



African Population and
Health Research Center

BECOMING BETTER PARENTS: GUIDELINES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT





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Published by the African Population and Health Research Center

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First Published 2013, Second Printing, 2014

Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the following for their contribution in this publication.

African Population and Health Research Center staff: Dr. Benta Abuya, Nelson Muhia, Shem Mambe, Milkah Nyariro (former APHRC) and Maurice Mutisya (former APHRC), with support of Dr. Moses Ngware the Head of Education and Youth Empowerment Unit. **Miss Koch Kenya staff:** Emmie Erondanga, Mary Njambi and Chris Wasike. **U-Tena Youth Organization:** Peter Mokaya, Nicholas Kyalo, Jonathan Nzuki, Anthony Mutuku and Albert Ongechi (late) and our **Consultant** Esther Ng'ang'a.

Edited by: Siobhan Editorial Consulting Ltd.

Printed in Nairobi, Kenya

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About the African Population and Health Research Center

The African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) is a premier research institution and think tank, generating evidence to drive policy action to improve the health and wellbeing of Africans. As an African-led global research Center invested in creating legacy impact, our work is centered in three programmatic areas of Research, Research Capacity Strengthening and Policy Engagement and Communications. Our research addresses important development issues and challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa in areas such as education, population, health, aging, urbanization and well-being. Our mission is to generate evidence, strengthen research and related capacity for the Africa R&D ecosystem, and engage policy to inform action on health and development. In order to do this APHRC employs four key values of fairness, integrity, respect and excellence.



Introduction

Research evidence shows that parental involvement plays a pivotal role in motivating children to study, as well as improving their wellbeing (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2007; Wilder, 2014). For instance, studies conducted by APHRC in urban informal settlements show that parental engagement and subsequent involvement in their children's education plays an important role in instilling significant positive aspirations; enhancing adolescent resilience to resist negative peer influence; significantly reducing aggressive, rebellious, and reckless behaviors; improving parent-child communication and relationship; embracing of positive discipline strategies; and enhanced parental monitoring on their children's academic performance, homework support, friends and their whereabouts as well as spending more time with their families (Abuya et al., 2015; Abuya et al., 2019; Muhia, 2019).

In addition, active parental involvement has a significant positive effect on students numeracy and literacy scores (Mahuro & Hungu, 2016). When parents are involved in their children education, students report more effort, concentration, attention, interest in learning, seek challenging tasks, persist through academic challenges, experience satisfaction in schoolwork, and are more motivated to read and voluntarily participate in literacy activities (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). Parental involvement is not only associated with enhanced academic performance but also with reduced school absenteeism (Hayes, 2012).

Studies also recommend that if both parents are involved, the academic gains for their children are likely to be higher (Perriell, 2015).

Parental involvement is also associated with sexual reproductive health and rights for adolescent girls. For instance, enhanced parental involvement, monitoring and relationship with parents are associated with less likelihood of engaging in sexual activity, experiencing sexual violence and engaging in drug and substance use (McBride et al., 2005; Pilgrim & Blum, 2012). In addition, parent-adolescent communication on sexual reproductive health issues is linked to reduced prevalence of adolescent pregnancy (Kassa, Arowojolu, Odukogbe, & Yalew, 2018). This is especially important considering that adolescents would prefer to discuss sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues with their parents as compared to their teachers and peers (Abuya et al., 2019).

Parental involvement has also been associated with improved wellbeing among children. For instance, in a study by Flouri and Buchanan (2003) parental involvement was found to significantly contribute to their children's happiness. Studies also indicate that children who discuss about the importance of education and future education plans with their parents tend to do better emotionally (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Policy advancements

Following the realization that parents in Kenya are less involved in parenting and learning processes of their children due to various reasons such as changes in family structure, economic reasons, and technological advancements, the Ministry of Education through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development came up with the Guidelines on parental empowerment and engagement (KICD, 2019). The Guidelines are designed as a tool for learning institutions to strengthen parents' capacity in parenting and involvement in the education of their children.

The A LOT-Change program

Motivated by the myriad of challenges affecting adolescents in urban informal settlements, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in partnership with Miss Koch Kenya (MKK) and U-Tena Youth Organization initiated an after-school support program titled, the Advancing Learning outcomes for Transformational Change (A LOT-Change) targeting adolescents and their parents/guardians in Korogocho and Viwandani in 2013. The first phase (2013-2015) only targeted adolescent girls in grades 6-8 and comprised of homework support in numeracy and literacy, life skills mentoring, parental counseling, and transition to secondary school subsidy. From the successes of the initial phase, the intervention was scaled up in phase 2 (2016-18) to include a leadership component and also target both adolescent boys and girls, with the other components remaining the same as was in Phase I. ALOT Change Phase III (2019-2022) was a follow-up study of the Phase II cohort who transitioned to secondary school in 2019. The main objectives for the this phase was to test the feasibility of implementing the A LOT-Change model among older adolescents and to establishing the sustainability of the effects of the intervention as observed in Phase II on the adolescents in secondary school. The intervention components in Phase III were mentorship in soft skills, exposure visits and motivational talks, service learning, guidance and counseling of parents, holiday homework support and digital literacy. Parental involvement was a key component of the intervention in all the phases.

Parental involvement manual

Taking into consideration the benefits of parental involvement in improving the education and wellbeing of children, APHRC in partnership with MKK, U-Tena Youth Organization and Esther Ng'ang'a a lead consultant in project management in health programs and counselling

developed a manual designed for parents of adolescents aged 10-19 years. The manual is meant to be used by programs and institutions or individual parents who would like to impart or gain knowledge and skills on positive parents to enable them effectively get involved in their children education and wellbeing. In addition, parents also learn how to take care of their own wellbeing. The topics covered in this manual include: understanding yourself, understanding your child, parent–child communication, drugs and substance abuse, HIV and AIDS among adolescents and young people, effective parenting, parents’ hopes and dreams for their child, providing psychosocial support for the children, parent-child communication and sexual risk behavior, and parenting in the digital era.

How to use the manual

The manual is meant to be used by a group of parents with the help of a facilitator who guides the group discussions. In the case of the A LOT-Change program, the parents/guardians of adolescents who were enrolled in an after-school support program were organized in support groups of up to 20 members and facilitated by a trained counsellor. The parental support groups met on a monthly basis for up to two hours to go through each of the eleven sessions as well as learn and share their parenting experiences. It is however important to note that the sessions are not mutually independent and thus the manual should be used more as a guide and source of information when discussing different parenting issues that parents bring to the support group. As much as it is encouraged to be structured by following the chronological order of the sessions, parents should also be encouraged to discuss emerging issues. The group will then decide whether the issue needs to be discussed on the same day or at a later date. Other materials such as online resources could also be referred to for information during the discussions.

It is encouraged to ensure that both male and female parents and guardians attend the sessions. The date and time for the sessions should be agreed upon by the parental support group members to enable majority of them attend. Parents in the A LOT-Change program held their meetings in the afternoons during the weekend. Considering that parents have a myriad of competing activities, the dates should be set early in the year to enable parents plan themselves. It is also hoped that once these parents are empowered, there will be a positive snowball effect as the parents interact and share the ideas learned with other community members.

Guidance for the facilitator

The participation of the parents is important to the success of the intervention with parents. The facilitator shall welcome the parents to the session and create a friendly and conducive environment in line with the principles of adult learning. Adult education requires both active participation and applicable teachings that are meaningful to their everyday lives. The first impression created by the facilitator is very important; it will determine the parents' interest level, future ownership and commitment to the course material. Parents who remain engaged throughout the sessions will likely continue using the life skills long after the intervention is phased out. Rules and regulations make a group more organized, harmonized, orderly and well-coordinated. During the first session, the facilitator should work with the group to develop ground rules/norms. Once participants have suggested the ground rules, then the facilitator should lead the whole group in an open discussion on how each of the rules should be implemented and

adhered to during all subsequent sessions. Ground rules may include, but are not limited to:

1. Respect all opinions
2. No right or wrong answers
3. No speaking out of turn
4. Address issues and not personalities
5. Time management and flexibility
6. Exercise tolerance
7. Equal chances to contribute
8. Regular attendance of all sessions
9. Responsible use of technology.

Note: Adults who support the educational and career development of adolescents help them gain self-confidence, an important requirement for a positive and healthy future. Parenting is an adventure to be enjoyed and not to be endured. Parents, therefore, need to be well-informed and committed to reach out and support their teenage children in word and action. Many parents feel inadequate or ill-prepared for the teenage years, and many give up too soon. Therefore, it is important to persevere and share with each other the knowledge gathered through our various experiences as parents. It is also important to note that parenting could be either through birth or adoption. Therefore, facilitators are encouraged to use the words parents and guardians interchangeably.

SESSION ONE: UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

Learning objectives

By the end of the sessions the parents should be able to:

- a) discover their individual uniqueness;
- b) identify the benefits of self-acceptance;
- c) identify their strengths and weaknesses;
- d) differentiate situations in life that can be changed and those that cannot be changed.

Duration: 40 minutes

Definition of key terms

Self-esteem is a feeling of having respect for yourself and your abilities.

Self-awareness means having a clear perception/picture/idea of your personality, including strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivation, and emotions.

Self-confidence is the belief in oneself and abilities; it describes an internal state made up of what we think and feel about ourselves.

Self-worth is the feeling that you are a good person who deserves to be treated with respect.

Self-acceptance is an individual's satisfaction or happiness with oneself, and is thought to be necessary for good mental health.

Notes to the facilitator

The purpose of this session is to help parents understand themselves first so as to be able to reach out in support of their children. Our focus will be to help parents evaluate their current position and build their self-esteem so as to understand the importance of their role in shaping the destiny of their children. A parent who has low self-esteem may unknowingly pass it on to the children or even vent their anger and frustration on the children. The opposite is also true; a confident parent is likely to pass the same down the line. Due to poverty levels in the informal settlements, most parents and their children constantly compare themselves with others outside the slums and wish their lives could change. Most people want to have more money, good housing, good clothes, and good food for their children. These wishes for a better life make one vulnerable to the pressures of engaging in unlawful and risky behaviour, which could endanger their lives and ruin the future of their children.

The purpose of this lesson is to help parents of these teenage children to first understand themselves, their potential, their emotions, their position in life and society, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Parents should understand their influence on their teenage children's lives and hence their power to either destroy or build their children's feeling of self-worth through their daily interactions.

Introduction:

The facilitator shall say:

Today we start an exciting journey exploring life issues that we are experiencing as we shape up our children's future. I would like us to have open discussions. Your active participation will be useful to

achieve our goal as a team. There will be no right or wrong answer because we are all learning and have different life experiences. If you have confidential concerns or questions, write them anonymously and drop them in that question box (point at it). In the next session there will be a chance to answer your questions and this process will be kept confidential.

In the coming weeks, we will be discussing your role in your children's development and how you can be a mentor and a source of support to your children. We shall also look into how to help children set goals in life and make the right choices. We will start this journey by first discovering who we are as parents. During this session and the coming ones, we will learn through discussions, storytelling and role-playing. It shall be a fruitful journey worth your time.

Story and discussion [10 minutes]

Today I have a story of Maria who lives in Kiamaiko slums. She is 29 years old and a mother of three children aged 14, 12 and 8 respectively. She is a single mother because the father of her children abandoned her for another rich woman when life became economically unbearable. After a long wait, Maria decided to take action and joined a self-help group at her local church, which assisted her to begin a small green grocer business. Her hard work started yielding fruit as her business grew tremendously. Through it, she has been able to comfortably feed, school and cloth her children.

However, something new is happening to Maria. She joined a women's group (*chama*) and has made new friends who, in her opinion, seem to be doing better than her. So she has started feeling inadequate due to peer influence and pressure from her friends. Despite her

thriving business, Maria feels compelled to close down her green grocer business and join her friends who sell imported merchandise from China. That is what she considers trendy as compared to her green grocer.

She is forgetting that her friends' circumstances are completely different from hers. For instance, their children are much older than hers and they also have husbands or relatives with whom they can leave their children when they travel. Some of their children are also in boarding schools, which are apparently very expensive.

She feels very bad that she has no such support and even considers looking for a man who could support her financially, no matter the risks involved.

If Maria changes her business abruptly without enough thought and planning, she will be putting her family's lives at risk. Getting new customers for new products is not easy and she also needs more capital to start this business. Because of all these things, she is confused and is even considering leaving this *Chama* which gives her loans.

Open discussion

1. How does Maria view herself?
2. List the things that she does not like.
3. List things that she could change about her situation.
4. List the things she cannot change about her situation.
5. What advice would you give to her or a friend in a similar situation?
6. What are the benefits of being content with yourself just as you are?

7. What does it mean to respect yourself and how does this influence your relationship with your children?

After the discussion say: Each one of us is unique with God-given potential. When this potential is discovered, it can help us get our life dreams realized. Do you believe that you have unique given talents?

Review the activity

- What did you learn today that could help you accept yourself as you are?
- How can this help you to be a better role model to your child?
- List five unique talents that you possess?

Listen to the responses and conclude the lesson.

