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better you

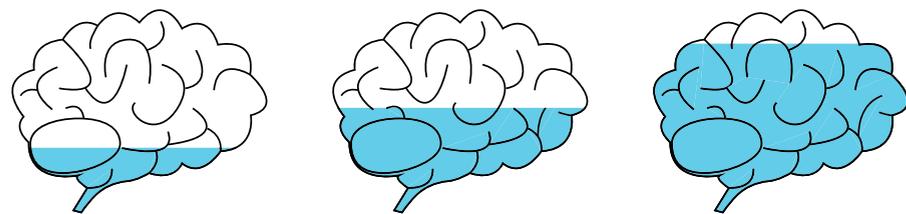
IMAGINE THAT.

Alone in a
Social World:
Relationships in the Digital Age

Vaping & More
What your kids are inhaling

A to D
What's up when
grades go down

2019/2020
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Wired for Trouble: Inside the Teen Brain

“I don’t know what happened to my child!” Sound familiar? The answer is your teen is simply growing up, and your once sweet, innocent, obeying child may now be a disorganized and even argumentative teen.

During the early to mid-adolescent years (ages 11 to 15) the brain’s prefrontal cortex is still developing. “At this age, kids often rely on the part of the brain called the amygdala which is associated with emotions, impulses and aggression,” said Valorie Rose, LIMHP, LADC, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner.

That means brain systems that seek rewards and process emotions are much more developed than the cognitive system which is responsible for good decision making, less impulsivity and more planning. The rational part of the teenager’s brain is not fully developed and won’t be until approximately age 25.

“But my child is too smart to act like this!” It doesn’t matter how intelligent your child is or the score of your child’s ACT or SAT, teenagers are less likely to think before they act. They often don’t consider the consequences of their actions or change their dangerous and or inappropriate behaviors.

“As a result, typical adolescents will push every boundary and test every limit as they strive for independence. The role of the parent is to help them come into that independence safely and responsibly,” Rose said.

“What can I do between now and age 25?” The answer for parents is to teach self-regulation, which is managing thoughts and feelings to achieve goal-directed actions or behaviors. Self-regulation tools include:

- Using persistence to complete big projects
- Solving problems to overcome challenges
- Delaying gratification to achieve goals
- Managing frustration and seeking help

“When self-regulation is out of control, poor decisions and impulsive behavior can have life-long consequences which teens are not capable of comprehending,” Rose said. “So teaching self-regulation during teen years becomes critical – plus it promotes well-being throughout a person’s life.”

Self-Regulation Toolbox for Parents

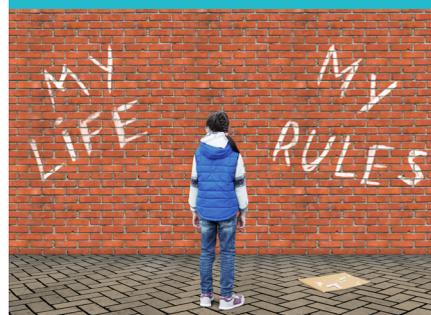
Model and coach behaviors on how, when, where and why to use skills, such as when conflicts arise with friends, classmates and coworkers.

Structure a teen’s environment to make self-regulation more manageable and provide a barrier against environmental stressors such as peer pressure.

- Limit opportunities for risk taking
- Have positive discipline and natural consequences for poor decisions
- Reduce the intensity of highly charged emotional situations by allowing time to calm down

Build a warm, responsive relationship so teens feel safe to learn and make mistakes as they are faced with bigger decisions and more challenging situations.

Amp up support for teens at risk who have experienced individual or environmental risk factors (divorce, peer rejection, peer substance use, poverty, child abuse) which may contribute to delays in developing self-regulation.



A to D: What’s Up When Grades Go Down



Declining grades, lack of motivation, fighting at home... what’s going on? Well, it’s clear...you have teens.

“It’s easy to label kids as defiant or difficult when faced with bad grades, arguing or lack of motivation on a frequent basis. However, there may be deeper reasons and as parents we can help,” said Bridget Mostek, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner.

A good way to start, according to Mostek:

- **Keep the doors of communication open.** You can’t make your kids talk to you, but it’s important to keep trying. Don’t fall into the trap of putting consequences in place for lack of communication. You are only placing more bricks and mortar on an already tough exterior.

• **Let your kids know you are present.** Put down your phone, turn off the TV, look them in the eye and listen. You have to truly listen to your children to understand them. Listen to understand, not just to reply.

