

How to Recognize an Eating Disorder

Early teen years can bring on bodily changes and weight gain. In a culture that emphasizes being thin, young girls often become self-conscious about their emerging more mature figures. Being preoccupied with her body image does not single a girl out for an eating disorder. However, a parent should be aware that while it is appropriate to maintain an average weight and good fitness, the focus should not become all important and obsessive.

Do only girls have eating disorders?

Some boys have them, but girls are affected in far greater numbers.

What are the most prevalent eating disorders among young teens?

The most commonly recognized disorders are anorexia and bulimia.

How does a youngster develop an eating disorder?

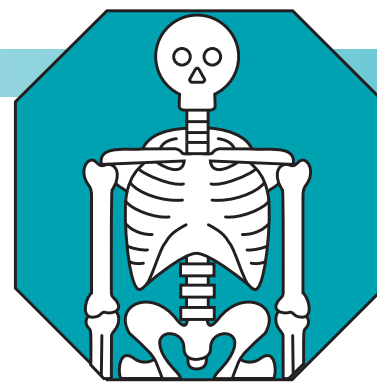
It usually starts with the desire to lose a few pounds. Instead of just maintaining the new, lower weight, however, a youngster becomes preoccupied with

further weight loss and what foods she can or cannot eat – imposing her own rules. She may eat only fruits or vegetables. She may take only very small portions. The anorexic youngster is literally starving. The bulimic teen eats large quantities then intentionally vomits or takes laxatives to get rid of the food.

When should a parent suspect an eating disorder?

A family physician, pediatrician or psychiatrist should be consulted if a youngster:

- ♥ Loses a substantial amount of weight, especially if it is a rapid loss.
- ♥ Displays bizarre eating habits: i.e., cutting food into tiny pieces, refusing to eat with the family, hoarding or eating just one or two types of food.
- ♥ Avoids being seen undressing and wears baggy clothes.
- ♥ Goes to the bathroom immediately after a meal (to purge food by vomiting or to abuse laxatives).
- ♥ Exhibits weakness, irritability, depression or fatigue.
- ♥ Becomes compulsive about other issues: arrangement of a bedroom, clothes, hand washing.



- ♥ Becomes isolated from the family: daughters may become particularly isolated from fathers.

A parent who notes one or more symptoms should act before a child becomes seriously emaciated. Consulting a therapist or counselor who specializes in eating disorders may be helpful.

How can a parent help a child avoid the risk of an eating disorder?

Encourage your child to maintain an appropriate weight, but also recognize that to be fit, healthy and attractive doesn't require stick-like thinness! Beauty comes in all sizes and shapes. Encourage your child to feel good about herself as she is.

The teen who is loved for herself, not just for her talents, performance and accomplishments, is less likely to fall victim to the current epidemic of eating disorders.

Check These Out!

Public libraries have many books, tapes and videos about parenting and child development. Use your library card to check out these and other excellent resources. Invite your young student along to check out books or tapes, too.

For special resources related to parent education and support in your community, contact local social services, schools, hospitals, libraries or United Way.

No body's perfect: stories by teens about body image, self-acceptance, and the search for identity /

Kimberly Kirberger. (B)

Caring for your teenager: the complete and authoritative guide /

editor-in-chief, Donald E. Greydanus ; writer, Philip Bashe ; editorial board, Roberta K. Beach ... [et al.] (B)

Ophelia speaks: adolescent girls write about their search for self /

Sara Shandler. (B)

The teenage body book /

Kathy McCoy and Charles Wibbelsman. (B)

"Don't stop loving me": a reassuring guide for mothers of adolescent daughters /

Ann F. Caron. (B)

Reviving Ophelia [sound recording] /

by Mary Pipher. (A)

(A) audio, (B) book

Healthy Stages is a program of Hampton's Healthy Families Partnership.