This week, take time to deliberately reflect on your life and make a list of five of your unique qualities. Likewise, deliberately encourage your children and help them feel that they are special. The next time we meet we will share what happened when you did this.

Key message

Everybody is unique; understand yourself and understand your teenager.

SESSION TWO: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

Review the previous session using the questions on page 9 and page 10.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session the parents should be able to:

- a) understand their children's developmental stages;
- b) help teenagers to select their friends and identify role models;
- c) learn how to cope with the physical and emotional changes in teenagers.

Duration: 40 minutes

Notes to the facilitator

In line with the previous session, it is important to increase parents' knowledge of their children's development. In this session, parents will learn how that may influence their children's participation in safe and healthy behaviours. Teenage years are a period of intense growth, physically, morally, emotionally and intellectually. It is, therefore, understandable that it is a time of confusion and upheaval for many families.

Despite some adults' negative perception of' teens, they are often energetic, thoughtful, and idealistic, with a deep interest in what is fair and right. Although it can be a period of conflict between parent and child, the teen years are also a time to help children grow into the distinct individuals that they will eventually become. But it is important

to make a distinction between puberty and adolescence. Puberty is the development of adult sexual characteristics; breasts, menstrual periods (ovulation), wet dreams (ejaculations), stronger muscles, Adam's apple, increased stature, pubic hair, and facial hair. These are certainly the most visible signs of puberty and impending adulthood, but children who are showing physical changes (between the ages of 12 and 19) can also be going through a bunch of emotional changes that are not visible from the outside. These emotional changes are the changes of adolescence.

The proper role of the parent is to provide encouragement, support and access to activities that enable the child to master key developmental tasks. A parent is their child's first teacher and should remain their best teacher throughout life. Functioning as a coach, the parent exposes a child to age appropriate challenges to encourage development as well as to experiences that allow the child to explore on their own and learn from interacting with their environment. Child development specialists have learned that from birth children are goal directed to experiment and learn from each experience.

A parent needs to provide the necessary support for a child to allow them to safely and productively explore and learn from their environment. The information here provides parents with the knowledge and guidelines and tools to give the support, guidance and learning experiences necessary for their child to grow and develop according to his/her unique developmental blueprint.

Understanding your child

Understanding your child is one of the most important things that you should appreciate as a parent. It is very helpful in becoming effective

enough to guide and nurture your child as he/she grows and matures. You need to bear in mind that your child has a unique personality trait that remains consistent throughout life. However, there are some personality traits that may vary in future.

One of the ways a parent can understand his/her child is by giving him/her a role and then **observing** how the child carries out the role. Look for the consistent traits. Which activities do they like best? Is adjusting to changes easy for them or do they need time to become familiar with these physical and emotional changes? These changes are the normal characteristics of a child and your child may not be an exception.

As much as possible parents must purpose to set aside time to talk to their children. This is crucial to gaining information and understanding. In the case of young children, they require less verbal language and more facial expression and body language in order to understand their thoughts and feelings. Asking them specific questions will allow them to share their feelings with you. For example, rather than asking them what they did in school, ask them what they built with their blocks today. Instead of asking them if they played with their playmate, focus on the game they played.

Another way of understanding your child is by assessing at their environment in order to learn about a certain behaviour that you have observed. Relatives, childcare providers, friends, teachers, the community, the home setting, and other aspects of the environment can play a crucial role in the behaviour of your child. For example, if your child is showing aggressiveness towards other children at school, you may want to find out all the possible sources of their aggressive behaviour.

Some possible angles would be their association with another child who is showing aggressive tendencies as well. The environment at home is another possible source for such behaviour. Have there been

conflicts and arguments at home lately that were seen by your child? What about conflicts in the wider community? These are some angles that you should consider when trying to find the reason behind your child's aggressive behaviour.

In addition, you can learn about your child by observing other children belonging to the same age group. Bear in mind that you went through the same stages as a child. However, the speed of development through each stage is a personal thing. By understanding your child's development, you would be able to provide them with opportunities as well as play things that can boost their development and prepare them for the next phase of their growth. At the same time, you would be able to set expectations and limits that are acceptable to your child.

Being a responsible parent is hard especially in this day and age when parents spend more time working rather than being with their children. Finding quality time is difficult when juggling between corporate life and parenthood. Finding time to be with and understand your child is one effective way of becoming successful in the art of parenting.

Teenage years are a period of intense growth—physically, morally, emotionally and intellectually. It is, therefore, understandable that it is a time of confusion and upheaval for many families.

Despite some adults' negative perception about teens, they are often energetic, thoughtful, and idealistic, with a deep interest in what is fair and right. Although it can be a period of conflict between parent and child, the teen years are also a time to help them grow into the distinct individuals that they will eventually become. It is important to make a distinction between puberty and adolescence. Most of us think of puberty as the development of adult sexual characteristics; breasts, menstrual periods (ovulation), wet dreams (ejaculations), stronger muscles, Adam's apple, increased stature, pubic hair, and facial hair. These are certainly the most visible signs of puberty and impending adulthood, but children who are showing physical changes (between

ages 12 and 19) can also be going through a lot of changes (such as emotions) that are not visible from the outside. These non-visible changes are referred to as **adolescence**.

As children enter the teenage years, friends will become more important. Positive, accepting and supportive friendships help teenagers develop towards adulthood.

Why teenage friendships are important

For teenagers, good friends can be like a **personal support group**. They can provide:

- a) a sense of belonging, a feeling of being valued and help with developing confidence;
- b) a sense of security and comfort in being with others going through the same experiences;
- c) a source of information about the changes that puberty brings, and what is going on physically and emotionally;
- d) a way to experiment with different values, roles, identities and ideas;
- e) experience in getting along with people of the opposite sex (friendships before the teenage years are often single sex);
- f) a chance to experience early romantic and sexual relationships.

Helping your child build friendship skills

Teenagers might be focused on their friends, but they still need your help and support to build and maintain positive and supportive friendships.

Good parent–child relationships tend to lead to positive relationships with peers. Therefore, being warm and supportive, staying connected and actively listening to your child can help with the development of friendship skills. You will also be able to support your child better if friendship problems come up.

Being a good role model is important too. Parents who are keen to spend time with their own friends are more likely to have children with lots of healthy friendships. It is also important for your child to see you looking out for your friends, and showing that friendship is a two-way thing.

Praising teenagers when you see them being fair, trusting and supportive of others encourages them to keep working on those positive social traits.

Helping teenagers who find it hard to make friends

All children are different. Not all will be outgoing and socialize with a big group of friends. If your child is like this, but seems generally happy and content, there is no need to do anything.

But if your child has trouble making friends and is worried by that, there are a few things you can do together:

Think about your child's interests and strengths. Based on this, you could look for new extracurricular activities for your child or encourage your child to join a club, sporting team or social group. Mixing with people who share similar interests is a great way to start friendships. If making friends at school seems to be the problem, a group or activity outside school can help your child build friendship skills and confidence.

Spend time with extended family and family friends. Plan an outing where your child can spend time with people who already know him.

Help the child plan an activity with friends. This could be watching a movie at home, having a sleepover or a baking afternoon, or playing some sport at the local playground.

Make sure the child feels comfortable inviting friends home, and give them plenty of space when she/he does.

Think about a part-time job or volunteer community activity. Working, particularly in a place with other young employees or volunteers, can give a child a chance to practise social skills as well as build job skills for the future.

Try to find out whether there are particular issues that are making it difficult for your child to make friends, such as lack of opportunity, lack of particular social skills or lack of confidence. You might want to ask for professional advice for complex issues.

Give your child lots of praise and encouragement to build self-esteem. Try not to pressure your child about friends or constantly discuss the situation.

Presentation and discussion [20 minutes]

Understanding your children's body changes is a process and not a one-time event. When, exactly, does adolescence start? The focus here is to understand that everybody is different. Adolescents' experiences vary; there are early bloomers, late arrivers, speedy developers, and slow-but-steady growers. In other words, there is a wide range of what is considered normal.

Many children announce the onset of adolescence with a dramatic change in behaviour around their parents. They start to separate from parents and become more independent. At the same time, children of this age are increasingly aware of how others, especially their peers, view them and are desperately trying to fit in. In terms of making decisions they consult more with their peers than with their parents.

Parents are likely to misunderstand the teenagers and take offence. It is, therefore, important to emphasize on the importance of parents understanding that this behaviour is normal. Similarly, the parents need to know who their children's friends are at this age by getting interested and being involved in their world.

1. How can you help teenagers choose good friends?
2. How do your children deal with peer pressure?
3. Who are your children's friends?
4. Do you allow your children to bring their in friends home?
5. Do you talk to the parents of your children's friends?

It is said, "you can tell a man's character by the company he keeps." Our friends are very important, not only because they are there for us, but also because they influence our character and attitudes. We may want to be friends with someone who is popular in the hope that we too will be popular. Or someone may have something that we really want and the best way to get it would be to befriend them first. At times it may be that we want someone we can control, so we look for a friend who will do what we want. Sometimes we think that if friends join us in our rebellious schemes, it makes it easier, and we feel safer in a team. Also, we may want friends for company, to take away our loneliness and boredom, and keep our minds busy.

All these reasons are selfish. If we make friends for selfish reasons, we use them until we do not need them anymore, then we discard them. That hurts and brings in feelings of guilt while the other party feels betrayed.

At times, we choose bad friendships knowingly because they are readily available or popular. Other times we do so to meet other people's

expectations. For example, associations with family, friends and neighbours can lead us to friendships that may not be of our choice.

When choosing friends, we must not force our children to be part of the deal. We should not make such unreasonable demands on the children but rather, advise them on important qualities to consider when choosing friends.

Such qualities include:

- common interests
- admirable uniqueness.
- respecting the fact that people are different.
- not being obsessive and possessive of you as a friend.
- willing to correct you when you are on the wrong while remaining understanding and caring.
- respecting your differences, principles and boundaries.

Facilitator: Hence the most important question to parents is, How well do you know your children's friends?

Appreciation for body changes

Children often start "trying on" different looks and identities, and they become very aware of how they differ from their peers, which can result in episodes of distress and conflict with parents. Hence talking to your children is key (ask how much do parents talk to their children) as you introduce the principles of good communication.

Review and action plan [10 minutes]

Ask: What did you learn today that could help you understand your growing children better?

This week let us strive to discuss with our children the changes they are going through at this stage in life. Let us also go out of our way to get to know their friends.

Key message

Be flexible as your child experiences changes and seek to be involved in their lives.

SESSION THREE: PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

Review the previous session and answer questions on page 18.

Introduce the topic of parent-child communication

Learning objectives

By the end of this session, the parents should be able to:

- a) communicate positively with children;
- b) know how to intervene during conflict;
- c) avoid negative communication;
- d) use communication builders.

Duration: 40 minutes

Communication is the sending/receiving of information from one person to another. Communication can be verbal, for example, one person talking to another, or it can be non-verbal, for example frowns on a person's face that will probably let other people know he/she is angry. Communication can be positive or negative, effective or ineffective.

It is very important for parents to be able to communicate openly and effectively with their children. Open, effective communication benefits not only the children, but every member of the family.

Relationships between parents and their children are greatly improved when there is effective communication taking place. In general, if communication between parents and their children is good, then their relationships are good as well.

Children learn how to communicate by watching their parents. If parents communicate openly and effectively, chances are that their children will, too. Good communication skills will benefit children for their entire lives.

Children begin to form ideas and beliefs about themselves based on how their parents communicate with them. When parents communicate effectively with their children, they are showing them respect. Children then begin to feel that they are heard and understood by their parents, which is a boost to self-esteem. On the other hand, communication between parents and children that is ineffective or negative can lead children to believe that they are unimportant, unheard, or misunderstood. Such children may also view their parents as unhelpful and untrustworthy.

Parents who communicate effectively with their children are more likely to have children who are willing to do what they are told. Such children know what to expect from their parents, and once children know what is expected of them, they are more likely to live up to these expectations. They are also more likely to feel secure in their position in the family, and are thus more likely to be cooperative.

Ways to Communicate Positively With Children

1. Start communicating effectively while children are young.

Before parents and their children can communicate, both must feel comfortable enough to do so. While their children are very young, parents should begin setting the stage for open, effective communication. Parents can do this by making themselves available to their children when they have questions or just want to talk. Furthermore, parents who provide their children with plenty of love, understanding and acceptance are helping to

create a climate for open communication. Children who feel loved and accepted by their parents are more likely to open up.

Sometimes it is easier for parents to feel acceptance for their children than it is to actually show it. Parents must demonstrate to their children that they love and accept them in both verbal and non-verbal ways.

Verbally, parents can let their children know they accept them through what they say. Parents should try to send positive messages to their children. For example, when a child picks up his toys after he or she is finished with them, parents can let him or her know that they appreciate it by saying something like, “I appreciate it when you pick up your toys without being told.” When talking with their children, parents should be careful of what they say and how they say it. Everything parents say to their children sends a message about how they feel about them. For example, if a parent says something like “Don’t bother me now. I’m busy,” their children may wind up thinking that their wants and needs are not important.