• **Discuss any possible underlying reasons.** Is there a situation at school with a student or teacher? Do they doubt their confidence, struggle with self-esteem or feel embarrassed to ask questions?

“As parents or professionals we are quick to give advice and offer solutions or suggestions,” said Mostek. “However, sometimes all our teens need is for us to just be truly present and listen.”

Strategies for Classroom Success

Is homework taking a backseat to video games and hanging with friends? Try these pointers to help your teen succeed academically.

Get involved to stay informed. Parent-teacher conferences, open houses, school activities and volunteering are great ways to get to know teachers and staff. You’ll quickly learn what is expected and how you can support your teen. And knowing the school’s layout helps when talking about your teen’s day.

Can’t visit? There is invaluable insight to be gained

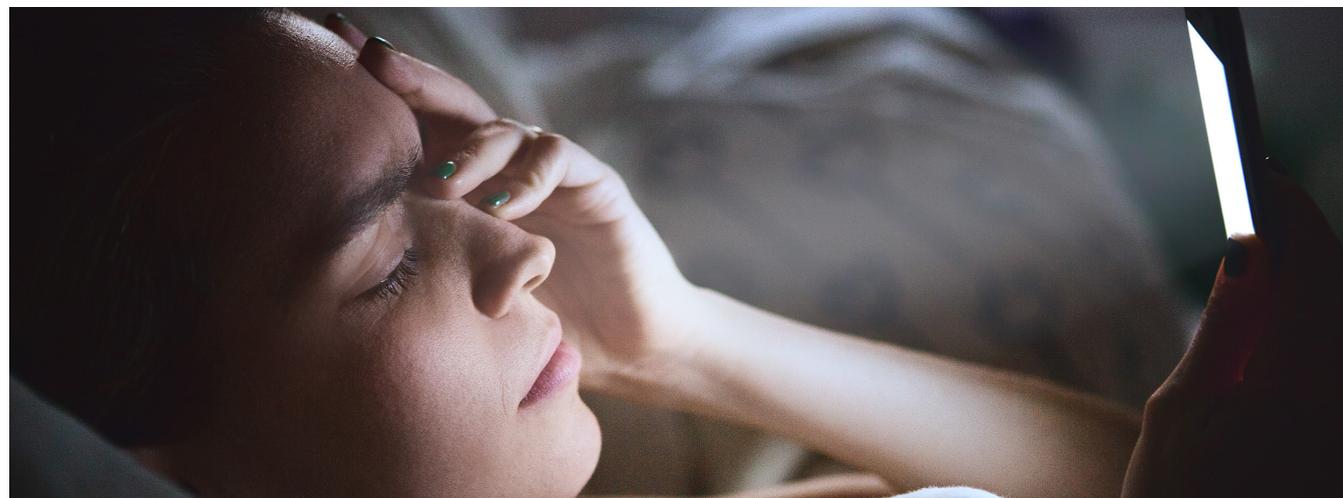
with just a few clicks on the school website. Many teachers maintain their own websites providing access to textbooks, homework assignments and other resources.

Support homework expectations. More than just providing a distraction-free study space, parents can offer to help with homework or encourage teens to ask for help. Make time to talk about school daily, regularly review class loads and assignments. Help your teen stay organized and prioritize extracurricular activities with school work.

Send your teen to school ready to learn. Make sure your teen starts the day with a nutritious breakfast and 8½ to 9½ hours sleep. Take attendance seriously. Catching up with classwork, projects and tests is stressful and can interfere with learning.

Vampire Hours:

What's Keeping Teens Up at Night



Your child's teenage years are perhaps some of the busiest of their lives. School becomes more demanding, activities stack up, social circles grow and their bodies begin to change. While their schedules are full, their sleep often suffers.

"Cumulatively, teenagers could end up eight hours sleep deprived by the end of the school week," said Tim Tesmer, MD, CHI Health Clinic ear, nose and throat specialist. "The lack of adequate sleep time affects concentration, mood, wakefulness, poor school performance and poor athletic performances."

Dr. Tesmer said extreme lack of sleep can also have far reaching effects, contributing to feelings of anxiety and depression.

To perform their best, teens need more sleep than young children and adults. Through these formative years, Dr. Tesmer said a little more than nine hours of rest each night is ideal.

"The developing brain that's undergoing a lot of hormonal shifts needs more time to rest and regenerate," he said.

To ensure your teen is getting enough sleep, Dr. Tesmer said the best course of action is to develop a routine and stick with it on the weekends.

