



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately.

An online directory of mental health services in South Dakota, searchable by town, is available at www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org. Other mental health resources are at this site as well. Information can also be obtained by calling 211 in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or calling toll-free 1-877-377-0941 from other areas of South Dakota.

We would appreciate your feedback on this “Wing For Life” newsletter. Please take three minutes to complete the on-line survey: www.seuw.org/wings.aspx

IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- The Importance of Body Image
- But Mom, All of My Friends Have One!
- Building Character: Addressing Drug Use
- Talking to Your Child about Disaster and News

The Importance of Body Image

Negative peer pressure is something that most of us as parents worry about, but we don't necessarily know how to talk to our children about it. Peer pressure is much more than just a phase or a “time of life” that adolescents must muddle through. And, while it can be something as simple and non-threatening as an outrageous new hair cut or color, it can also be dangerous behaviors that your child is exposed to.

During the teen years, your child is trying to discover his identity and sense of self. It is important to remember that every child develops differently and at his own pace, so be

careful about comparing your child to another child. You need to be in tune with what is going on and provide support and advice. Many parents assume that their child doesn't value their opinion; however, this is not the case. Children do listen to their parents. You can provide stability and be a positive influence in your child's decision-making process.

Body image plays an important part in self-esteem and peer relationships. Girls who go through puberty earlier, for example, are at a greater risk for developing eating disorders, depression, and early sexual activity. For both boys and girls, concerns about personal appearance are very common during the teen years or adolescence. Because of the stress of worrying about how they appear to others, adolescents may be more likely to make poor choices which can affect their health and well-being. Some examples of these may include:

- poor food choices; skipping meals or bingeing/purging (eating too much and then vomiting)
- using tanning beds and/or tanning without proper sun protection (i.e. sun tan lotion w/ SPF of 15 or above)
- experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs.



Youth with chronic illnesses are at an increased risk for lower self-esteem and body image issues. Any illness that affects how your child develops physically or forces lifestyle changes, such as diabetes, can be exceptionally difficult.

There are things that you can do to promote positive self-esteem and counteract negative peer pressure:

- Praise and encourage your child. Both praise and encouragement can happen either directly or indirectly. For instance, parents can tell their teen they did a good job at something in front of them or mention it to someone else while their teen is within earshot. Although direct praise is

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children.

For additional resources on children's mental health, visit www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org.

This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.



good, indirect praise can sometimes be more powerful since it seems more genuine. This helps him feel positive about who he is and the choices he is making.

- Talk about how to avoid situations that are dangerous or negative. Talk about how to get out of a situation that is uncomfortable such as saying “no thanks.”
- Encourage him to surround himself with supportive friends who have a positive influence.
- Discuss with your child how he feels about himself and his skills and abilities.
- Encourage healthy food choices and regular physical activity.
- Stay in touch with your child’s school. Children who have a positive connection in school and participate in school and community activities are less likely to experiment in risky or dangerous behaviors.
- Although the early teen years is a time of exciting change for many parents and their teens, the transition from elementary to middle school or junior high can be difficult for some youth. Watch for changes in your child’s behavior, performance, or mood during major life transitions.

Remember, negative peer pressure is a very real issue that

most adolescents face. However, with the proper support and guidance, it can become a positive learning experience rather than a negative or dangerous one. If you are worried about your child during this time or feel your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

But Mom, All of My Friends Have One!

Does your child just have to have the latest computer game, the coolest clothes, or the hottest CDs? Does your child want to spend her money faster than she can earn it? Does she look down on other kids who don’t have the “right” clothing or possessions? Most parents who want to raise a responsible, caring child should be concerned about the effect extreme materialism can have on a child’s self-image and values.

Out of control materialism should be addressed. If you feel like your child is caught in the spending trap, there are some things you can do to help. Help your child under-

BUILDING CHARACTER:

Addressing Drug Use

As children get older, they will be required to make more decisions, and the decisions will become more difficult and complex. Increasingly, youths are also being held accountable for the consequences of their choices. Decisions regarding academics, friendships, career choices, or how to spend free time have greater significance. Peer pressure increases during adolescence, but also pressure your child places on himself may increase.

Parents may not have much influence on the pressures their children experience, but they can have a great influence on the decisions they make. This is particularly true with the pressure to use drugs. There are many positive things adults can do for their adolescent child to deter drug use.

Serve as a good role model. What are you doing or saying in front of your child? Are you demonstrating appropriate and moderate use of alcohol and prescription medicines?

Keep your child busy. Encourage him to become involved in positive activities to help occupy his free time.

Show your support. Get involved in the life of your child. Attend school and extracurricular activities that your child is involved in. Know your child’s friends and

the friends’ families. Have your child’s friends over and make a point to meet their parents at activities if possible.