Non-verbally, parents can show their children they accept them through gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal behaviours. Parents should try to eliminate behaviour that gets in the way of effective communication like yelling and not paying attention to their children. Practice makes perfect: parents must learn to show acceptance in ways their children will emulate.

2. Communicate at your children’s level.

When parents communicate with their children, it is important for them to come down to their children’s level both verbally and physically. Verbally, parents should try to use ageappropriate language that their children can easily understand. With younger

children, this can be done by using simple words. For example, young children are much more likely to understand a direction such as, “No hitting your sister,” as opposed to “It is not acceptable to hit your sister.” Parents should try to know what their children are able to understand and they should try not to communicate in ways that their children are not able to understand. Physically, parents should not, for example, dominate their children when talking or communicating with them.

Instead, they should try to come down to their children’s level by lowering themselves, either by kneeling, sitting, rounding shoulders, etc. This will make eye contact much easier to maintain, and children are much less likely to feel intimidated by parents when they are eye to eye.

3. Learn how to really listen.

Listening is a skill that must be learned and practised. Listening is an important part of effective communication. When parents listen to their children, they show them that they are interested and they care about what their children have to say. Here are some important steps to becoming a good listener:

a) Make and maintain eye contact.

Parents who do this are showing their children that they are involved and interested. Children might get just the opposite message - which is their parents are not interested in what they are saying - if minimal eye contact is made.

b) Eliminate distractions.

When children express a desire to talk, parents should give them their undivided attention. They should put aside what they were doing, face their children, and give them their undivided attention. If parents, for example, continue to read the paper or to watch television while their children are trying

to communicate with them, children may get the message that their parents aren't interested in what they have to say, or that what they have to say is not important. If children express a desire to talk at a time that the parent is unable to, parents can schedule a time later on to talk with their children.

c) **Listen with a closed mouth.**

Parents should try to keep the interruptions to a minimum while their children are speaking. They can offer encouragement, for example through a smile or a touch, without interrupting. Interruptions often break the speaker's train of thought, and this can be very frustrating.

d) **Let your children know they have been heard.**

After children are done talking, parents can show them that they have been listening by restating what was said, only in slightly different words. For example, "Boy, it sounds like you really had a good day in school." Not only will this let children know that their parents have been listening, but it will also offer an opportunity for clarification if the parents are misinterpreting the message their children are trying to get across.

4. **Keep conversations brief.**

It is very difficult especially for the younger children to sit at one place for a long time listening to a speech. One good rule for parents is to speak to young children for not longer than 30 seconds, then ask them to comment on what was said. The goal is for parents to pass on information a little at a time while checking that their children are paying attention to and understanding what is being said at regular intervals. Parents should let their children decide when enough is enough. Parents can look for clues that their children have had enough. Some clues include playing, lack of eye contact, and distractibility. Parents need to know when to communicate with their children, but they also need to know when to back off.

5. Ask the right questions.

Some questions help conversations along, while some can stop conversations. Parents should try to ask open-ended questions in their conversations with their children. Such questions often require an in-depth response that will keep a conversation going. Open-ended questions that begin with the words “what,” “where,” “whom,” or “how” are often very useful in getting children to open up. Parents should try to avoid asking questions that require only a yes or no answer. While asking the right questions can help a conversation along, parents need to be careful not to ask too many questions while conversing with their children. When this happens, conversations can quickly turn into interrogations, and children will be much less likely to open up.

6. Express your own feelings and ideas when communicating with children.

For communication to be effective, it must be a two-way street. Not only must parents be available and listen to their children for effective communication to take place, they must also be willing to share their own thoughts and feelings with their children. Parents can teach their children many things, for example morals and values, by expressing their thoughts and feelings. When expressing their ideas and feelings, however, parents must be careful to do so in a non-judgmental way. It seems logical that the more parents open up to their children, the more their children will open up to them.

7. Regularly schedule family meetings or time to talk.

One very useful communication tool for families with older children is the regularly scheduled time to talk. This can be done in a number of ways. One common way is the family meeting. Family meetings can be scheduled, for example, once a week, or whenever there is

something that the family needs to discuss. Families can use family meeting time to iron out the details of daily living, for example chores, curfews and bedtimes. Family meeting time can also be used to air grievances and to talk about problems. It can also be used to talk about positive things that have occurred during the last week. It is important that each family member is given time to talk to and be heard by all.

Regularly scheduled times to talk and communicate do not have to be as formal as the family meeting. For example, families can use the dinner hour each night as a time to catch up with each other. Parents can also set aside time to play communication games, such as picking specific topics of discussion and giving everyone in the family a chance to express their opinions. It is important that families set aside time at regular intervals to communicate with one another.

8. Admit it when you do not know something.

When children ask questions that their parents cannot answer, they should admit that they do not know. Parents can use such instances as learning experiences. For example, parents can teach their children how to get the information they are looking for by taking them to the library, using the encyclopedia, etc. It is far better for parents to show their children that they are human and thus do not know everything than it is to make up some answers that might not be true.

9. Try to make explanations complete.

When answering their children's questions, parents should try to give them as much information as they need, even if the topic is something parents do not feel comfortable discussing. This does not mean that parents must go into great detail. It is just important that parents know how much information their children need and

then give it to them. Parents should ensure that the information they give their children is age-appropriate. Parents should also encourage their children to ask questions. This will help parents figure out just what information their children are looking for. Not giving enough information can lead children to draw conclusions that are not necessarily true.

Communicating during Conflicts

All families will have conflicts at one time or another. While such conflicts can be upsetting, they need not to be too disruptive. There are many different things that parents can do to smoothly get through conflicts and to keep the lines of communication open at the same time. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Work on one problem at a time.**

During conflicts, it is best to try to solve one problem at a time. It is not a good idea to bring up many different issues at once. This can be very confusing to both children and their parents. When this happens, families can quickly lose sight of the real issues.

2. **Look for creative ways to solve problems.**

When trying to solve conflicts, parents should try to keep in mind that there is usually more than one solution to any problem. Parents and children should work together to find solutions that are agreeable to all parties. Learning to be flexible when solving problems is a great skill for children to have. If one solution does not work, parents should be flexible enough to try alternative solutions.

3. **Be polite.**

Parents should not forget the ordinary rules of politeness simply because they are dealing with their children. During conflicts,

or at any other time, parents should treat their children with the same amount of respect that they would show to any other person. Children are human beings, too, and they deserve to be treated with respect. Sometimes during the heat of an argument or disagreement, parents say things to their children that they would never say to another relative or a close friend. Parents should make an effort to avoid this.

4. Use “I” messages.

When discussing conflicts with their children, parents should always try to state problems in terms of how they feel. For example, instead of saying something like “You never pick up your clothes like you are supposed to,” parents should try something like “I feel frustrated when you do not pick up your clothes.” By using ‘I’ messages, parents are telling their children how their behaviour makes them feel, instead of accusing or blaming. ‘I’ messages are effective because children are much less likely to resist or rebel against something that is stated in terms of how the parent feels.

Stating things in terms of ‘I’ messages is much less threatening to children than accusing or blaming. ‘I’ messages also show children how to take responsibility for their own actions. Parents who express their feelings in such a way are also teaching their children to do the same.

5. Be willing to forgive.

Teach your children to be forgiving by doing so yourself.

How to avoid Negative Communication

Unfortunately, many parents are not aware of just how often they use negative forms of communication with their children. These parents may, as a result, be planting the seeds of mistrust and low self-esteem

in their children. This is why it is important for parents to become aware of and to correct any negative forms of communication they may be using with their children. Below is a list of examples of negative communication parents should avoid. Parents should go through this list and identify any of these negative communication patterns that seem familiar. After identifying problem areas, parents can then begin making changes.

1. Nagging and lecturing.

Nagging is repeating something that has already been said. Lecturing is giving more information than is needed without stopping to listen to other opinions or ideas. Parents can avoid nagging and lecturing by keeping their conversations with their children brief. Parents should also keep in mind that as long as they have told their children something once, there is no need to say it again. Instead of nagging, parents should use a consequence other than nagging (for example, time-out) when their children do not do something they have been told to do. Nagging and lecturing cause children to stop listening or become defensive or hateful.

2. Interrupting.

When children are talking, parents should give them the opportunity to finish what they are saying before speaking themselves. This is common courtesy. Children who feel that they cannot get a word in edgewise (sideways) with their parents may stop communicating with them altogether.

3. Criticizing.

Parents should avoid criticizing their children's thoughts, feelings, ideas, and/or the children themselves. Children often see such criticisms as direct attacks, and the result can be lowered self-esteem. When necessary, parents should criticize behaviour, or what children have done, not the children themselves.

4. Dwelling on the past.

Once a problem or conflict is solved, parents should try not to revive it. Children should be allowed to start over on a clean slate. Parents who constantly bring up their children's past mistakes are teaching their children to hold grudges for long periods of time. Also, children need to know that once a matter is settled it remains settled.

5. Trying to control children through the use of guilt.

This involves trying to make children feel guilty because of their thoughts, feelings, and/or actions. Parents who use guilt to control their children could do great harm to their relationship with their children.

6. Using sarcasm.

Parents are using sarcasm when they say things they do not mean and imply the opposite of what they are saying through their tone of voice. An example is a parent saying something like, "Oh, aren't you grateful," when a child breaks something. The use of sarcasm hurts children. Sarcasm is never a useful tool for parents who are trying to effectively communicate with their children.

7. Telling your children how to solve their problems.

This happens when parents jump in and tell their children how they should do things instead of letting them have some input into solutions for problems. Parents who tell their children how to solve their problems may lead them to believe that they have no control over their own lives. Such children may end up believing that their parents do not trust them. Or, they may resent being told what to do and as a result resist their parents' directions.

8. Putting children down.

Put-downs can come in many different forms such as name-calling, ridiculing, judging and blaming. Put-downs are detrimental to effective communication. Put-downs can damage children's self-esteem. Children who are put down by their parents often feel rejected, unloved, and inadequate.

9. Using threats.

Threats are rarely effective. They often make children feel powerless and resentful of their parents.

10. Lying.

No matter how tempting it is to make up a lie, for example to avoid talking about uncomfortable topics like sex, parents should not do so. Parents should try to be open and honest with their children. This will encourage the children to be open and honest with their parents. Also, children are very perceptive. They are often very good at sensing when their parents are not being totally honest with them. This can lead to feelings of mistrust.

11. Denying children's feelings.

When children tell their parents how they feel, parents should not make light of these feelings. If, for example, a parent feels his or her child should not feel sad about losing a football game, he or she should not say so. Parents should instead say something supportive, for example, "I know you really wanted to win. It is hard to win sometimes." With younger children, this can be done by using simple, concrete words. Children need to have their feelings supported by their parents. Parents need to show their children understanding when it comes to their feelings. If they do not, the children will as a result feel misunderstood by their parents.

Communication Builders

Here are some examples of things parents can say to their children to help open the lines of communication:

- a) "I would like to hear about it."
- b) "Tell me more about that."
- c) "*Ongea* (speak out). I'm listening."
- d) "I understand."
- e) "What do you think about ...?"
- f) "Would you like to talk about it?"
- g) "Is there anything else you would like to talk about?"
- h) "That is interesting."
- i) "Wow!"
- j) "I am interested."
- k) "Explain that to me."

Effective, open communication takes a lot of hard work and practice. Parents should remember that they will not be perfect. Parents make mistakes. What is important is that parents make the effort to effectively communicate with their children starting when their children are very young. The result will be a much closer, positive relationship between parents and their children.

Knowledge application

What did you learn today that is important in improving communication with your children?

Key message

Keep communication channels between you and your teen as open as possible from an early age. Communicate regularly, honestly and consistently.

SESSION FOUR: DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Learning objectives

By the end of this session, the parents should be able to:

- a) Learn different types of drugs and their characteristics;
- b) Understand the effects of different types of drugs;
- c) Know the physical and behavioural signs of drug abuse;
- d) Understand how they can prevent drug abuse

Notes to the facilitators:

Sometimes parents are caught unawares and only come to realize that their children are involved in drugs and substance abuse when it is too late.

Definition

A drug is any substance which when introduced into the body will alter the normal functioning of the body.

Drug abuse is the habitual taking of addictive or illegal drugs.

Statistics of Drug Abuse in Kenya

A National Survey on Alcohol and Drug Abuse conducted by NACADA in 2012 shows that 13.3% of Kenyans are currently using alcohol, 9.1% tobacco, 1.0% bhang, and 0.1% heroin.

Overall, bhang is the most easily available illicit drug in the country at 49% followed by cocaine while heroin is the least available illicit drug in the country.

Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance in the country and poses the greatest harm to Kenyans as evidenced by the numerous calamities associated with excessive consumption and adulteration of illicit brews.

Among the different types of alcoholic drinks, traditional liquor is the most easily accessible type followed by wines and spirits and lastly *chang'aa*. At least 30% of Kenyans aged 15–65 have ever consumed alcohol; 13.3% of Kenyans, meaning at least 4 million currently, consume alcohol.

Since the previous survey in 2007, it is noted there has been a decline in the use of cigarettes (tobacco). Worrying, though, is that the median age of first use of all drugs has gone as low as 10 years.