"This helps your body get into a regular rhythm," he said. "If it's not possible to maintain a routine on the weekends, take an afternoon nap."

Getting enough sleep is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to a healthy teen. Another challenge is making sure that sleep is restful.

"When you're looking at blue lights right before bed, it decreases the amount of melatonin, increases our arousal and turns our brain back on because it's almost like it's mimicking daylight," said Aaron Robinson, MD. "Then, it's harder to fall asleep and when you do fall asleep, it's less restful because you have less rapid eye movement (REM) sleep."

Dr. Robinson, a CHI Health Clinic ear, nose and throat specialist, consistently talks with teens about sleep hygiene and blue lights before bed. He said any type of screen can contribute to a restless night.

"The worst thing you can do is have a TV or computer in your child's bedroom," Dr. Robinson said. "Reading a book before bed is different because it's not stimulating visual receptors that make the melatonin stop secreting."

Recommendations for healthy rest:

- **Screens** – Avoid 1-2 hours before bedtime
- **Food** – Avoid before bedtime
- **Lights** – Use yellow- or orange-toned bulbs for nightstands to mimic sunset hues
- **Supplements** – Take melatonin to help initiate feelings of sleepiness if challenges persist



Gaming: Harmless Fun or Unhealthy Addiction?

Is your teen addicted to video games? Apparently the public's preoccupation is so great that the World Health Organization last year declared gaming addiction "a mental health disorder."

Video games can provide recreation, problem-solving and abstraction, as well as some social connection, said Beau Carlson, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner. But he's also seen studies that show they can be habit-forming and disruptive.

"I have personally worked with children who exhibit a high sensitivity to electronics-induced dopamine, where they become increasingly

irritable and agitated following exposure to electronics or gaming," said Carlson. "And there seems to be a positive correlation between depression, anxiety, ADHD and overuse of the games."

Children who play extended amounts of video games also may be socially delayed. "I have worked with a number of children and adults who tend to use video games to self-medicate and avoid obligations," he said. "And online environments can foster unrealistic conditions where bullying is more prevalent due to the difficult nature of online, real-time monitoring."

How much gaming is too much

Signs of obsessive behavior to be on the lookout for, according to Beau Carlson, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner:

- Sneaking playing time outside of established limits
- Skipping meals
- Gaming too close to bedtime (the games' "blue light" can disrupt sleep cycles) or staying up too late or all night gaming
- Opting out of other activities, such as sports, hanging out with friends, etc.

"I would encourage adult caregivers to set limits for children so that basic needs (eating, sleeping, homework, interacting with family and friends) are fulfilled."



Vaping, Dabbing and More:

What Your Kids Are Inhaling



If we can't smell any smoke, how are we supposed to know there's a fire?

A stray lighter, overheard phone conversations or smoky-smelling clothes were once signs parents could quickly sniff out indicating bad choices.

The vaping epidemic served as a wakeup call. Overnight, technology advanced beyond regulations and teens could quickly jump into a life-long addiction that's much harder for parents to detect.

"Even kids who wouldn't think of lighting up a cigarette are experimenting with JUUL. It's trendy, fun-flavored and doesn't come with the stigma of smoking. It's easy to buy, easy to hide and seems like a 'safe' risk," said Kim Burr, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic tobacco cessation counselor.

But the tech-friendly design, bubble-gum flavored pods can't hide the alarming amounts of nicotine and other harmful chemicals being inhaled. "Since it's concentrated, one pod is the equivalent of smoking an entire pack of cigarettes," Burr said.

Schools, parents and the FDA eventually caught on, but history has proven there's always a new and better drug around the corner. "Teens are upping the game. Now they're concealing highly concentrated marijuana wax (butane hash oil) in lip balm containers and using e-cigarettes to puff. Unfortunately, this "dabbing" can cause hallucinations, unconsciousness and visits to the ER," said Burr.

So how do parents keep up and clue in to a new culture with hundreds of

DIY videos teaching their kids to best way to smoke a joint undetected? "Parents can't know everything. Focusing on the next risky trend can make you feel powerless," said John Duggins, MS, LIMHP, LADC, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner. "Try working on your relationship instead."

Research supports Duggins. Regular conversations about the dangers of drugs and alcohol are reported to lessen the chance of teen usage by 42 percent. However, only 25 percent of teens say they've had the "drug talk."

"Strengthen your relationship by monitoring, supervising and setting boundaries. Keep the lines of communication open and be a good role model. Sometimes just staying involved can make all the difference," Duggins said.

