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Changing Youthstories, Mapping Risks, Diagnosing Needs and Modelling Multimodal Intervention towards Personal Growth and Social Inclusion of Young People in Difficult Situations

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# Chronicles of success

## *Positive story telling - log covering journey towards solutions & 'recovery', curative and preventive instrument*

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## Explanatory booklet for parents

Looking for new experiences is normal for teenagers, and sometimes it involves thrill-seeking or even risky behaviour. If you're concerned that your child is taking unsafe risks, there are things you can do to help your child stay safe – and ease your own anxiety.

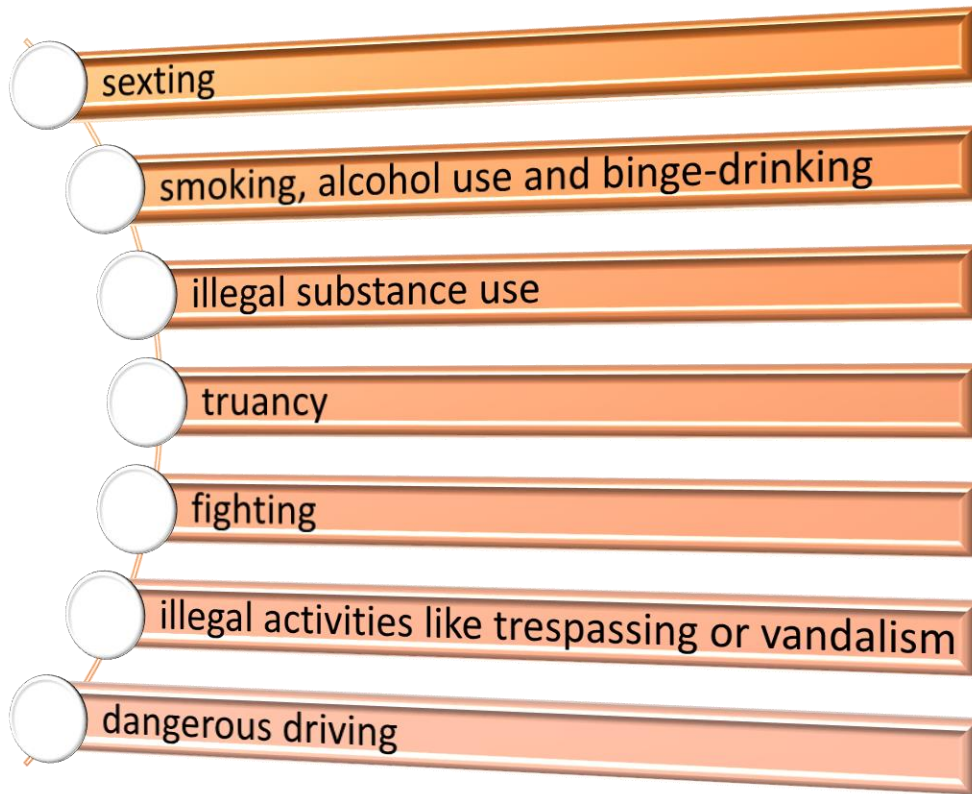
It's normal for teenagers to want new experiences – although it can be stressful for you as a parent.

Teenagers need to explore their own limits and abilities, as well as the boundaries you set. They also need to express themselves as individuals. It's all part of their path to becoming independent young adults, with their own identities.

Also, the parts of the teenage brain that handle planning and impulse control don't completely mature until about age 25. This means teenagers are sometimes more likely than adults to make quick decisions without always thinking through the consequences and sometimes teenagers make decisions about potentially risky things to fit in with a group.



## Common risk behavior



Risk behaviour varies according to gender. Boys are more likely to experiment with fighting and skipping school, while girls are slightly more likely to smoke.

Some teenagers are more likely to engage in risky behaviour. Some young people have a tendency to seek out sensation more than others. That is, they enjoy the 'rush' of adventure and want new and exciting experiences.

Other teenagers have a different understanding of risk from their parents. This means they don't see any real danger in what they're doing. When teenagers think their actions will have negative consequences, they do think more carefully about what they're doing .