Types and Effects of Drugs

Effects of Alcohol

1. *Immediate effects of alcohol on the brain and body*

The first few drinks affect judgment and reaction time. More alcohol causes reactions to become even more sluggish and delays physical coordination. Far too much alcohol can suppress some body functions and, in extreme cases, result in death.

2. *The physical effects of alcohol*

From the second you take your first sip, alcohol starts affecting your body and mind. After one or two drinks you may start feeling more sociable, but drink too much and basic human functions, such as walking and talking, become, much harder. You might also start saying things you do not mean and behaving out of character. Some of alcohol's effects disappear overnight, while others can stay with you a lot longer, or indeed become permanent.

If you drink heavily the night before, you will almost certainly wake up with a hangover. Alcohol irritates the stomach, so heavy drinking can cause sickness and nausea and sometimes diarrhea.

Alcohol also has a dehydrating effect, which is one reason why excessive drinking can lead to a thumping headache the morning after.

3. *Appearance*

Drinking too much alcohol is not good for your skin either. As well as causing bloating and dark circles under your eyes, alcohol dries out your skin and can lead to wrinkles and premature aging. If you drink heavily you may develop acne rosacea, a skin disorder that

starts with a tendency to blush and flush easily and can progress to facial disfiguration, a condition known as rhinophyma.

4. *Alcohol poisoning*

In the worst cases alcohol poisoning can cause lung damage (as you inhale your own vomit) and even lead to a heart attack. Many traditional 'cures', such as drinking black coffee, just do not work – they may even make things worse.

5 *Liver disease*

Liver disease used to affect mainly drinkers in middle age, but now sufferers are getting younger. Up to one in three adults drinks enough alcohol to be at risk of developing alcohol-related liver disease.

6. *Cancer*

Alcohol misuse is an important factor in a number of cancers, including liver cancer and mouth cancer, both of which are on the increase. Alcohol is second only to smoking as a risk factor for oral and digestive tract cancers including throat cancer.

Evidence suggests that this is because alcohol breaks down into a substance called acetaldehyde. This can cause a condition called acetaldehyde toxicity or acetaldehyde poisoning. When acetaldehyde enters your blood, it can damage membranes and cause scar tissue. This can trigger an inflammatory response from the body – in the most severe cases, cancerous cells can develop.

7. *Heart disease*

While studies suggesting that alcohol can help heart disease often hit the headlines, the reality is that the jury is still out on the extent of any benefits. And it is clear that any benefits which may exist are limited to very low levels of consumption – probably no more than 1 unit of alcohol per day.

8. Mental health

Alcohol alters the brain's chemistry and increases the risk of depression. It is often associated with a range of mental health problems. A recent British survey found that people suffering from anxiety or depression were twice as likely to be heavy or problem drinkers.

Heavy drinking often leads to work and family problems, which in turn can lead to isolation and depression. For heavy drinkers who drink daily and become dependent on alcohol, there can be withdrawal symptoms (nervousness, tremors, palpitations) which resemble severe anxiety, and may even cause phobias, such as a fear of going out.

9. Dependence

If you drink large quantities of alcohol on a regular basis you run the risk of becoming addicted. This can have serious effects on your family, friends and partners, as well as your mental health.

Effects of Tobacco

1. Respiratory problems such as increased coughing, phlegm, wheezing, chest colds and shortness of breath.
2. Serious ailments such as bronchitis, pneumonia, emphysema, strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, ear infections, osteoporosis and impotence.
3. Asthma attacks or increased asthma symptoms.
4. Dental problems such as yellow teeth, gum disease, tooth decay and tooth loss.
5. Dulled sense of smell and taste.

6. Cold fingers and toes.
7. Zits – It takes longer for a smoker's acne to heal.
 - Hair loss – even for some teens.
8. Low sperm count: Even teenage smokers have fewer than half as much sperm per ejaculate as non-smokers.
9. Premature wrinkling and related signs of premature aging.
10. Infertility, sudden infant death syndrome and low birth-weight babies.

Statistics and Trends

On average, smokers lose 15 years of life.

Tobacco kills 1,200 people A DAY.

Researchers estimate that 50% of smokers who began smoking when they were young will die of a smoking related illness.

Smokers have more colds than non-smokers because their bodies are not as efficient at clearing out germs. Four out of five lung cancers are caused by smoking.

Nine out of 10 people who get lung cancer die from the disease, usually within two years of diagnosis.

More people die from smoking than from AIDS, car accidents, suicide, murder, fires and other drugs COMBINED.

In Kenya, the current usage of tobacco products is 8.6%, and it is largely limited to males. Data shows that 16.8% of the males are current users of tobacco products. This contrasts sharply with 2.1% of the females.

1. Central Nervous System

Bhang affects the perception of time, distance, and speed. It upsets coordination, causing unsteady hands, a change in gait, uncontrolled laughter, and a lag between thought and facial expressions. Sexual functions are disturbed.

One may suffer illusions and hallucinations, difficulty in recalling events in the immediate past, slowed thinking and narrowed attention span, depersonalization, euphoria, depression, drowsiness, lack of sleep, difficulty in making accurate self-evaluation, a lowering of inhibition, loss of judgment, and mental and physical lethargy.

Heavy use over a long period of time causes permanent changes in the brain. It has been found, for instance, that the brains of young heavy users of cannabis reduce in size. The loss in brain substance is comparable to that normally found in people seventy to ninety years old. Progressive brain damage may explain the psychic changes that occur after heavy long-term use.

2. Respiratory system

Individuals who smoke bhang/hashish for long periods show a tendency toward bronchitis. The lungs of bhang users are more blackened than those of tobacco smokers because, to get an effect, cannabis smoke must be inhaled deeper and held longer in the lungs.

3. Effects on the hormonal system

Studies have shown that testosterone, the most potent of the male sex hormones, is depressed in the blood of bhang users, and

reproductive function is inhibited. Sperm counts are lower and there is a decrease in sperm motility and an increase in the number of abnormal sperm.

Bhang is anti-androgenic and the effects may translate into decreased libido and impaired fertility. In females, bhang causes hormonal disruption of the female reproductive cycle, a suppression of ovarian function and disorders of menstruation.

4. *The cell function*

The recent work with perhaps the broadest implication is that which shows the effect of cannabis on chromosomes that carry the hereditary information for each cell. Normal human cells except the reproductive cells contain 46 chromosomes in 23 pairs. Long-term users of psychotropic substances have a higher number of broken chromosomes hence leading to birth of malformed offspring.

Another serious implication of the damage to cells is the suppression of immune response. Diminished immune results through the interference with genes that regulate the defense cells.

Statistics and Trends

Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit substance globally, with an estimated annual prevalence in 2010 of 2.6–5.0% of the adult population (between 119 million and 224 million users aged 15–64 years).

Effects of Inhalants and Solvents

a) Short-term effects

Within seconds of inhalation, the user experiences intoxication along with other effects similar to those produced by alcohol. Alcohol-like effects may include slurred speech, an inability to coordinate movements, dizziness, confusion and delirium. Nausea

and vomiting are other common side effects. In addition, users may experience lightheadedness, hallucinations, and delusions.

b) Long-term effects

Compulsive use and a mild withdrawal syndrome can occur with long-term inhalant abuse. Additional symptoms exhibited by long-term inhalant abusers include weight loss, muscle weakness, disorientation, inattentiveness, lack of coordination, irritability, and depression.

After heavy use of inhalants, abusers may feel drowsy for several hours and experience a lingering headache. Because intoxication lasts only a few minutes, abusers frequently seek to prolong their feeling high by continuing to inhale repeatedly over the course of several hours. By doing this, abusers can suffer loss of consciousness and even death.

Effects of Heroin

Heroin is a powder obtained from the dried milk of the opium poppy plant. Pure heroin is white, but with impurities, it is brown powder commonly known as brown sugar. Other names by which heroin is known are *kichuri, kiketi, skag, junk, unga, pony, mzigo, stuff, boy, maponaji, prama, dabadaba, kete, joy powder, hard stuff, white stuff, horse, mwimbwi* among others.

Heroin is used as both a painkiller and a recreational drug and has high potential for abuse.

Effects of Cocaine

How Does Cocaine Affect the Brain?

Cocaine is a strong central nervous system stimulant that increases levels of dopamine, a brain chemical (or neurotransmitter) associated with pleasure and movement, in the brain's reward circuit. Certain brain cells, or neurons, use dopamine to communicate.

Normally, dopamine is released by a neuron in response to a pleasurable signal (e.g. the smell of good food), and then recycled back into the cell that released it, thus shutting off the signal between neurons. Cocaine acts by preventing the dopamine from being recycled, causing excessive amounts of the neurotransmitter to build up, amplifying the message to and response of the receiving neuron, and ultimately disrupting normal communication. It is this excess dopamine that is responsible for cocaine's euphoric effects. With repeated use, cocaine can cause long-term changes in the brain's reward system and in other brain systems as well, which may eventually lead to addiction. With repeated use, tolerance to the cocaine high also often develops.

Many cocaine abusers report that they seek but fail to achieve as much pleasure as they did from their first exposure. Some users will increase their dose in an attempt to intensify and prolong the euphoria, but this can also increase the risk of adverse psychological or physiological effects.

What Adverse Effects Does Cocaine Have on Health?

Abusing cocaine has a variety of adverse effects on the body. For example, cocaine constricts blood vessels, dilates pupils, and increases body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure. It can also cause headaches and gastrointestinal complications such as abdominal pain

and nausea. Because cocaine tends to decrease appetite, chronic users can become malnourished as well.

Regardless of the route or frequency of use, cocaine abusers can experience acute cardiovascular or cerebrovascular emergencies, such as a heart attack or stroke, which may cause sudden death. Cocaine-related deaths are often a result of cardiac arrest or seizure followed by respiratory arrest.

Statistics and Trends

Global cocaine use has remained stable at 0.3–0.4% of the population aged 15–64.

The current prevalence rate of cocaine is 0.1% in Kenya.

Prescription drugs

What Is Prescription Drug Abuse?

Prescription drug abuse is when someone takes a medication that was prescribed for someone else or takes their own prescription in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed. Abuse can include taking a friend's or relative's prescription to get high, to treat pain, or because you think it will help with studying. Pain killers and cough medicines are misused frequently.

How Are Prescription Drugs Abused?

It depends—some people take other people's drugs for their intended purposes (to relieve pain, to stay awake, or to fall asleep). Others take them to get high, often at larger doses than prescribed, or by a different route of administration.

What is wrong with Abusing Prescription Drugs?

Virtually every medication presents some risk of undesirable side effects, sometimes even serious ones. Doctors consider the potential benefits and risks to each patient before prescribing medications. They understand that drugs affect the body in many ways and take into account things like the drug's form and dose, its possible side effects, and the potential for addiction or withdrawal.

a) Side effects.

Prescription drugs are designed to treat a particular illness or condition, but they often have other effects on the body, some of which can be dangerous. Side effects can be made worse when prescription drugs are not taken as prescribed or are abused in combination with other substances—including alcohol, other prescription drugs, and even over-the-counter drugs, such as common cold medicines. Some combinations could affect breathing altogether, requiring emergency care, or worse—it could be fatal.

b) Withdrawal.

Taking drugs repeatedly over a period of time can cause changes in the body as well as the brain, resulting in physical dependence. When the body adapts to the drug's presence, and when its use is abruptly stopped, the person can experience withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal symptoms depend on the drug itself, and include nausea, chills, vomiting, muscle pain, and diarrhea. These symptoms can often be controlled or diminished with proper medical supervision.

HIV/AIDS and Drug abuse

Drug treatment is disease prevention. Drug treatment reduces the likelihood of HIV infection by 6 fold in injecting drug users. Drug treatment presents opportunities for screening, counseling, and referral.

Sources of Drugs

Parents need to know some common avenues for drugs such as, house parties, sleepover, shopping malls, social media, adult suppliers, for example security guards in estates, relatives, and organized events, e.g. church events, sporting events among others.

Physical Signs of Drug Abuse

- Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness
- Loss of or increase in appetite, changes in eating habits
- Cold, sweaty palms
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual
- Unusual smells on breath, body or clothes
- Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness
- Slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination
- Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom feet
- Nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating
- Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head
- Irregular heartbeat
- Running nose; hacking cough
- Puffy face, blushing, or paleness

- Frequent rubbing of the nose
- Frequent twisting of the jaw, back and forth
- Deterioration of hygiene or physical health

Behavioural Signs of Drug Abuse

- Change in overall attitude or personality with no other identifiable cause
- Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skip school or is late for school
- Change in activities or hobbies
- Chronic dishonesty
- Sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or disrespectful behaviour
- Difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness
- General lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, “I don’t care” attitude
- Change in habits at home, loss of interest in family and family activities
- Paranoia
- Silliness or giddiness
- Moodiness, irritability or nervousness
- Excessive need for privacy, unreachable
- Secretive or suspicious behaviour
- Car accidents
- Change in personal grooming habits
- Possession of drug paraphernalia
- Change in friends, friends who are known to be drug abusers

How Parents Can Prevent Drug Abuse

Research shows that the main reason that teenagers do not use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs is because of their parents – because of their positive influence and because they know it would disappoint them. That is why it is so important that parents build a strong relationship with their teens and talk to them about substance abuse – the earlier the better!