Those most vulnerable to substance abuse are teens:

- With substance abusing parents
- Who start alcohol/drug use at age 15 or earlier
- Who are experiencing transitions (new school, new community)
- With drug-using peers
- Who are not bonded to school
- Who have difficulty regulating emotions and controlling behavior

For information on marijuana myths, go to CHIhealth.com/MarijuanaMyths. For help confronting your teen about possible drug use, go to CHIhealth.com/ConfrontingTeenDrugUse.

Alone in a Social World:

Relationships in the Age of Digital Media

Quick – how many times a day do you check your phone?

Twenty? Fifty? Would you believe 150 times? That's how often studies find the average mobile user checks emails and text messages a day.

Is that killing "face-to-face" social interaction? Maybe not.

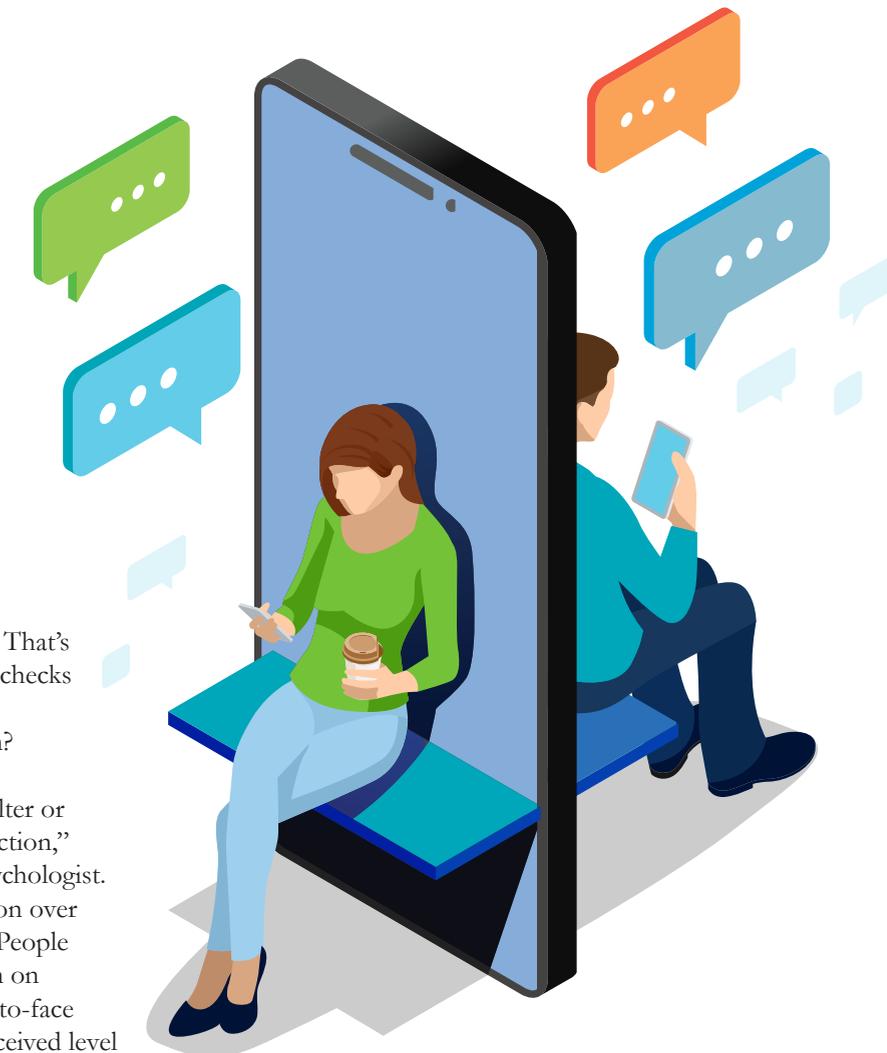
"Social media is often seen as a safe way to filter or screen potential candidates for in-person interaction," says Mark Weilage, PhD, CHI Health Clinic psychologist. "There is also research indicating communication over social media has sped up the intimacy process. People are more likely to disclose personal information on social networking sites than they would in face-to-face communication because they have a higher perceived level of control and safety."

But social media can come up short when you can't make eye contact with a person, hear tone of voice or check out body language. Dr. Weilage's advice to avoid misunderstandings:

"Don't text if you're trying to relay something important or emotion-laden. Face to face is best in those situations and Facetime or a voice call is a good second choice. It is far too easy to misinterpret text messages and as a result things can spiral without the extra cues and immediate feedback."

