differing opinions from family values.
- **Experimentation:** Teenagers like to experiment with new styles, hobbies, or sometimes risky behaviors like staying out late or breaking minor rules. This is all part of their search for their own identity.
- **Privacy:** Teenagers seeking more privacy is common. They may lock their doors or avoid family gatherings. This is all part of developing a sense of self.
- **Academic Variability:** Fluctuations in academic performance can occur as teens work to balance it all, including school, a social life, and other responsibilities. A temporary drop in grades is normal during this adjustment period.

CONCERNING BEHAVIOR SIGNS

- **Severe Mood Swings or Prolonged Sadness:** While mood swings are normal, extreme changes or constant sadness could be signs of depression or other mental health issues. Watch out for signs of hopelessness, withdrawal from activities they once enjoyed, or talk of self-harm.
- **Extreme Changes in Behavior:** Sudden and drastic changes in behavior may point to underlying issues. Examples include a well-behaved teen getting into serious trouble.
- **Academic Decline:** A lack of interest in school or a consistent drop in grades could be a sign of other problems. This may include learning disabilities, mental health issues, or something else.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Unexplained physical ailments, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, significant weight loss or gain, or self-harm behaviors like cutting are red flags that need immediate attention.
- **Social Withdrawal:** Seeking independence and privacy is normal, but complete withdrawal from friends and family is concerning. Observe your teen to see if they stop participating in activities they once enjoyed or isolate themselves for long periods of time.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- **Maintain Open Communication:** Encourage open and non-judgmental communication. Let your teens know they can talk to you about anything. Listen to them with empathy and without interrupting, scolding, or telling them how to feel. If they don't feel comfortable talking with you, give them the option to speak with a trusted person, like a relative, coach, or teacher.
- **Monitor Behavior:** Observe for significant changes in behavior and ask them about it but remember to respect their boundaries or needs for privacy. Focus on consistent patterns versus isolated incidents.
- **Provide Support:** Be supportive and understanding. Offer them help rather than punishment when they face challenges.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If you notice concerning or harmful behaviors as self-harm, substance misuse, or other red flags, don't hesitate to seek help. Professionals like counselors, psychologists, or pediatricians can help and provide early intervention.

Marine Corps Community Services is here for you and your family! If you are looking to get your teen involved in extracurricular activities, please contact Child and Youth Programs or Youth Sports. If your teen is showing concerning behavior, please reach out to Community Counseling or your child's medical provider for help and support.