The good news is that it is easy to do! Here are a few ways you can build a positive relationship with your teens and start talking to them about drugs.

1. *Establish and maintain good communication with your children.*

Why? The better you know your children, the easier it will be to guide them towards positive activities and friendships.

How?

- a) Talk to your children every day. Share what happened to you and ask what happened to them during the day.
- b) Ask questions that kids cannot answer with “yes” or “no,” such as “What was your favorite part of the day?” Ask your children their opinions and include them in making decisions. Show your children that you value their thoughts and input.
- c) Be ready to talk to your children as early as the fourth grade, when they may first feel peer pressure to experiment with alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes.
- d) Listen to your child’s or teen’s concerns nonjudgmentally. Repeat them to make it clear that you understand. Do not preach.

2. Get involved in your children's lives.

Why? Young people are less likely to get involved with drugs when caring adults are a part of their life.

How?

- a) Spend time doing something your children want to do every day.
- b) Support your children's activities by attending special events, like recitals and games, and praising them for their efforts.
- c) Help your children manage problems by asking what is wrong when they seem upset and letting them know you are there to help.

3. Make clear rules and enforce them consistently.

Why? Research shows that when parents set harsh rules or no rules, kids are more likely to try drugs.

How?

- a) Discuss rules, expectations, and consequences in advance.
- b) If a rule is broken, be sure to enforce the consequences. This teaches children to take responsibility for their actions.
- c) Give praise when your children follow rules and meet expectations.

4. Be a positive role model.

Why? Children imitate adults.

How?

- a) Demonstrate ways to solve problems, have fun, and manage stress without using alcohol or drugs.

- b) Point out examples of irresponsible behaviour, such as ones you see in movies or hear in music.
- c) Remember that you set the example. Avoid contradictions between your words and your actions. Use alcohol in moderation, do not smoke cigarettes, and never use drugs.

5. Help your children choose friends wisely.

Why? When children have friends who do not engage in risky behaviours, they are likely to resist them too.

How?

- a) Help your kids feel comfortable in social situations.
- b) Get to know your children's friends and their families.
- c) Involve your children in positive group activities, such as sports teams, scouting troops, and after school programmes.

6. Talk to your children about drugs.

Why? When parents talk to their kids early and often about substance abuse, the kids are less likely to try drugs.

How?

- a) Short discussions go a long way. Engage your children in a conversation. Ask what they know, how they feel, and what they think about the issue.
- b) Talk to your children one-on-one and together.
- c) Educate yourself about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use before talking to your children. You will lose credibility if you do not have your facts right.
- d) Set some time aside for you and your child to act out scenarios in which one person tries to pressure another to drink alcohol, smoke, or use a drug. Figure out two or three ways to handle each situation and talk about which works best.

When?

Any time you spend together is the perfect time for a conversation.

Establish an ongoing conversation rather than giving a one-time speech.

What should I say?

- Explain the effects of drugs on the body and the legal consequences of using drugs.
- Make it clear that you do not want your kids to use drugs and that you will be disappointed if they do.
- Discuss why using drugs is not okay. Explain that it is against the law for a child or teen to use alcohol or cigarettes and that using drugs is always illegal—for good reason.
- Explain how drug use can hurt people in several ways—for example, the transmission of AIDS through shared needles, slowed growth, impaired coordination, accidents. Discuss the legal issues. A conviction for a drug offense can lead to time in prison or cost someone a job, driver's license, or college loan.
- If any of your children have tried drugs, be honest about your disappointment, but emphasize that you still love them.

Some commonly abused drugs by children living in the slums include: bhang, cocaine, tobacco, glue, jaba, moguka, miraa, chivees, muratina and msii/mafutayandegé. Msii is commonly abused by children who are in class 4–7, who use their handkerchief and sweaters to sniff it since it is affordable.

Activity

Break into groups of 3–8. Ask the participants to discuss the following in their small groups and then present their findings to the large group. Choose a chairperson to moderate the discussion and a secretary to record the proceedings. It is advised that gender balancing is taken into account.

Ask the following questions:

Group 1: What do you understand by the term substance use? Give examples of different types.

(You may get confusing answers for drug and substance use, but you need to clarify the difference).

Group 2: What causes teenagers to engage in substance abuse?

(Expect peer pressure, violence and dysfunctional families as part of the responses. If not included, you could add these to their list).

Group 3: What are the effects of substance use?

Group 4: What are the warning signs of problems in a teen's life?

Expect the following withdrawal signs: extreme weight loss or gain, sleep problems, rapid and drastic changes in personality, sudden change in friends, skipping school continually, and poor school performance etc.

Review

What did you learn today that will help you become a better parent to your teenage children?

Take home message: Drugs and substance abuse is real and parents can help identify and prevent as well as address it by walking alongside their children.

SESSION FIVE: HIV AND AIDS AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Review the previous session using the questions dropped in the question box.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, parents should be able to:

- a) understand the basics of HIV/AIDS;
- b) consider their children's vulnerability to STIs and HIV/AIDS
- c) identify prevention methods.

Duration: 40 minutes

Acronyms

AIDS Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

ARV Antiretroviral

HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus

MTCT Mother-to-Child Transmission

STI Sexually Transmitted Infection

VCT Voluntary Counseling and Testing

Introduction and notes to facilitator

Young people run the greatest risk of HIV infection through unprotected sexual intercourse. Whereas abstinence has been established as the

best way to prevent HIV transmission, not all youth will adhere to the practice. Discussions around this topic can be very sensitive and therefore participants need to be free to ask questions if need be. It is the duty of the facilitator to ensure the environment is conducive.

Understanding HIV/AIDS

HIV weakens the immune system, the body's built-in defense against disease and illness. One can have HIV without knowing it. He/She may not look or feel sick for years, but can still pass the virus on to other people. Without HIV treatment, the immune system can become too weak to fight off serious illnesses. HIV can also damage other parts of the body. Eventually, the person can become sick with life-threatening infections. This is the most serious stage of HIV infection, called AIDS.

There is no cure for HIV but there is treatment.

There is no cure for HIV, but with proper care and treatment, most people with HIV can avoid getting AIDS and can stay healthy for a long time. Anti-HIV drugs (ARV) have to be taken every day.

Who can get HIV?

Anyone can be infected with HIV, no matter your age, sex, race or ethnic origin or who you have sex with.

HIV transmission

Only five body fluids can contain enough HIV to infect someone: blood, semen (including pre-cum), rectal fluid, vaginal fluid and breast milk.

HIV can only get passed when one of these fluids from a person with HIV gets into the bloodstream of another person—through broken

skin, the opening of the penis or the wet linings of the body, such as the vagina, rectum or foreskin.

HIV cannot pass through healthy, unbroken skin.

The two main ways that HIV can get passed from one person to another are:

- through **unprotected sex** (anal or vaginal sex without a condom);
- by **sharp objects/sharing needles** or other equipment to inject drugs (including steroids).

HIV can also be passed:

- by sharing needles or ink to get a tattoo;
- by sharing needles or jewelry to get a body piercing;
- by sharing acupuncture needles;
- to a fetus or baby during pregnancy, birth or breast-feeding.

HIV cannot be passed by:

- talking, shaking hands, working or eating with someone who has HIV;
- hugs or kisses;
- coughs or sneezes swimming pools;
- toilet seats or water fountains;
- bed sheets or towels;
- forks, spoons, cups or food;
- insects or animals.

Activity

Conduct a discussion with the parents on the question, “Why are many young people infected with HIV/AIDS?”

Duration: 10 minutes

Answers should include but should not be limited to:

- They are poor and therefore engage in sex for money to get food.
- Because they lack parental care and advice.
- If their life dreams are frustrated because they feel forsaken.
- Since they involve themselves in substance abuse and alcohol which affects their judgment.

Reducing HIV infections among adolescents

There are a number of interventions that can help prevent children from being infected with HIV/AIDS. These interventions include:

a) School based intervention

- Review teacher training curriculum to include updated information on HIV prevention, care and treatment, alcohol and drug use and age appropriate comprehensive sexuality education for teachers.
- Implementation of the age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education.
- Functional AIDS control units that serve pupils in learning institutions.
- Education sector HIV and AIDS workplace policy dissemination and enforcement.

b) Evidence based intervention

- Sex and HIV education, prior to the onset of sexual activity, may reduce stigma, delay first sex, increase HIV testing, sensitize on condom use, and reduce number of sexual partners.
- Training for teachers to conduct age–appropriate, participatory sexuality and AIDS education increases knowledge.
- Mass media and social marketing campaigns can change risky behaviour.
- Increased income opportunities can reduce sexually risky behaviour.
- national efforts can be effective in preventing HIV nation-wide.

Review and action plan

Summarize by thanking the participants for the information shared on HIV and AIDS. At this point it is important to realize that parents have a responsibility to teach their children about the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS. It is also important to visit VCTs to know their status.

Tell them that as a team, we must treasure and protect our children. Hence this week again, we continue to discuss with our children hindrances to achieving their dreams. For example, early sexual activity and danger of contracting sexually transmitted diseases or HIV may hinder them from realizing their potential.

Key message: HIV and AIDS are real and must be addressed appropriately. Get information on prevention and know your status.

SESSION SIX: EFFECTIVE PARENTING

Review the previous session using the questions dropped in the question box.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, the parent should be able to:

- a) describe effective parenting;
- b) differentiate between types of parenting;
- a) explain how presence outweighs presents to a child.

Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood by a parent or parent figure.

What does effective parenting mean?

Most parents love their children, but sadly some children do not experience the feeling of being loved.

Effective Parenting is about understanding each child as a unique individual and knowing how to communicate your love effectively.

It is about listening, understanding, praising, encouraging and being a good role model for your child. Effective parents need to be thinking not only of the immediate situation, but also to be asking themselves questions such as:

- How can I respond to issues in a constructive way?

- What personal values do I hope for my child?
- Is my character demonstrating these values to my child?
- Will my actions help my child to grow to be responsible?
- Am I creating a family atmosphere where my child feels loved?

Introduction

Being a parent is probably the most important job we can do in our lives. To parent effectively one needs to understand what it takes to do the job well. The more a parent gets to understand about a child's development and needs, the more he/she can become aware of what it takes to create healthy environments for children to thrive in.

Throughout human history, people have lived in small, close-knit communities, but today not all parents have relatives nearby to support them and give guidance in child rising. In some ways parents intuitively know how to make good and wise decisions about parenting, but sometimes the challenges and mixed messages of the world can make it difficult. It is therefore important to take every opportunity to learn more on what it takes to parent effectively.

Benefits of parenting effectively

Parenting positively creates happier homes where children are more cooperative. Children who grow up feeling secure and loved have lower stress levels, better overall health and are likely to do better at school.

Parenting styles

Parenting style means the type of behaviour that you use when interacting with your child.

Many people are now trying to develop an approach to parenting that combines the most helpful aspects of these different approaches.

1 Autocratic (or authoritarian) parenting

Autocratic (or authoritarian) parenting is based on the belief that the parent is always right and children must obey. Although this is helpful in some ways, as children need limits to keep them safe, children often feel frustrated and even unhappy because they feel as though what they think or feel does not count.

2. Permissive parenting

Permissive parenting is where parents want their children to feel happy and to grow up with minds of their own, so they let the children do what they want. However, children need limits and often feel unsafe when there are no clear boundaries or consequences to their behaviour. If adults do not take responsibility, children can feel insecure and can grow up to think only of themselves.

3. Democratic parenting

Democratic parenting aims to involve children in decisions about their lives, but the parent takes a lead role and encourages appropriate behaviour without using excessive control or allowing children to do whatever they want.

Is there a 'right' way to parent?

There is no one way to parent. Every child and every family is unique, with its own history and its own way of doing things. The parent should think about how he/she wants to parent and help the child to grow up to be all that he or she has the potential to be. This is not thinking about what career the child might follow, but about what sort of person he or she might be and what sort of values he

or she will have. The parent should make a list of things at home that really matter to him/her, such as kindness, communication, honesty, fun. Then choose the three that are most important to him/her. When the parent focuses on the outcomes he/she wants to achieve, he/she will create a suitable environment in which the child can thrive.

How can one be a positive parent?

Children need to know that they matter to the parent, just for who they are. Although parents want your child to do well, he or she needs to know that the parent's love is unconditional – that nothing would ever end this love and that the parent always wants to keep the connection between them.

Help your child to do things for himself or herself and to gain confidence. Listen to the child and protect him or her – both physically and emotionally.

Part of protecting children is making sure that when parents leave them in the care of someone else they are safe. Whenever you are arranging any form of child minding, make sure that this person (or childcare center) will take care of your child's needs – not only physically but also emotionally.

In many ways, children live in a different world from the one parents grew up in, with mobile phones, the Internet, play stations and many other gadgets that can make life more exciting, but also more dangerous. Children do not have the life experience to understand the dangers that may face them. Parents need to know how to keep the child safe.

Think about what the child needs:

- Does the child know you love him or her, no matter what?
- Do parents discuss fair rules and keep these consistent, so that the child feels safe?