"Don't text if you're trying to relay something important or emotion-laden."

– Mark Weilage, PhD



Lack of face-to-face communication also can lead to unkind, dehumanizing communication, he warns. "In youth we see a rise in cyber-bullying – demeaning and cruel conversation behind a screen – that would perhaps not happen if there was eye contact and immediate feedback of discomfort on the other person's face."

Other suggestions:

- Ask yourself if your online social media relationships are healthy and balanced, and ask the same thing about your in-person relationships.
- To better understand and work toward that balance, check out the Smart Gen Society at www.smartgensociety.org.

A Glimpse Inside the Troubled Teen's Mind

Once a taboo topic, mental health has been brought out of the shadows by teens who are heroically breaking down barriers with their honesty.

"Teens are more open to sharing their struggle," said Jamie Ryder, PhD, CHI Health Clinic psychologist. "We're doing a better job at recognizing that teens need help with their mental health and not putting as much of a stigma around it."

Mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and disruptive mood dysregulation are what she sees most in her practice.

With 14 years of experience, Dr. Ryder's passion is working with teens, running a group that focuses on helping them learn to manage and regulate extreme emotions. "(Some of these teens have) an overreaction to and may be irritable and on edge," Dr. Ryder said.

"Teens are more open to sharing their struggle."

– Jamie Ryder, PhD

With Generation Z at the center of a society fueled by social media, today's teens are enthralled in a digital culture that psychologists believe is causing their mental state to suffer. Dr. Ryder often works with adolescents who have difficulty with social skills and the ability to form meaningful relationships without using a phone or computer.

"(Social media) needs to be closely monitored by parents and not letting that become your child's whole life," she said.

While they are common factors, Instagram and Snapchat aren't the only things contributing to your teen's state of mind.

"Everybody's story is different," Dr. Ryder said. "Some of it is genetics, biological. A lot of teens that I see have had some type of trauma in their life."

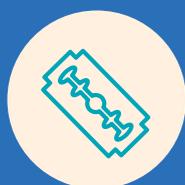
Parents play a vital role in their child's mental health. Recognizing the warning signs is key, but fostering an open and honest relationship is equally important.

"I think you should be having conversations with your child before you even notice things," Dr. Ryder said. "You should have an open and honest dialogue before you see signs. If things are going on, they should already feel comfortable with being able to come to you and share those things."

Mental Health: Signs of Struggle



Avoiding friends or previous social groups



Self-harming behaviors like cutting, burning or hair-pulling



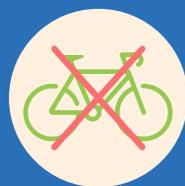
Drastic change in performance at school



Sleeping too much or not sleeping at all



Sudden change in mood or behavior



Loss of interest in things they once enjoyed

Supportive Surroundings: What Parents Can Provide

When it comes to prevention, the following is key, according to Jamie Ryder, PhD, CHI Health Clinic psychologist:

- 1 Structure
- 2 Consistency
- 3 Routine
- 4 Balance

"They need to have these things in order to perform their best," Dr. Ryder said. "They're always going. They're always doing. They need balance in their life – a balance between school and fun. Not too much time on screens, social media and making sure they're getting enough sleep."



Opening the Door to Help: Evaluation Vs. Testing



Knowing when to get your child help and what to do for them can also be a confusing path to navigate. There are several avenues to consider, including evaluation and testing.

Evaluations include a set of in-depth screening questions which can help mental health providers narrow down treatment options like inpatient and outpatient therapy, in-school interventions or medication.

"If we do all those things and put additional supports in place around the child and don't see a change or regression in their behavior, then we might look toward testing to get a more in-depth picture," Dr. Ryder said.

"Testing is a much more complex process and not the first thing you should do."

– Jamie Ryder, PhD

Testing looks for cognitive strengths and weaknesses, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities and personality functioning.

"Testing is a much more complex process and not the first thing you should do," Dr. Ryder said.

Relationship Struggles: When to Step In

Your daughter is suddenly dropped by her friend group. Or your son's buddy seems to be taking advantage of him. When as a parent do you step in and help?

"For run-of-the mill conflict, stand back and let teens work things out," said Casey Ferguson, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner. "Step in when it's an issue of safety – if there is bullying for example."

If you do step in, do so carefully. "A good approach is to pose questions," Ferguson said, such as:

- What would you tell a friend to do in this situation?
- How does it feel when your friend does this?
- Is this a relationship you enjoy, or is it just convenient?