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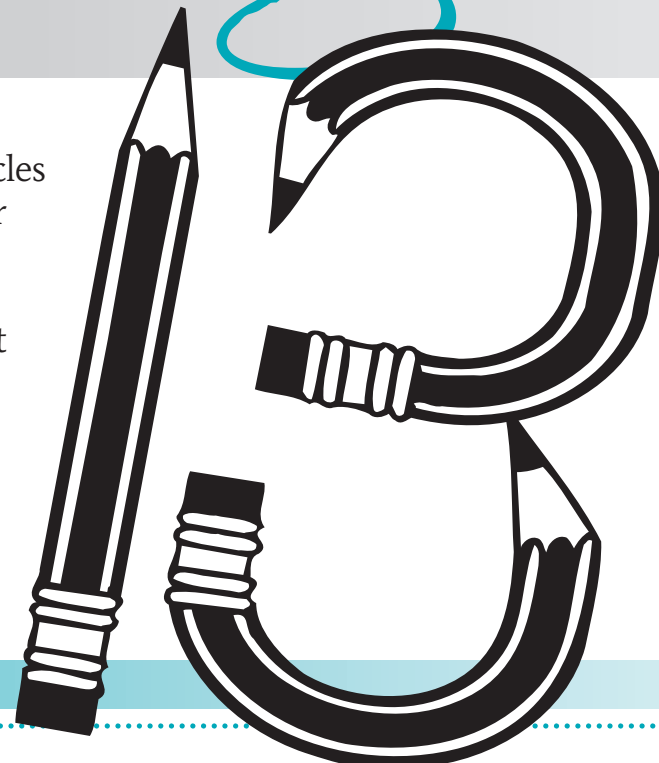
Healthy Stages

8TH GRADE

Tips for Parents of Eighth-Graders. *Healthy Stages* is a free, once-a-year newsletter. It is designed to reach you during your child's current grade in school. Every effort has been made to pack its short articles with helpful facts. We suggest you keep *Healthy Stages* around for the entire school year. Put it in a folder with other important information about your child.

Refer to it from time to time. Its articles may help you deal with a problem or try a new approach in parenting.

We hope you look forward to all that this year brings. And we hope you'll turn to *Healthy Stages* often. We want to help you make this school year one that both you and your child will remember with joy.



Age 13 Brings Changes To Teens Body & Mind

Your eighth-grader can be at any of several stages in puberty by now. Because girls enter puberty generally about two years earlier than boys, at around age nine, your daughter may now look and act very different from the way she did as a younger child. Boys, typically enter puberty at around age eleven, or even later. Each individual's development "time clock" varies, depending on factors that range from genetics to physical health and well-being.

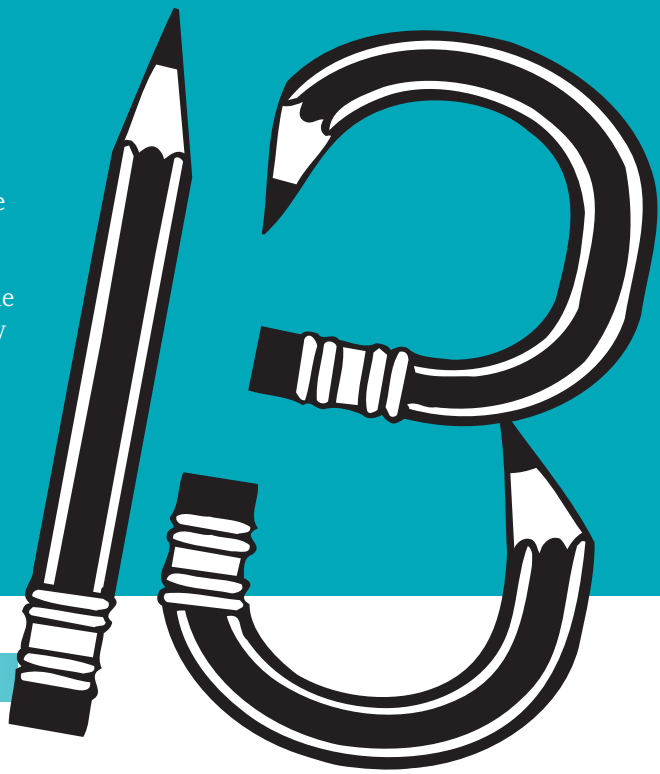
If a parent has felt uneasy talking about sexual topics before this it may seem even more challenging now. Sex discussions with a young teenager need to reflect a parent's knowledge that a son or daughter now has not only a natural curiosity, but also hormonal urges that are part of his or her maturing body. The parent and teenager who can get into trusting sensitive conversations about sex at this stage are building a valuable foundation. So make your conversational style less a lecture and more a confidence-sharing. Let your teen feel free to ask anything and say anything. If you need help – and most parents feel they do – get one or more resource books such as those mentioned in this newsletter's "Check These Out" column.

Realize, too, that the child who wanted to be a movie star or ballplayer now begins to think more realistically about a future career. Help your child discover natural interests and talents. Share facts about your work life with him or her.

Expect your adolescent to test your rules and your patience as he or she begins establishing more inde-

pendence and a unique identity. And remember that your love, affection and approval can be all-important now.