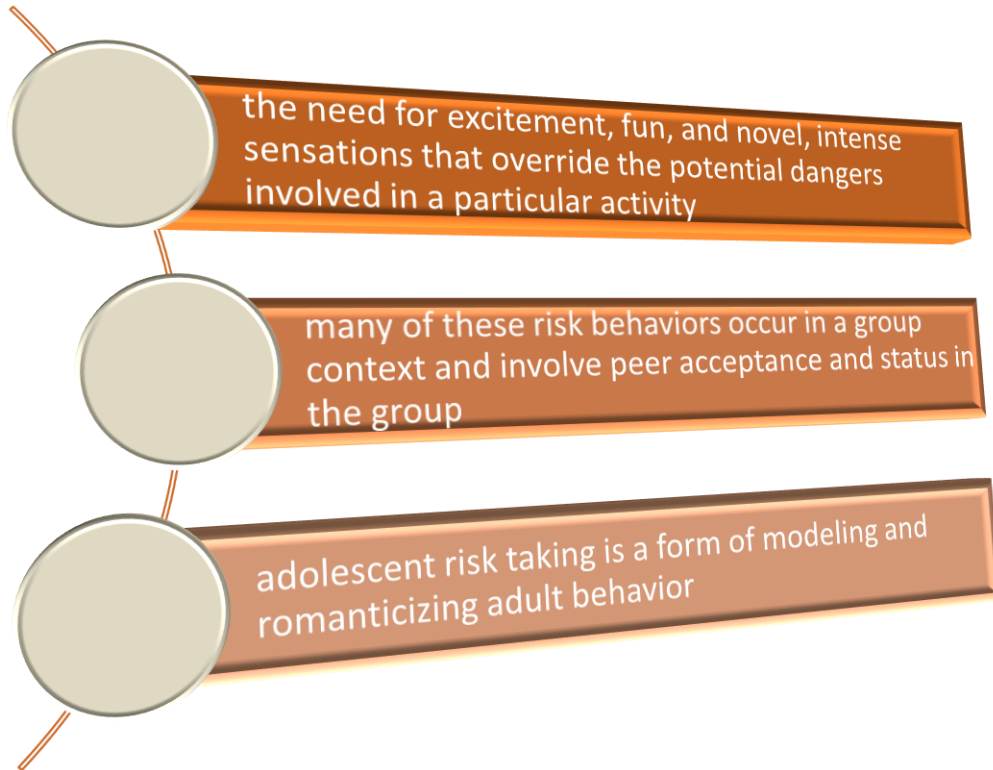
Some teenagers are very influenced by their peers and their need to fit in, so they do what they think is 'normal' for their group. Other teenagers want to perform, impress, show off or be different. In fact, risk-taking among teenagers doubles when peers are around.



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Why adolescents engage in risky behaviors



*Mind that teenagers are not all alike and that they may have different reasons for engaging in the same risk behavior .*

Adolescents may also have multiple reasons for engaging in a particular risk behavior. For example, given the use of sexuality to market just about every product imaginable, it is no wonder that adolescents are so curious and tempted to experiment. In the educational center most of the teenagers said that they thought that pressure from a friend was “often” a reason that committed the crime.



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For some youths, risk-taking behavior may signal a problem that can threaten their well being in both the short and long term. It is very important that parents understand the difference between normal experimentation and signs of troubled or high-risk youth so they can make appropriate



What are some signs that youth have crossed the line between normal experimentation and problem behavior?

Concern is warranted when high-risk behaviors begin early, such as at ages 8 or 9, are ongoing rather than occasional, and usually occur in a social context of peers who engage in the same activities. In this case, consideration should be given to referring the adolescent and his or her family to a mental health professional. In addition, it may be a sign that an adolescent is in serious trouble and needs professional help if he or she is engaged in multiple risk behaviors

Youths who are at greater risk for serious negative outcomes tend to engage in multiple problem behaviors, such as drug use and unprotected sexual intercourse, at an early age and usually have several antecedent risk factors in common, such as poor school performance and low self-esteem



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### The major problem areas of most concern for high-risk adolescents

alcohol and drug abuse

school failure and dropping out

crime, delinquency, and  
violence



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## Alcohol and Drug Abuse

It is difficult to draw the line between teens who are simply experimenting with alcohol and drugs and teens who have developed an alcohol or drug problem. Often, only a trained substance abuse professional can make this judgment. Teens who begin using drugs early, who rely on alcohol and drugs to alleviate feelings of anxiety or depression, especially when such use is shared by their friends, may be at higher risk than other teens for developing a substance abuse problem. Parental substance abuse, including alcohol abuse, is a risk factor for the development of substance abuse problems for adolescents, as are certain parenting and family management characteristics. These include lack of monitoring or supervision of youth, unclear expectations of youth behavior, and no (or only rare) rewarding of positive behavior. Exposure to peer use of substances and susceptibility to peer pressure can also increase risk of substance abuse.