Listen and avoid getting in the middle of the conflict. Letting teens find their way will ultimately empower them in the future. "When we rescue kids, they don't grow from the experience of working through conflict, which is essential for developing long-term healthy relationships," Ferguson said.



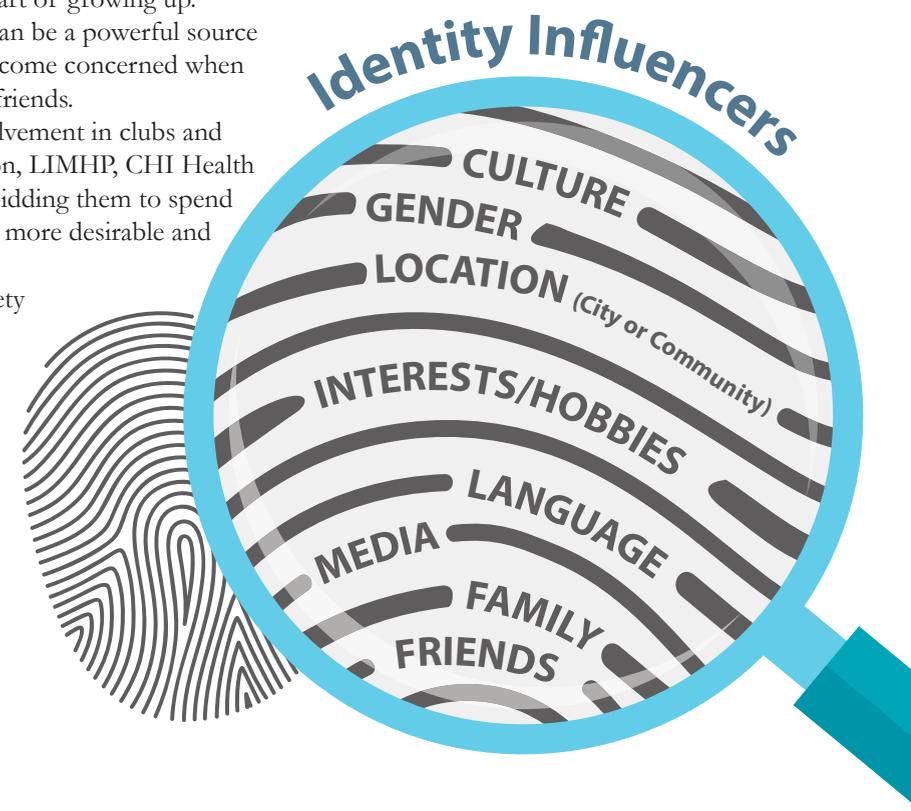
Who Am I? Teen Identity Crisis

If your teen is searching for identity, it's not actually a crisis. In psychology, crisis can mean active exploration – and that's part of growing up.

Kids crave a sense of belonging and friends can be a powerful source of identity during the teen years. Parents can become concerned when teens gravitate toward a questionable group of friends.

"When that happens, you can encourage involvement in clubs and activities outside of school," said Casey Ferguson, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner. "Forbidding them to spend time with that person can make the relationship more desirable and possibly secretive."

An exception to this advice: if your teen's safety is at risk. That's an extenuating circumstance which requires parents to use their best judgment.



Identity Exercise

Have your teen create a collage out of magazine clippings. Make one side "Who I Am" and the other side "Who I Want to Be."

Online Diagnosis: There's a Quiz for That

Depressed or anxious? Bipolar or schizophrenic? There's an online quiz for that. Teens searching online might even stumble across issues they've never heard of before, like type D personality. Alice in Wonderland Syndrome? Yes, there's a site for that.

The upside of all that online information? "If a depression checklist prompts teens to go to their parents for help, that's a good thing," said Casey Ferguson, LIMHP, CHI Health Clinic licensed mental health practitioner.

The downside of online searching? "Not all sources are reputable, and can lead kids down a path that doesn't really apply to them and cause them undue distress."

There's even a diagnosis for obsessive online symptom checking: cyberchondria.



Ferguson's advice for parents? "If your child comes to you with an online diagnosis, listen to the symptoms and take them seriously. A licensed mental health practitioner can help you determine if supportive therapy is all that is needed, or if more formal treatment would be beneficial."



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someone who is, call 911.*

Additional help:

Nebraska Family Helpline
Any Problem. Any Time.

1-888-866-8660

Boys Town National Hotline

1-800-448-3000

National Suicide
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