Sleep? Your young teen requires it now more than at any stage since infancy. Sleeping late on a weekend may not be laziness so much as a natural urge to grab a bit more needed rest. Nutrition? Try to see that meals are balanced and snacks aren't just empty calories. Focus on good nutrition and eating habits rather than on weight. Do everything in your power to keep a family dinner hour – if not every night, then several times a week. It's a tradition that feeds both body and spirit.



The Parent-Teacher Partnership

What Do I Say to My Child's Teacher?

Many parents feel perfectly comfortable establishing a bond with elementary school teachers. When their child becomes a teen, the effort seems to become harder. Often, there's more than one teacher to get to know. And teens sometimes resist a connection between moms or dad and the school! Yet now is a vitally important time for you to stay in touch with school and help your child succeed. Here are some conversation starters with teachers:

"Hello. Glad to meet you!" Attend PTA meetings and teacher conferences. Simply being there will prove you're a parent with your child's best interests at heart.

"When is the best time to contact you?" Find this out from each teacher. Write down times and phone numbers. The teacher will know you're serious about staying in touch, and will appreciate your effort to make it convenient.

"What are the class rules and course plans?" Often, teachers hand out a schedule of rules, study guides and projects. Often, students cram them in a backpack and forget to bring them home. Ask for your own copy of what's expected. It will help you help your child.

"How is my child progressing?" You'll want to know: Is my youngster advancing or falling behind in a subject? How well does my child participate in class? Do you note any learning strengths or weaknesses? Is my child squinting or showing any other physical signs that should be checked by our doctor? Is homework being turned in regularly?

"How can I help?" Let a teacher know you'll gladly cooperate, whether it's by helping your child gather library resources for a report, checking over homework or getting involved in class activities.



Nurturing Your Teen

Satisfying conversations with Your Eighth-Grader

Do you try to talk with your young teen only to be cut short?

Example: "What did you do at school?" "Oh, nothin."

Advice from a college instructor in child and family education is: Keep it light. Yield the right of way. Let go of an adult agenda:

Open by sharing. Tell something about your day instead of starting with a question about his or hers. Starting with a question is controlling. Starting with a personal thought is leading.

Show a warm body response. When your child talks, light up your face. Touch a hand. Let your body say, "I am here for you now."

Rephrase in your own words. Child: "Jason slammed me against a wall in PE. And the teacher yelled about being noisy when I wasn't even talking." Parent: "So you were a victim twice today, huh?"

Offer a parallel comment instead of advice. Parent: "I hated being yelled at in class, too." – not – "You should stay away from Jason."

Close with feeling. Wrap up your conversation with a caring thought: "I like talking with you," Or "I love you." Learn how to be free and non-judgmental now, and your child may become your intimate conversation partner for life.

This article was abbreviated from "Conversations that Go Somewhere" by Tom Drummond, Parenting Insights Issue no.2, 1994.

Empowering Your Teen, Liberating Yourself

A mother may "wait on" a 13-year-old, thinking she is letting her youngster have a few more precious months as a child. A dad may "give up and give in" rather than stand firm on a house rule, reasoning that he's keeping peace in the family. But that is not what's happening. The child who has everything done for her is being taught to stay dependent all her life. The child who gets his way by wearing down a parent will try the same tactic on a future professor, boss or spouse. The more you introduce reasonable self-care, chores and responsibilities to your teens, the less pressured you'll feel by the workload that falls to you!



Parenting Teenagers is the guidebook for STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens), by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, *American Guidance Service, Inc., 1993. It is used in STEP/Teen classes, and is also available at most bookstores. Here are a few tips from the book, to help you begin showing your teen how to grow into a responsible young adult.

Wake up call: Do you call your teen over and over, even though he or she has an alarm clock? Inform your youngster that he or she is to take personal responsibility for getting up on time from now on.

Clothes care: Do you select your teen's clothing? Pick it up off the floor? Launder it? Begin turning over these responsibilities to your son or daughter. He or she can learn how to select, care for and maintain clothes. No special talents are needed to operate a washing machine and dryer responsibly.

Lost and found: Do you search for a teen's misplaced books, homework, eyeglasses, jacket or shoes as part of the morning rush to get ready for school and work? Keeping track of belongings is something a youngster of 13 can do for himself or herself.

Household chores: Do you struggle with household cleaning, errands, cooking and yard work while your teen watches TV or calls friends? Redistribute household chores in a fairer, more even-handed way, so that your teen has clearly defined tasks.

Are you thinking that these changes will bring on family warfare, with teens making life difficult for everyone? If so, reassure yourself that all the above steps are important to a budding young adult's sense of responsibility, independence and self-worth. If you just can't bring off the changes consider taking a STEP/Teen or other type parenting class.