For example you might say, 'You can choose to watch this television program tonight or you can choose to keep your television hours for later this week.' If the child chooses to watch the program now, he or she cannot also have the extra hours later in the week. The child needs to experience the consequences of the decision he or she makes.

- Do you acknowledge the child's feelings, viewpoints and experiences (as well as your own)?
- Do you allow your child to experience reasonable consequences for his or her actions (provided his or her physical and emotional safety is never put in danger)?

The difference between parenting and fathering/mothering

A parent is one who is responsible for taking care and supporting a child's growth and development. A parent makes sure that the child gets the basic human needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care and education. A parent is actively involved in the life of the child. On the other hand, father and mother are just the individuals that were responsible for the formation of the child, mostly through sexual intercourse. Fathering and mothering do not involve taking care of the child during its growth and development.

Presents versus Presence

It is no secret that children love gifts like toys and sweets. However, the most important gift any child could receive is the continual

presence of his/her parents. As a parent, giving time, energy and love to the child is the most important thing.

Children need the parents example as the child's first school is the home. This is the place where children learn basic skills such as how to speak, walk, use the toilet, and hold a fork, etc. Children learn these skills from watching others. Parents set an example to children. If a child sees a parent performing a certain task, the child feels it is also right to do it. When the parent is present in the child's life, he/she will help shape the child into the person they can become. Children look up to the parents their entire lives and the parents actions speak much louder than any amount of money. Parents should show their children, by their example and actions, that they want what is best for them.

Activity

Divide the parents into small groups. Ask each group to answer the following and write them down. Then allow each group to present their experiences to the entire group.

How well do parents supervise their children?

Discuss suggestions on how they can improve their parenting skills individually.

Let them also share the challenges they face and discuss possible solutions for the same.

SESSION SEVEN: PARENTS' HOPES AND DREAM FOR THEIR CHILD

Review the previous session using the questions in the box.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, the parent should be able to:

- a) appreciate their teenager's dreams;
- b) to describe what aspirations they have for their children;
- c) communicate and support their dream for their child.

Duration: 40 minutes

Notes to the facilitator

Most teens have dreams which we can help them achieve if we build trust and acceptance into their lives. Although parents also have dreams for their children, these dreams may at times vary from their children's own dreams. Overall, both the parents and their children would want to succeed in life. There is therefore need to understand and appreciate that your children could have varied dreams that should be respected. Similarly, there is need to understand that the main dream-killer is early sexual activity.

Your vision and high expectations of your child's future are powerful – and research shows that they impact your child's school achievement. From the time your child begins school until he or she graduates from

high school, your expectations and your belief in the importance of education can motivate your child to fulfill his or her dreams. Parents who expect their children to finish high school and attend college or a vocational program communicate that belief in many ways. Studies show that parents who do this give their children an advantage at school.

This particular form of parent involvement influences your child to believe in the power of education. The vision and expectations you have for your child's schooling can be expressed in many ways.

You are providing high expectations and helping your child succeed when you:

1. *Communicate hopes and expectations*

It is important to discuss your hopes and dreams for your child's education early and regularly with him or her, and even kindergarten is not too early to start! These conversations let your child know that education is important to your family. You give your child a goal to aim for when you:

- a) ask about and listen to your child's thoughts on the future.
- b) share your hopes for education after high school.
- c) state your belief in your child's ability to achieve career or vocational training.

Your hopes and expectations are the foundation for achieving goals and the most powerful influence on your child's school performance. Expect your child to:

- a) give school his/her best effort and attendance;
- b) follow through on his/her responsibilities, like completing homework, turning it in on time, and studying for tests.

2. *Connect School to Life*

Knowing what your child is studying in school helps focus your conversation of future goals. It keeps your child looking forward. You help build the bridge of “from here to there” when you:

- a) connect school subjects to current events, personal interests, or career goals through conversation with your child;
- b) connect school subjects to your child’s activities, hobbies, and places your child goes;
- c) share your own personal successes and challenges with school.

3. *Build study skills and strategies*

Help them reinforce the skills they need to make academic progress in school and beyond. You do this when you:

- a) make homework and studying a priority at home.
- b) help your child learn to break down long or difficult assignments into easier and more manageable pieces.
- c) keep reading time high and screen time low outside of school (screen time includes video games, computer games, social media, TV, and even cell phone games).
- d) help your child learn how to manage time for studies, outside activities, and household/job responsibilities.
- e) say “You can do it!” Tell your child you believe he or she is capable of doing the school work and then praise any progress.
- f) help your child learn how to find school help, such as staying after school to work with a teacher.

4. Help Your Child Plan for the Future

The academic choices children make starting in upper primary can impact their transition to college and vocational training. As parents you can help children plan for the future when you:

- a) understand the admission process for entering a post-secondary program, such as college or vocational training.
- b) remain key to your child's success in school, even when schools and subjects change, and even if you are not an expert in algebra or one of the other subjects.

Your expectations will motivate your children and give them confidence and fuel for their dreams. Regularly share the “big picture” with them: your hopes for them and your confidence in their ability. To help them reach their goals, give them some day-to-day rules and tools to use. Expect them to attend school every day, do their assigned work, and try their best. Look at how they spend time, do things together that connect what they are learning in school and real life, support healthy friendships and activities, and help them learn to manage time, too. Let them know when you see them making progress.

Activity

Introduce the activity by saying:

When parents set, or know, their children's goals, they are able to plan how to support them with the necessary characteristics for achieving those goals.

In this session, our focus will be to set goals for parents as we work towards appreciating our children's dreams. It is true that the parents have dreams regarding their children. It is also a fact that children have individual dreams of their own.

What specific dreams do you as a parent have for your children regarding: education, careers, family life, spiritual development?

Are these dreams achievable?

What in your view can hinder those dreams from being attained?

Answers may be many such as:

Early pregnancies, involvement with drugs and alcohol, laziness, carelessness, bad company, influencing their morals etc.

What can you, as a parent, do to ensure that these dreams are achieved?

- a) Support with goal setting and keeping them on track to achieving them.
- b) Support with homework including creating a safe environment.
- c) Positive friendship with the children.
- d) Protection from violence and sexual abuse.
- e) Being positive role models.
- f) Guidance and counseling on sexuality and related issues including open discussions on HIV and AIDS.

Discussion questions

How much are you able to get involved in your children's dreams to help them realize such dreams?

Do they know that you are there for them? Do they feel that you understand, respect and trust them to make good decisions pertaining to their dreams?

Review and action plan [5 minutes]

What lesson have you learnt today?

Action plan:

This week we continue talking to our children using the communication skills learnt in previous session. We also need to engage them about their goals in life and discuss the challenges they may encounter. We shall endeavor to help them overcome these challenges.

Key message

Our dreams and the teenagers' dreams can be aligned for the good of all. Have appropriate and reasonable expectations for your children.

SESSION EIGHT: PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE CHILDREN

Review the previous session

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, the parent should be able to:

- a) understand the importance of parental support for the children;
- b) understand the importance of education;
- c) identify the challenges children face in life.

The Definition of Psychosocial Support

Life is often described as a journey from birth to death. On each person's journey they may encounter certain opportunities or face certain challenges. Typically parents help children learn skills to overcome life's challenges. Children face many challenges because of poverty and the effects of HIV and AIDS. These children can solve many of their own problems, but sometimes they become overwhelmed by facing too many at the same time. In addition, many children have lost their parents and are left alone to face life's challenges. These children often need psychosocial support from other people.

What is psychosocial support?

Psychosocial support describes the effort to meet ongoing emotional, social, and spiritual needs of children as they face life's challenges.

People provide emotional support to each other in many ways in their daily lives. For example by listening to a friend tell a happy or sad story, comforting a friend during a sad or difficult time, or taking part in group or community activities.

This kind of social or spiritual support is like a river flowing through a village. It is always there, providing its waters to the people who live there. Sometimes people do not even think about it. But everyone notices when it dries up and disappears, the trees dry up and turn brown, and the grass does not grow to feed the cattle. When children lose a parent or are separated from their community, their river of support dries up. They will not thrive unless the new community they are part of can help them to be emotionally healthy. When children are emotionally healthy, they have energy to play and learn. A child's emotional health may affect his or her physical health and nutrition thus their ability to learn. All of these things have a large impact on a child's future.

Identifying children who need psychosocial support

Many children in the community could benefit from parents' knowledge and skills. Parents will need to identify which children are most vulnerable and would benefit most from their support. A parent will need to actively seek out families that may need his/her help, instead of waiting for them to come. Some caregivers may be too shy or busy to look for help, but they may be the ones that need it the most. Children who are most vulnerable may be identified either because they have

very difficult lives or because of particular problematic behaviours. Children with difficult lives include:

- children who have lost one or both parents.
- children in a child-headed household.
- children who have been abused.
- children with disabilities.
- children who talk about suicide.
- children living on the street.

Looking out for children with these life problems will help a parent to know which children and families need his/her attention and focus.

Children have many ways of showing that they are having difficulties coping. Problematic behaviours may indicate that these children need support.

Problematic Behaviours

There are many behaviours that may indicate that a child is not doing well. Some of these include:

- excessive crying.
- being aggressive.
- withdrawing from social activities and spending time with other children, and/or being overly quiet and reserved.
- being very fearful.
- not sleeping well.
- bedwetting.
- missing school.

- using drugs or alcohol.
- sexual promiscuity.

Looking for and asking about children with these problematic behaviours will help parents to know children and families need their focus and attention.

Recognizing resilience in children

Children have much strength that helps them cope with challenges and difficulties. It is useful to identify the characteristics of a resilient child, which may include:

- ability to ask for help.
- being positive, with hopes for the future.
- being able to set goals.
- putting effort into work.
- playing well with other children.
- looking clean, taking pride in appearance, being confident.
- taking responsibility and caring for siblings and family members.
- ability to deal with challenges and frustrations appropriately.
- continuing with routines of life (school) despite difficulties.

Serious challenges for children

There are many challenges and problems that children growing up may face. Some of the most serious problems faced by children include:

- child abuse, including physical, verbal and sexual abuse.
- loss of parents—grief and loss.

- living in a child-headed household.
- illness—including HIV and AIDS.

Ways to help children with some of the most serious problems they experience

A. Child abuse

Forms of child abuse

- Physical abuse—beating of children
- Sexual abuse—sex acts with a child under 16 years of age
Emotional and verbal abuse
- Denying children any of their basic needs
- Child labor—work that is dangerous or denies children their right to education, health, safety, etc.

Signs of child abuse

- Bruises or scars suggesting physical abuse
- Pain or discomfort in the child's private parts
- Major behaviour changes (anxiety, fear, depression, running away, substance abuse)
- Suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide
- Acting out inappropriate sexual behaviours
- Abusive or sexual behaviour towards other children

How to support children who have been abused

- Listen to the child—try to engage him/her to talk about their experiences.
- Investigate whether ongoing abuse is occurring and try to arrange a safe home for the child.

- Teach children and communities about the rights of children.
- Teach children life skills around negotiating appropriate physical and emotional relationships with adults and other children.
- Explain about right and wrong touching.
- Provide information on where they can go for additional help.

B. Grief/Loss and trauma

Parental illness and death are causes of deep sadness and pain for young people. Orphans and other vulnerable children may require psychosocial support because of the loss they have experienced. The death of a parent is an emotional shock that can produce long-lasting, harmful effects. Psychosocial support aims to help children and young people cope with emotional trauma and stress.

How adolescents react to grief and loss

Adolescents have more knowledge of death and why people die. If allowed to express themselves, they typically grieve well and recover from the loss. If they are having difficulty, some reactions may include:

- depression, strong feelings of hopelessness/despair.
- strong feelings of anger.
- rebellious behaviour.
- confusion.
- social withdrawal.
- poor school performance.

C. Child-headed households

Children in child-headed households are at high risk of exploitation. They may suffer more emotionally after the death of their parents because they have no adult at home to offer guidance on their life journey. Common problems in child-headed households include:

- children missing school.
- malnutrition.
- poor physical state of home.
- extreme sadness.
- vulnerability to sexual abuse or exploitation as child laborers.
- lack of life skills and livelihood training opportunities.

How to help children in child-headed households

- Regularly visit these homes to check on children (health, education access, safety).
- Advise on home management, hygiene, and nutrition.
- Make sure children have access to basic health care.
- Help children access legal/social service support when needed.
- Teach about where to get help.
- Make sure all children are getting at least one nutritious meal per day.
- Teach about family and cultural norms.

Listening to children/basic counseling

When a child has very strong feelings about something—for example grief due to the death of a parent, or mean comments made by other students—one of the best ways to help is simply to listen to the child and let him or her talk about the problem. It is very important that people who talk with children about their difficulties are able to carefully listen and talk to them in a way that is helpful. Children are often not accustomed to talking to an adult about themselves or their problems, and often adults are not accustomed to listening to children.

