Teens, ADHD, and Risky Behavior

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Teens, ADHD and Risky Behavior
Outline

• Developmental Goals for Teens
• Why Symptoms of ADHD Put Teens At Even More Risk
• Specific Temptations
  – Substance Abuse
  – Sex
  – Peer Pressure
  – Driving
• How to Interact Effectively With Your Teen
Developmental Goals and Demands on Teens

- Establishing an identity that is separate from parents (early adolescence) and peers (late adolescence)
- Becoming independent
- Exposure to new temptations, including drugs and alcohol
- Experience of new feelings and emotions
- Managing more responsibilities, including harder courses at school and multiple demands
- Thinking about the future
How ADHD Symptoms Put Teens At Risk

• Immaturity
  – Brain development may be slower by up to 3 years
  – Social development is approximately 30% behind peers
• Impulsive Behavior
  – Acting or speaking without thinking
  – Difficulty delaying gratification
• Difficulty planning ahead
  – “Now vs. not now” mentality
  – Not likely to weigh consequences
• Low Frustration Tolerance
  – More intense emotional responses
  – Sensitive to criticism or disapproval
• Restlessness/Need for Stimulation
  – May be easily bored and look for distractions and excitement
ADHD Teens & Substance Abuse

- 5% of teens in US have drinking problems; 14% of teens with ADHD have drinking problem
- 55% of adults with ADHD have experienced some type of substance abuse
- Why ADHD and Substances?
  - May alleviate feelings of shame, frustration, hopelessness
  - Alcohol may calm physical, emotional, and intellectual restlessness
  - Marijuana use may help with focus
- What to do
  - Help them learn how to cope with problems in an effective way
  - Be proactive about solutions for situations they may face
  - Make sure they participate in other activities they enjoy/excel at
  - Let your children know they are important by spending time with them
  - Have discussions about drugs and alcohol and be clear about expectations and consequences
  - Do not overreact if you hear something you don’t like
  - Know the signs of drug use:
    - Paraphernalia
    - Identification with drug culture
    - Physical deterioration
    - Changes in school performance
    - Increase in defiant behavior such as stealing and lying
ADHD Teens & Sex

- Teenagers untreated for their ADHD are ten times more likely to get pregnant, or cause a pregnancy, than those without ADHD.
- Teenagers untreated for their ADHD are 400% more likely to contract a sexually transmitted disease than teens without ADHD: 16% to 4%.
- Why ADHD and Sex?
  - Difficulty planning ahead
  - Lack of consideration for consequences
  - Teens with low self-esteem crave the attention
- What to do
  - Many of the same things as with substance abuse: focus on increasing self-esteem, being non-judgmental, etc.
  - Prepare younger children (ages 8 - 10) for what changes to expect
  - Normalize sexual behavior, but discuss (and perhaps role play) what “good decisions” look like
  - Talk openly about your concerns; if you cannot do that, neither can your children
  - When speaking with teens, discuss topics such as:
    - Sexuality as part of whole self
    - Connection between sex and valuing the self
    - Communication and intimacy
    - How values can guide behavior (offer examples)
    - How alcohol influences decision-making
    - Birth control
    - Disease prevention
ADHD Teens & Peer Pressure

• Why is peer pressure particularly difficult for ADHD teens?
  – Desire to fit in may be exacerbated by previous difficulty fitting in
  – If he feels different, isolated, alone, he will gain positive reinforcement by feeling he is part of a group
  – Desire to be “popular”

• What to do
  – Many of the same things as with substance abuse and sex
  – Convey that you understand need to fit in (do NOT belittle it!)
  – Ask questions about his perspective
  – Help him find groups related to their interests that will allow for *positive* peer pressure
  – Help him find ways to give back to community
  – When talking about friends who concern you, do not be judgmental. Be open and listen.
ADHD Teens & Driving

• When compared to other teens...
  – ADHD teen drivers are seven times as likely to have been in 2 or more accidents.
  – ADHD teen drivers are two times as likely to have a speeding ticket.
  – ADHD teen drivers are five times as likely to have a traffic citation.
  – ADHD teen drivers are four times as likely to have been in an injury accident.
  – ADHD teen drivers are four times as likely to have been at fault for the accident they were in.

• Why such difficulties?
  – As with most teens: lack of experience and feelings of invincibility
  – Impulsivity
  – Distractibility

• What to do
  – Model safe driving
  – Make sure your child is mature enough before allowing him to drive
  – Discuss how symptoms may affect driving
  – Make driving a privilege (that must be earned by acting responsible, such as filling out a log about previous driving tips) and slowly increase amount of time as teen earns it
  – Ensure that he has enough practice with someone else in the car
  – Create a checklist for when he first gets in the car (seatbelt, checking mirrors, etc);
  – Enforce rules about medication as well as distractions in the car (cell phones, changing radio station, etc.)
  – Do not allow other passengers (who can be distractions) for the first few months
  – Minimize amount of time spent in traffic when dangers (and tempers) are at highest point
  – Teach your child how to plan to leave lots of extra time when going somewhere
Interacting Effectively With Your ADHD Child at Any Age

• Provide structure and consistency to create healthy routines
• *Teach* and *practice* skills, including problem-solving and decision-making
• Use positive communication to demonstrate their value
• Respect your child’s experience
  – If you don’t, he’ll look for respect in sex, admiration for using drugs, etc.
  – If they feel unloved, he will turn to risky behavior to numb pain
• Keep in mind that walking side-by-side is less threatening than face-to-face
  – both literally and figuratively
• Use positive behavioral strategies rather than punishments whenever possible
  – Punishment alone is often ineffective because it doesn’t take into consideration the biological differences in ADHD teens’ brains
  – In fact, punishment may backfire as some teens respond to frequent negative interactions with negative/aggressive behavior
What to Consider When Interacting With Teens

• Teens may not respond to time-outs, token systems, and stickers and charts the way younger children do.
• Recognize that your teen needs to start taking responsibility for his own life.
• Some suggestions:
  – Negotiate with your teen, which not only teaches the skill of negotiation but also demonstrates that you respect his perspective.
  – Allow your child to write you a note (or make a verbal argument) to make his case. Consider it seriously.
  – Create contracts together.
  – Set expectations by consistently using the rule: “When you do what is expected, then you may do what you want to do.”
  – If your teen still does not meet expectations, ask yourself:
    • Did he clearly understand the expectations?
    • Did he clearly understand the consequences?
    • Were the consequences (both reward and punishment) important enough to motivate a behavior?
    • Was I consistent and immediate in delivering rewards and punishments?
    • Did my spouse fail to follow through or follow through inconsistently?
    • Were we trying to modify too many behaviors at the same time?

• If you feel your child is at risk, do something. Remember that you are his parent, not his friend, and you might have to make decisions that he doesn’t like!
Summary

• Dealing with the symptoms
  – Immaturity → do not allow privileges before they are ready
  – Impulsive Behavior and Difficulty Planning Ahead → Teach positive routines
  – Low Frustration Tolerance → Teach problem-solving and coping skills (and foster positive self-esteem)
  – Restlessness → Make sure positive activities are available

• Teach skills by
  – Creating structure and consistency
  – Practicing before a tempting situation arises

• Foster positive self-esteem, including:
  – Feelings of value
  – Feelings of competency

• Remember that your role as a parent…
  – Does not mean you don’t consider his point of view
  – Does mean you will make some decisions he doesn’t like
Questions?

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