



Are Your Teens' Moods Getting in the Way? by Sue Blaney

Teenagers are famous for their moody ups and downs. In your home do you experience the occasional slammed door, teary outburst or angry shout? This is all part of family life. Let's set your expectations about what is "normal" and typical for teen behavior and moods; this way you will be more able to keep communication open and improve your relationship with your teen. A good relationship will help you as you try to minimize your teen's involvement with alcohol, drugs and other risky behavior.

Teens' emotions are intense. There has been a lot of research in the area of teens' developing brains, and today we know that teens feel and respond to almost everything through their emotions. Much of the information that adults process logically, teens process in the emotional center of their brains. We even know that teens feel their emotions at twice the intensity that adults do! The emotional rollercoaster ride you see is not your imagination...this is perfectly "normal" for teens.

Intense feelings may cause some teens to spend more time behind closed doors, communicate with you less, and spend more time with their friends— who feel like they do. Some teens withhold information from parents so they feel a sense of power... helping them to feel independent. While this behavior may be typical, it can complicate your family's dynamics and your ability to keep communication open. Remember, communication is the key to your success in helping to keep your child safe from engaging in alcohol or drug use.

Here are some tips for parents/care givers:

- When emotions are high, try to respond in a way that helps to create a solution; you surely don't want to make the problem bigger through your reactions. As best you can, try to be a calming influence when your teen is highly emotional.
- Address the situation or discussion later when emotions are less intense.
- Put yourself in his/her shoes. Your teenager is responding to situations from the point of view of someone who has far less experience than you do. A bad test grade or a break up with a friend can feel like a lay-off or divorce would feel to you. Give him or her your sympathy and support.

If your teen's behavior and moods are making communication difficult and you are concerned about him or her, it may be time to activate your network. Touch base with the important adults in your teen's life – guidance counselors, teachers, coaches, family members, friends, faith leaders... or, other people who have a relationship with your teen. You can do this in ways that don't send out red flags, or embarrass your teen. Make sure that you have relationships with the adults in your teen's life who can be called upon to give helpful guidance to you or your teen should the need arise.