Guidelines for listening and talking to children/Basic counseling techniques

- 1) **Initial considerations:** Set up a comfortable time and place to speak with a child or caregiver, with adequate privacy. Introduce yourself and explain why you are there. You will need to use a level of language that matches the child's age. You may need to be aware that when children do not tell the truth, they may have a reason, such as being fearful of something.
- 2) **Start with yourself:** To be a good listener with children, you should enjoy children, have patience, and be able to listen to a child's painful feelings without becoming too uncomfortable.
- 3) **Identify good listening:** It is important to actively listen to what a child says, to pay close attention, and to think carefully about the child's words. This will allow the child to feel recognized, understood, and to release their feelings. If you are a good listener, you can also be a model for other family members as to how to help the child.
- 4) **Good listening involves patience in waiting for a child to share his/her feelings:** You will need to read expressions on a child's face or how she holds her body. You will need to be accepting of what

the child is saying. It is useful to identify with the child's feeling but not to become too overwhelmed or upset by what the child is feeling or telling you.

Dealing with difficult behaviours among children

Sometimes we are not aware of exactly what problems children face, but we can tell by their actions and behaviour that they have more problems than they can manage. When children have experienced loss or great stress, they may “act out” in ways that seem unusual and are troublesome to their siblings or caretakers. We may observe behaviours such as:

- inactive, withdrawn behaviour.
- aggressive/disobedient behaviour.
- bedwetting.
- educational issues: Learning difficulties/missing school.
- substance abuse, risk taking, and risky sexual behaviour.
- depression.

When children are having a difficult time, or showing problematic behaviours, they may not have enough energy to play and learn—which is children's “work”—or enough trust to have good relationships with other people.

These behaviours may:

- have an impact on physical and nutritional health.
- shape children's relationships with the people they depend on.
- shape children's ability to learn and thus affect their futures.

A. Inactive/withdrawn behaviour

You should be concerned if the child is so inactive or withdrawn socially that s/he:

- does not look at or greet a familiar visitor.
- does not speak at all during a visit, or speaks very little and softly.
- just sits, and does not play.
- does not appear to watch or listen to others.
- sits far away from other people.
- does not move at all during a visit or moves rarely or only on command.

Some causes of withdrawn behaviour are:

- 1) *The child is malnourished or sick.*** In this case you may need to help the family find resources to feed the child, or refer them to the local health worker.
- 2) *The child is neglected.*** Children need to interact with other people in order to develop in a healthy way. Children can become too inactive or withdrawn when they are left alone most of the day, have no one to talk to or play with or if the caregiver rarely speaks to the child.
- 3) *The child is abused.*** Children can become inactive or withdrawn if caregivers beat them frequently or speak to them very harshly or not at all, or demand that they be quiet all the time.
- 4) *The child is suffering from grief and worry.*** Children who have recently lost a parent, have a very sick parent, or have moved and lost contact with their homes and their brothers and sisters, may be very withdrawn from grief or worry.

Activity

Discuss with the parents some possible solutions to this.

B. Disobedient/aggressive behaviour

You should worry if a child is so disobedient or aggressive that s/he:

- frequently fights with other children.
- frequently ignores caregiver requests.
- frequently disobeys caregiver.
- uses bad language to others.
- is described by the caregiver as bad, disobedient, or too aggressive.

Most children are aggressive or disobedient from time-to-time.

Causes of disobedient behaviour include:

- 1) Neglect:** If children are left alone most of the day without protection and with no one to talk to and nothing to do, they can become aggressive and disobedient. They may be acting this way to seek attention.
- 2) Abuse:** If children are spoken to only harshly or are disciplined with frequent or harsh beatings, they can become aggressive and disobedient.
- 3) Grief and anger:** Children who have recently lost a parent, have a very sick parent, have moved and lost contact with their homes and their brothers and sisters, may be very aggressive or disobedient out of grief or anger.

Activity

Discuss with the parents some possible solutions to this.

C) Bedwetting

A sign of abnormal bedwetting is when a child who had previously been able to stay dry all night reverts to urinating in the bed.

Some ways to help in dealing with bedwetting

- Do not blame or punish the child.
- A child should be given clean clothes and should not be made to go to school smelling of urine.
- Let the child know you will help them solve this problem.
- Do not let the child drink a lot of liquid after the evening meal.
- Be sure the child urinates before bed.
- Adults may want to wake the child later in evening to urinate.
- Offer some praise or recognition for a dry night.
- Spend some time listening to the child; bedwetting might be related to a specific and ongoing stressful situation.

D. Educational issues

A child's poor performance in school or lack of attendance can be very problematic to a parent.

Reasons children do not attend school regularly, or perform to their potential

- No funds for school fees, supplies, or uniforms.
- Poor health.
- Lack of breakfast before school.

- Work that needs doing at home.
- Bad experiences in school.
- Lack of energy due to hunger or too much physical work.
- Lack of value placed on girls' education.
- Changes in the body—particularly as girls mature, and when they start menstruating.

Activity

Discuss with the parents some possible solutions to this.

E. Substance abuse

Orphaned and vulnerable children are at higher risk of using drugs due to low self-esteem and trying to escape feelings of extreme sadness. Drug use may also be linked to poor sexual decision making in adolescents.

Signs of substance abuse in young people include:

- excessive fatigue.
- changes in appetite.
- weight loss.
- restlessness.
- poor concentration.
- rapid mood swings (from very happy to very sad).
- loss of interest in school.
- refusal to do usual household tasks.
- violent or aggressive behaviour.

Activity

Discuss with the parents some possible solutions to this.

F. Depression

A child suffering from severe depression feels sad all the time and cries a lot. The child may refuse to eat and may lose a lot of weight. S/he may feel tired all day long and want to stay in bed all day, but finds it difficult to sleep at night. A depressed child withdraws from activities, may talk a lot about wanting to die, and sometimes has thoughts about killing himself or herself. The child may say over and over again that he or she wants to be where the deceased parent is. The child may show self-destructive and aggressive behaviour like cutting himself or herself, pulling out his or her own hair, deliberately causing hurt to his or her own body, and destroying objects that were formerly precious to him or her.

If you know of a child who is experiencing these severe problems, speak to the child and explain that you have noticed that s/he is going through a difficult time. Mention to the child that you want to help him or her by talking to their caregiver and suggesting that the child be referred to a specially trained counselor or a social worker. It is important that you do not criticize the child's behaviour. If the child feels that you are being critical, your help may be refused.

Some ways to help:

- Give the child plenty of opportunity to talk out his/her feelings and fears during the day with an understanding and caring adult.
- Reassure the child that s/he is loved and will be cared for and that his sadness will get better with time.
- Encourage lots of physical activity as this will help to relax the child, work out some of his/her feelings, and tire him/her out to sleep better.

Suicide

When a child makes a statement about suicide, never ridicule him or her or ignore his/her feelings, and never refuse to talk about it. If they are saying it, they are thinking it and thoughts of suicide must be taken seriously. The child is trying to say, “I need to talk, I need help.”

Attempting suicide

Children who have experienced the pain of losing someone they love are much more at risk of attempting suicide, especially teenagers who think that no one else understands their feelings. They often feel VERY alone with no one to talk to.

Teenage boys are particularly at risk, as they tend to keep their emotions and bad feelings locked up inside.

Therefore, if a boy makes a suicide threat, it needs to be taken VERY SERIOUSLY! As girls tend to talk about suicide more openly, intervention is often possible before a child acts on these emotions. But in any situation where a girl or boy is talking about suicide:

GET HELP IMMEDIATELY! Ask for help/support from grandparents, elders, uncles, village headmen, social welfare officers, counselors, health workers, t h e church/mosque, peers, and other supportive members of the community.

Assignment

What have you learned today that will help you provide psychosocial support to the child?

SESSION NINE: PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION AND SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOUR

Review the previous session using the questions in the box.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, the parent should:

- a) understand how maintaining a close relationship with the child reduces the chance of him or her engaging in early sexual activities;
- b) Cultivate a good rapport with the child.

Duration: 40 minutes

Introduction

Parents and other family members are in a unique position to protect adolescents from the negative health outcomes associated with sexual risk-taking and related risk behaviours. Parent-child communication about sex has been shown to encourage:

- delayed onset of first sexual activity;
- increased sexual abstinence;
- increased open communication;
- practice of safer sex, if sexually active, through condom use.

A teen wants to hear from his or her parents, and even though parents often worry that their children will not be receptive to conversations with them about sexual topics, research has shown that:

- pre-teens are ready for sexuality information from parents, and they rate parents as their top source of information about sexuality.
- teens feel that it would be easier to delay sex and prevent pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.

Parents can provide adolescents with accurate information about sex and its potential risks and consequences, as well as foster responsible sexual decision-making skills. Unlike programmes or classes, parents are a source of information that is always close at hand. They also have the ability to deliver important age-appropriate prevention messages to their children earlier than youth would typically be exposed to them through traditional education and prevention efforts. Parents are in a unique position to:

- start early;
- answer questions right away;
- provide ongoing information about sexuality;
- build upon past talks as children grow and develop;
- separate myths and rumors learned from other sources.

Unfortunately, many parents do not discuss sexuality or sexual risks with their children, citing barriers such as embarrassment, fear of encouraging sexual activity, and lack of knowledge, skills and confidence. Among those who do communicate with their children about sexuality issues, communication too often occurs later rather than sooner. Many parents underestimate the sexual behaviour of

their adolescents and therefore miss the opportunity to teach youth during the critical pre-risk window, before sexual risk behaviours begin. This training assists parents in overcoming the barriers to discussing sexuality and sexual risks with their children and builds confidence in talking early and often.

Parenting Skills

Parents influence adolescent behaviour by providing structure and support for their children and by playing a key role in promoting family health and well-being in the following ways.

- a) Parents' monitoring of their children's social activities has been associated with better overall psychosocial adjustment among adolescents, which is an important predictor of sexual activity beginning at a later age, less frequent sexual behaviour, fewer sexual partners, and more consistent use of contraceptives.
- b) Teens who perceive their parents as supportive and involved and who are more satisfied with their relationships with their parents tend to engage in less sexually risky behaviours.
- c) Teens who report positive and supportive relationships with their parents also report having fewer sexual partners and using protection more consistently.

The facilitator should say;

“It is time to evaluate ourselves and check how well-prepared we are to affect the lives of our children positively. The reality of adolescent sexual behaviour is one that parents wish they didn't have to deal with. Building life skills in our children will help us. The earlier we open up to our children and allow them to be free with us the better. Open communication makes them comfortable to expose their fears and pains without reservation. We must learn not to shy away from issues of sexuality. The more we get comfortable with the subject, the more information we will be able to share with our children.”

The facilitator at this point should challenge the parents to take advantage of teachable moments with their younger children.

When children are growing up, they will ask very innocent questions such as where babies come from. When they see an expectant mother they want to know why their tummy is so much bigger than others'. It is in such moments that we should start communicating facts about sexuality. However this has to be age-appropriate.

When our children become teenagers and realize we lied to them about simple facts, like pregnancy and childbirth, it becomes difficult for them to trust us.

Parents are best-placed to teach their children on matters of sexuality because they have the correct information and experience. Studies have shown that youth prefer to hear first information on sexuality from their parents. Unfortunately, this rarely happens; they get to hear the information from their peers who may be misinformed. Young people usually have misleading myths on sex and sexuality. This may lead our children to experimenting on the myths. There are myths, for example, that explain why some children will have larger breasts than others and how having many girlfriends makes you a hero. They say that when boys get to touch the girl's breasts often, the girls will have larger breasts. Others indicate that if a certain black insect found in the river bites your nipples, then your breasts will grow bigger.

Information about puberty and how to support the teenagers is very important to address the myths that often lead to high-risk sexual behaviour.

Activity

Ask the parents to discuss the following question.

What can parents and guardians do to support their children?

Duration: 10 minutes

Listen to their responses and then conclude the discussion.

Conclusion

Parents and guardians have a critical role of understanding their children. They can empathize with them by sharing what they went through as teenagers. They must also understand that times have changed and therefore be sensitive to the needs and the pressures that the children are facing. This can only be obtained by initiating friendship with the children and assuring them of their support both emotionally and materially within their means. This will motivate them to follow their dreams; and especially to perform well in school as they focus on their careers.

SESSION TEN: PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Review the previous session.

Learning objectives

By the end of the session, the parents should be able to:

- a) recognize the existence of technology;
- b) know how technology has influenced children.

Duration: 40 minutes

Introduction

Family as a unit of nature and nurturing has been compounded with numerous challenges in this digital era.

Traditional societal values that held the family together in Africa's context are today profoundly threatened by the modern social-economic demands and trends.

Unlike the old days, parenting has proven to be a challenging task in these days. Rapidly changing lifestyles, recurring demands and requirements of life has put forward multiple challenges to parents. Obviously – different times, different conditions, different people and different ways of doing things.

While acknowledging that the development of technologies, globalization, westernization or civilization as they call it make our lives easier, the same advances make the task of parenting more complicated than ever before.

The biggest challenge in parenthood is dealing with the rising outside influences of society. Factors including drugs and alcohol, peer pressure and entertainment media, are top concerns for every parent today.

The Internet, for instance, is definitely one of the most celebrated emergences of the modern day, but, like any other thing, it also has its dark side.