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Common reasons teens abuse drugs include

Curiosity	
Peer pressure	
Stress	
A desire to escape	
Emotional struggles	
To have fun	

### Signs of Teen Drug Abuse

There are many signs that a teen is using drugs. It can be difficult to tell the difference between the pangs of adolescence and actual drug use, but parents can be proactive in talking to their teen to find out what's going on.



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Common signs of teen drug abuse include

Bad grades	
Bloodshot eyes	
Laughing for no reason	
Missing curfew	
Unusual tiredness	
Secretive behavior	
Smell of smoke on breath or clothes	
Frequent hunger or “munchies”	
Avoiding eye contact	
Diminished personal appearance	
Poor hygiene	
Loss of interest in activities	



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## School Failure and Dropping Out

Dropping out of school can be one of the most detrimental actions youths can take, with potentially disastrous effects on their economic futures.

Dropping out of school is a process that often begins in primary school and leads children to become gradually detached from the education system. The reasons for this detachment vary considerably from one child to the next, from one culture to the next, and include the child's unease within an unsuitable school system (socio-economic and educational reasons).

Dropping out of school and academic failure lead children down an endless spiral where lack of self-confidence and the feeling of failure limit their chances of integration in society (exclusion, limited school guidance, informal and even dangerous jobs, etc.).

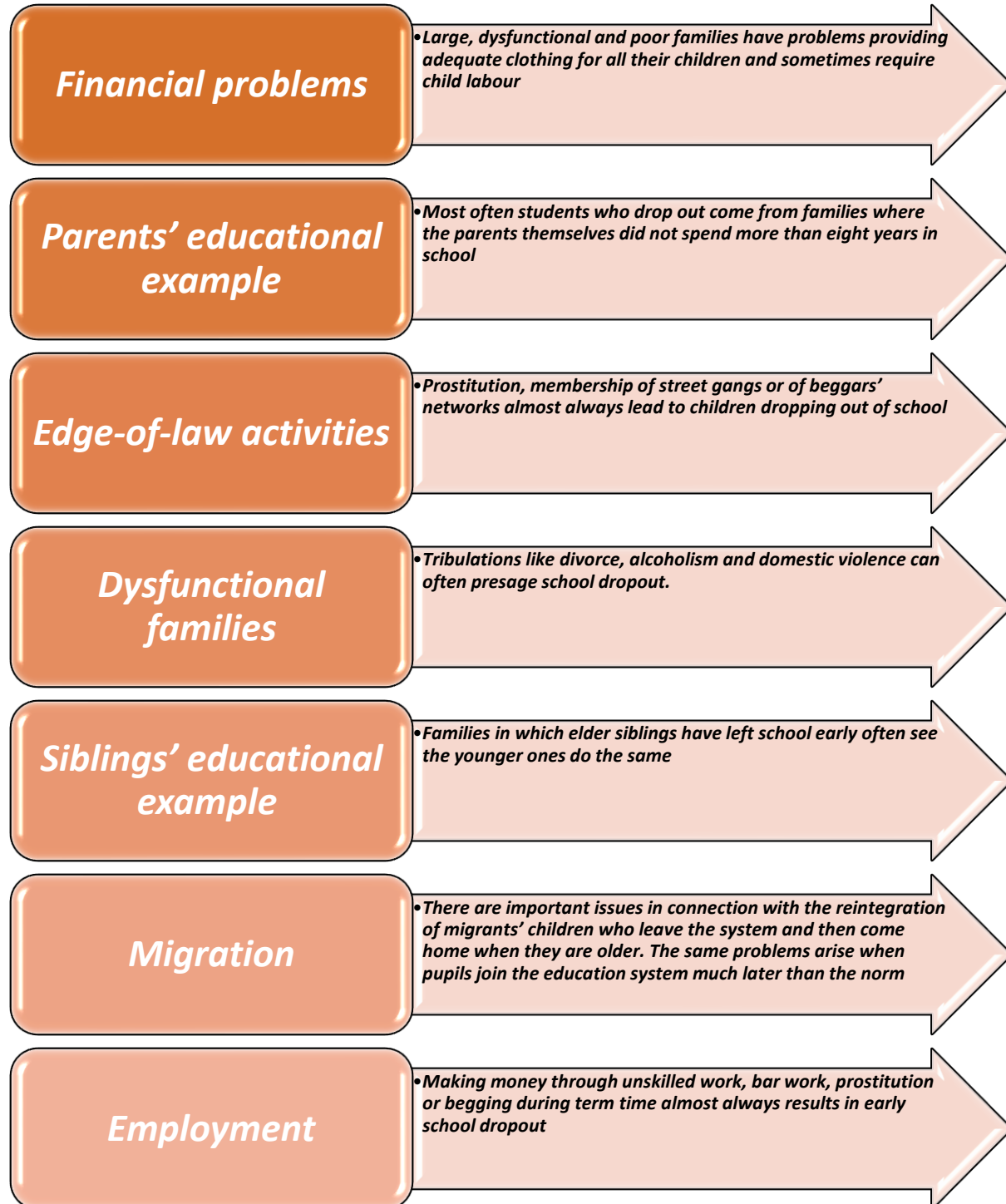
One way in which people are affected by their decision to drop out of high school is a greater chance of being unemployed.