Communicate. Don’t be afraid to discuss the subject of drug use. Use opportunities that may arise to start frequent, short conversations regarding good, healthy decisions related to drug use. Role play ways to use “refusal skills” with your child if he is offered alcohol or drugs. Brainstorm ways your child can opt out of difficult situations. One long lecture is not as effective. Help your child feel comfortable about talking to you about difficult subjects, such as drugs and alcohol.

Share your feelings. Let your child know that you will do everything in your power to keep him safe from harm. Encourage good decisions and acknowledge and praise these decisions when they occur.

Be aware of signs of drug use. Have you noticed any abrupt or drastic changes in your child’s actions or behaviors? Is his physical appearance different? Is your child struggling in school? Is he socializing or hanging out with a new crowd or group of friends? One or a combination of these indicators could be a sign of drug use.

If you are suspect drug use or abuse, please contact your physician, school counselor, or mental health professional.

stand that character, contribution to society, and quality of personal relationships have more value than any material goods.

- **Be a role model.** Look at your own habits. For example, track your own spending habits for a month, then determine how much of your money is going to wants as opposed to needs. Are there any areas in your budget where you could use restraint? Are you caught up in “having it all?” Model what is important to you by having your child track her own spending as you have done.
- **Talk about money and materialism.** Discuss finances with your child, even if she seems too young to understand the finer points. By the time your child reaches middle school, she will be more reality based. Talk to her about the pitfalls of credit card debt and the need to budget even small amounts of money. Don’t be afraid to admit the mistakes you’ve made in your own life but also share the lessons you have learned and how it can be freeing to be in control of your spending.
- **Talk about why it seems so important to have the coolest clothes or the hottest game.** Let her know that being a good person or friend has nothing to do with one’s possessions. Talking about family values, important relationships, and positive self-esteem is helpful to your child, showing her the importance of these things.
- **Turn off the television.** Research has shown that the fewer

commercials that our children see, the less materialistic they become. Help your child become aware of advertisers’ marketing claims and work on cutting down TV time. Take time to spend quality time with your children. Teach them about other cultures, nature, and other interests besides materialistic issues. Learn from others about what makes them feel good about themselves.

- **Shop with your child.** At the mall, talk to your child about differences in price and value, warranties, and long-term use. Allow your child to make her own mistakes and learn from the consequences. Let your child buy that cheap, plastic necklace even though you know it will be broken within days. She’ll soon learn not to spend her money on things that won’t hold up.
- **Learn to Say No.** Children who get everything they ask for don’t learn to handle disappointment or learn to work for things they desire.

Everything you do with money has some kind of value attached to it. There are many opportunities to demonstrate the link between money decisions and family values. Help your child acquire a balanced attitude about money, material items, and self-esteem. You will also help her achieve lasting financial and emotional success.

TODAY’S ISSUE

Talking to Your Child about Disaster and News

Children react to a disaster in different ways. Your child doesn’t have to be directly in the disaster zone to be affected emotionally. Your child could be affected simply by hearing about the event and seeing the images on TV or by discussions at school and with peers. It is important for parents to know how their child might respond to disasters and how to talk to him/her about it.

Older children are likely to complain that they have physical pains when they are under stress. They may not do the chores, homework, or other responsibilities they previously handled. They may compete for attention from their parents or teachers or withdraw and resist authority. They may act out at home or in school and also start experimenting with high-risk behaviors such as alcohol or drug use.

When talking to your child after a disaster here are some tips to follow:

- Provide your child with the opportunity to talk about what is in the media and to ask questions.

- Tell your child your feelings and fears about the situation.
- Tell your child the truth about what occurred but do not create a sense of panic.
- Don’t be afraid to admit that you can’t answer all questions.
- Answer the questions at a level your child can understand. Don’t use big words that will confuse your child.
- Provide opportunities for your child to talk about the event more than once because there will probably be more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to create a family emergency plan. This may be very comforting to you and your child.
- Allow your child to discuss other fears and questions since the communication lines are open.
- If your child does not want to talk about what happened, suggest other ways of expression such as drawing pictures or writing stories and poems.
- Monitor your child’s exposure to the media. Some parents may wish to limit how many graphic and troubling scenes their child views. If possible, watch the news reports with your child as this is when he might develop questions.
- In addition to the tragic views, help your child see the heroic actions and assistance offered by people to disaster victims.

You may want to help your child find a way to help those affected by the disaster. Children at this age could give blood or volunteer with community organizations that are assisting the victims.

If you are worried about your child during this time or feel your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org.

The term "parent" is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.

Printing and distribution provided by



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