On the Internet our children can now easily find the materials that we would not like them to see, such as pornography, violence, foul language and other harmful content. The effect of such materials is, to say the least, disastrous.

Ironically, parents are aware that the online world is dangerous place for kids if not well managed. But the problem is, in many cases our kids know more about computers and the Internet than we do. Parents therefore become unable to train them in internet safety as we do not know how to use it ourselves.

The younger generation increasingly gets exposed to every material at their disposal, so much that traditional values are not easily retained against a rushing tide of new lifestyles. Its no wonder we have increased cases of illegal drinking at early age, drug use, and hostile music designed in a manner likely to demean the human experience plus numerous video games that virtually express violence and rudeness as fun.

The mass media is another influence of cultural imperialism today. One of the negative roles that mass media plays is the dominance and propagation of violence particularly on television and video film industry. A lot of the foreign film content on television is mainly composed of scenes of violence. The actors who engage in murder and other violent actors are portrayed as heroes. These junks have dangerous effects on the youths, who ignorantly mimic them as a way of life.

Peer pressure too is gripping our young ones so fast that by the time they realize, the damage is already done. Young people tend to imitate their peers in all manners that we might not be pleasant with. Gone were the days where locally made products were cherished. Now our young people tend to enjoy foreign products to the detriment of our own locally made products. Instead of locally blended juice, they opt for the imported ones found on the shelves of the leading retail outlets. They prefer fancy things.

These emerging trends continue to influence our children's behaviour. We need great wisdom and courage to pilot new models of engagement and professional practices as we mentor these vulnerable young people.

These challenges are compounded by the extreme pressure parents are facing in order to make ends meet. Unlike in the olden days, where the men were the sole bread winners, today both the parents have to work to accomplish the economic stability of the homestead.

Single parents as well have to work extra and strike a balance between work and parenting duties. These factors affects parenting dimensions as parents are forced to hire nannies to take charge of their kids or even send them to boarding schools from a young age.

As one scholar once observed, *'the love you have for your child is so much greater than any challenge you will face as a parent'*. It is definitely important to spare more time and converse with these young ones. This will help us learn from them, give right instructions and adjust appropriately to their social and emotional needs.

In addition, by being close to them, we will engage them positively and encourage their participation in key family activities like praying, eating and participating in recreational activities together.

Activity

In groups of five, discuss the influence of technology on both children and parents. Allow parents to share their findings.

CONCLUSION

The facilitator should recap all the previous sessions; one at a time and emphasize on the action points and what the parents should remember from the following topics:

- 1 Understanding yourself:** we are different and our children, though our offspring, are unique too.
- 2. Understanding your children:** Upon gaining knowledge on understanding ourselves, we can now move on to understanding our children, how and why they behave the way they do.
- 3. Good communication:** Communication and packaging of the information we are sending to our adolescents is important. The message may be good but how the message is packaged is also a determinant of the message's effectiveness.
- 4. Dreams and expectations:** We as parents have dreams and expectations from our children but we must appreciate that they also have dreams, which must be understood and supported unless they are morally unacceptable. Our role as parents/guardians is to support them by giving as much information as possible and empower them to make the right decisions.
- 5. HIV and AIDS:** It is very important to have the correct information in terms of facts of prevention, mode of transmission; care and treatment. Once the youth are well-equipped, they are likely to make better choices and thus make their parents/guardians proud.

6. **Support:** Teenagers need our undivided support for them to excel in their pursuit of their life dreams and especially on their career paths. It is important to note that competition is intense in schools and we need to reduce their household chores and give them a chance to revise and concentrate on their assignments.
7. **Drugs and abuse:** There is a clear link between drugs and substance abuse and risky behaviour that may lead to HIV infection and other STIs.
8. **Effective parenting:** Even the best of parenting is fraught with challenges and disappointments. There is no formula for parenting that guarantees a perfect child. However, when parents evaluate their parenting skills and make necessary adjustments to improve their parenting skills, they may have peace of mind when that time of parting with their grown up child comes. As a parent, you should be able to say, at the very least, that you did your best.
9. **Sexuality:** Most adolescents admit that they would rather get their first information from their parents which, unfortunately, is rare. We should be willing to hold open discussions between parents and children from the time they can communicate. The information that we pass to them should be age-appropriate.

General thoughts

The idea that teenagers are impossible to talk to, live with, and relate to has become so commonplace that we adults start to believe and act as if it is so. The myth of the difficult teenage years is perpetuated over and over until everyone believes that all teenagers are difficult all the time. It just is not so.

The teenage years run smoothly and joyously for some parents, whereas others find them impossible. Some parents enjoy every minute with their children, knowing they will soon be gone. Others find it so difficult to relate that they throw in the towel and withdraw- counting the days until their children move out. Some parents find the relationship with their children so fulfilling- not only because they are learning the art of avoiding discrimination, but because the house is so lively- that there is excitement in the air. Still others resort to threats, punishment, and authoritarian rule to avoid relating.

Often, it seems that our teenagers do not want our love. The truth is that they do, but in a new way. However difficult it may feel sometimes, it is always better to strive for a conscious relationship with your children- even during those times you wonder if you are being stretched beyond your capabilities. If relating to your children is impossible, it is because you do not have the tools. Once you gain the tools, a relationship with a teenager is no more difficult than any other relationship. The teenage stage of life is no more difficult than any other stage of life; it just takes new skills.

This session provides tools to guide you in the art of relating to your children. Even when your parent/children relationship appears hopeless beyond repair, you can follow the suggestions below to help you rebuild a loving bond.

1. Accept changes graciously

You know that everything changes, but you are rarely prepared when it comes to your child. When your child is still very small, change seems gradual; you know you will have fifteen or more

years together. Then suddenly they are teenagers, and the years are flying by. They are all grown up with plans of their own, plans that do not always include you, and you realize that the time together is precious- the years have shorted into months.

As parents, we want to hold tightly to those heart-melting moments when she/he lost her/his tooth and you were the Tooth Fairy. Your babies will always be your babies but you cannot treat them like one anymore. Your child looks more like a young woman/man now. By the time your child is a teenager, she/he has had lots of new experiences; if you presume she/he is thinking as she/he did when she/he was ten years old, you are missing a lot. If you are fighting those changes you will get weary. But if you welcome the changes graciously, you will be young at heart.

Parents have to change too - you cannot avoid it. Growing up and moving on is a continuous process that your whole family is involved in. Your child is not the same person she/he was five years ago, and neither are you.

Change brings fresh possibilities, opens windows to surprises ahead. Soon you find that you have more to share. As a courageous parent aware of the process of life in which you are involved, you accept the shifts, and turns, shedding your tears while moving forward. Sometimes you will be glad for the changes, and oftentimes thankful that being a teenager is not a permanent condition.

2. Do the best you can

There will be times when nothing works, when nothing you do or say will make things better. No matter what parenting skills you employ, no matter how loving, kind, understanding, fair courteous, or brilliant you are, there will be painful times when your children will not cooperate, when they will call you names. There will be

times when nothing makes it right, times when they do not like you and you do not like them.

When everything you do is a source of irritation for them, do you wonder where you have failed? Do you wish you could start over, do it better? Do you strive to have a good relationship, yet secretly yearn for the peace and quiet when they move out? You are not alone. Parents feel guilty about a lot of things. We worry when we extend our own insecurities and inadequacies on our children. We fear they have inherited our legacy of pain. We wonder if we have taught them what they need to know to succeed. We doubt ourselves and are sure we have messed up as parents by not doing it “right.” We are hard on ourselves. We are afraid we are bad parents. We know we worry too much about their setbacks and we take on too much responsibility for their future - but we cannot help it. After all, we are parents and we want the best for them.

When things go wrong, we put on the pressure. We are aware of our own imperfections, so we try to instill perfection in our kids. Perfection is such a bitter pill. It makes you tense and does not cure a thing. It is okay to be “good enough.” Just because your child has a problem does not automatically mean you have messed up. Say to yourself: I am doing the best I can with what I know. Then be gentle with yourself.

3. Believe in them fully

Think back to your own adolescence years and ask yourself if at any time during those years you felt troubled or discouraged. Was your heart broken? Did you think you did not belong or wonder if you would ever fit in? Were you ever filled with sadness or self-doubt? Did you feel confused or hopeless with no place to turn? Or did you have someone to talk with, to confide in, and to help you out?

Who was that person? Who believed in you even though you had lost belief in yourself? Who was there for you when you needed a shoulder to cry on? When you longed for a comforting hug? Was it a friend, a teacher, a parent, a grandparent, or a stranger? Who saw the spark of potential within you and said, “I know you can do it?”

If you were fortunate enough to have at least one person who recognized the scope of who you were, and who showed you the way, you understand how important that backing was. If you had no one at your side, you know what you missed - how alone you felt - and you do not want your own children to have such a struggle.

Your belief is that your teenager is capable and intrinsically good is a prerequisite for the development of a responsible and enthusiastic young adult. He/She needs you to believe in them totally. They need you to believe in them even when they make bad choices, when they let you down and disappoint you. They need you to believe in them, to love them, to never give up on them. If you stop believing in them, they will have a very hard time getting on track again. Even when your children’s behaviour is less than desirable, when he/she does something foolish, uses poor judgment, or completely messed up, remember that they do it because often it is the only choice they thought they had at the moment.

Every teenager will mess up, take risks, get in trouble, break a rule, try to get away with something, and keep something from you. Some children will get in legal scrapes, causing all kinds of chaos. Even so, when this happens you should remind yourself that the trouble they are having is only a small part of whom they are. Let your children know, that even though they are making mistakes, you still believe in them totally. Only then will they be able to learn from their mistakes, correct them, and move on.

Believe that your children are wonderful persons who will succeed because they are self-sufficient. If you believe in them no matter what, even when they have lost belief in themselves they turn their life around.

4 Include them in your life

Although it might seem that your children are setting you aside by not including you in the details of their lives, this is definitely not the time to exclude them from yours. Do not kick them out of your life now. Teenagers want to belong, be part of you, and be included in your life.

If your life is hectic and family members seem to be going their separate ways, you will have to make extra effort to keep each other informed. If there are a lot comings and goings in your household, try hanging a family calendar and log in commitments so everyone can see.

If you want to know where your children are, let them know where you are. Tell them your schedule - where you are going and when you will be back. Call if you will be late. Leave them a note when you cannot tell them in person. Let them know how to reach you. Take your kids to your workplace; let them see you at the office.

Once a year, Peter takes her children to her favorite business luncheon spot to give them a peek of their dad's business world. In just two hours, the children see a professional side of their Dad that they might miss otherwise. With this new perspective, they gain respect for all she is doing.

Through understanding how you spend your day and how you manage your life, teenagers gain appreciation for what you do, for how hard you work to support the family. As they see what you

have achieved, you will gain their respect. When they see firsthand what you cope with, they will have more understanding about what you have accomplished, what you have overcome, and that is a practical learning experience. Show them what you do. You will be strengthening your ties, and even though you might not know it, you will also be teaching time management.

5. **Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate**

With a teenager in the house, you will have lots of chances to sharpen your negotiation skills. It is a golden opportunity to learn to settle disputes so that everyone triumphs. If you use negotiation, you will get to know each other better and you will both feel comfortable, even when you do not see eye-to-eye, and you will be able to face disagreements without breaking up.

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, and particularly with a teenager who is in the process of forming his/her own identity. To expect otherwise is to miss the chance to get to know each other better. Conflicts will not ruin your relationship if you sweep them under the rug and pretend they do not exist. Expecting everything to run smoothly without misunderstandings breeds distance and fosters a pattern of relating that is superficial.

14 year-old Katie has already given up talking things over with her mother because, she says, "My mom gets so upset when I disagree with her, that it is better to keep my thoughts to myself. She does not know me anymore."

This does not mean you should try to work things out in the heat of the moment. If everyone is yelling, take thirty-minutes time-out before you start negotiating. Let your children know that you want to listen to how they feel, by saying, *"I want to give you my full attention, so let us take time-out and meet back here in thirty minutes."* During this time-out, take some deep breaths, center

yourself, and get unruffled. You will want to listen fully to your children's point of view and share yours calmly, before you begin to negotiate.

Some parents like to demand obedience to hard-and-fast rules because it is easier to enforce rules than to negotiate. Firmly established rules strip you and your children of the learning that comes from debating the pros and cons of each unique situation.

Mary wanted to go for a concert, but her mother was not comfortable with the surroundings. Negotiations started with each of them stating what they were asking for and why it was so important. Her mother said, "It is important for me to feel that you will be safe." Mary responded, "It is important to me to feel that you can trust me to take care of myself in this situation." From this beginning, they were able to discuss and figure out what would make Mom secure and Mary feel trusted.

Ask for your kids' suggestions: "Can you think of another solution?" "Any other ideas?" "What do you want me to do?" There is a lifetime skill gained in learning to talk things over. Negotiating helps your teen think things through, take both persons' needs into account, and feel responsible for coming up with a solution. When you negotiate, you continue to build a bond while respecting your teen's individuality.

Keep your rules at home negotiable. It takes more time and effort to negotiate, but it keeps your home life lively and spontaneous. There are plenty of rules elsewhere that we are all following.

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