

## It's Normal - Teenage Behaviour

It's not uncommon for parents to worry about their children's behaviour as it can be challenging to differentiate between normal teenage behaviour & symptoms of mental illness, drug use, or behavioural difficulties.

### Normal Behaviour

- Wanting separation, distance, & privacy from family
- Spending increasingly more time on technology or locked in their room
- Short-tempered, angry, & easily embarrassed
- Engaged with friends & in healthy social & extracurricular activities outside of the home
- Engaging in risky behaviours at a younger age than you did at their age – social norms have changed & as adults we should not compare our teenagers behaviours to our own at their age. Although you may not support a behaviour, this doesn't mean it is atypical.

Teenagers have not developed the same coping skills as adults, & new experiences or troubles can be perceived as a much bigger deal to teens than they would to adults. What may seem like an overreaction to a school grade or a dispute with a friend may in fact be an appropriate reaction for a teenager.

### Abnormal Behaviour

- Not engaging in activities they used to enjoy or with friends
- Chronically angry, anxious, frustrated, or sad – in particular, when there are episodes lasting more than a few days
- Significant decrease in school performance or strong resistance to attending school
- Physical pains (stomachaches, headaches, back pains)
- Problems with memory, attention, or concentration
- Big changes in energy levels, eating, or sleeping patterns
- Sees or hears things that others do not
- Excessive disregard for personal hygiene or appearance

\*It is important to remember that no one sign means that there is a problem. It depends on the nature, intensity, severity, & duration of a problem.

### Tips

- Talk to your teen's friends' parents - compare your teen's behaviours to their group norm
- Start an ongoing conversation about mental illness with your teenager - remember to avoid sarcasm, threats, & the need to get the last word. Do listen, make allowances, & be open to different answers. If things get heated or overwhelming, take breaks & return to the conversation later.
- Acknowledge that you are in this together
- Teens – Remember, parents frequently react strongly because they know the stakes are high... & because they love you

### Sources

<http://www.asmfmh.org/resources/publications/normal-teenage-behaviour-vs-early-warning-signs-of-mental-illness/>

American Psychological Association - Teenagers: <http://www.apa.org/topics/teens/index.aspx>

American Psychological Association - Brochures: <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/brochures/index.aspx>

Local organizations: [http://www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/other\\_psychology\\_web\\_links](http://www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/site/other_psychology_web_links)