Incarceration in some sort of correctional facility, such as a jail or juvenile detention center, is also a more likely scenario for high school dropouts.

Another, less tangible consequence of dropping out of high school is missing all the different opportunities that come about as a result of finishing high school. High school is a good place to explore intellectual interests, play team sports and meet friends.



Factors that may cause dropout in connection with pupils and their families

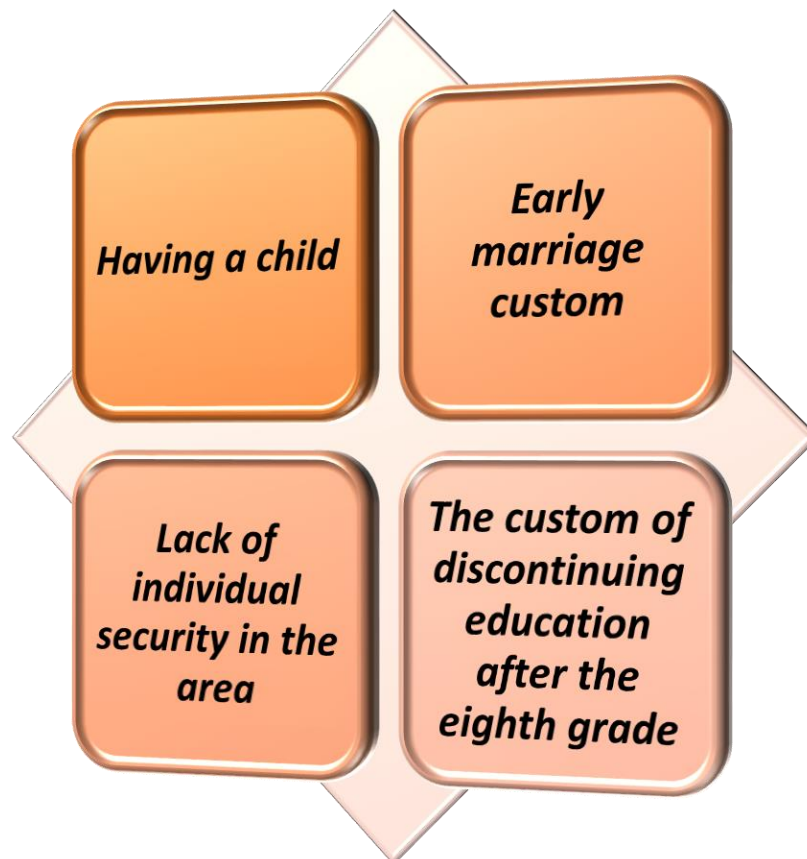




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At the community level, the major factors in early school dropout are as follows

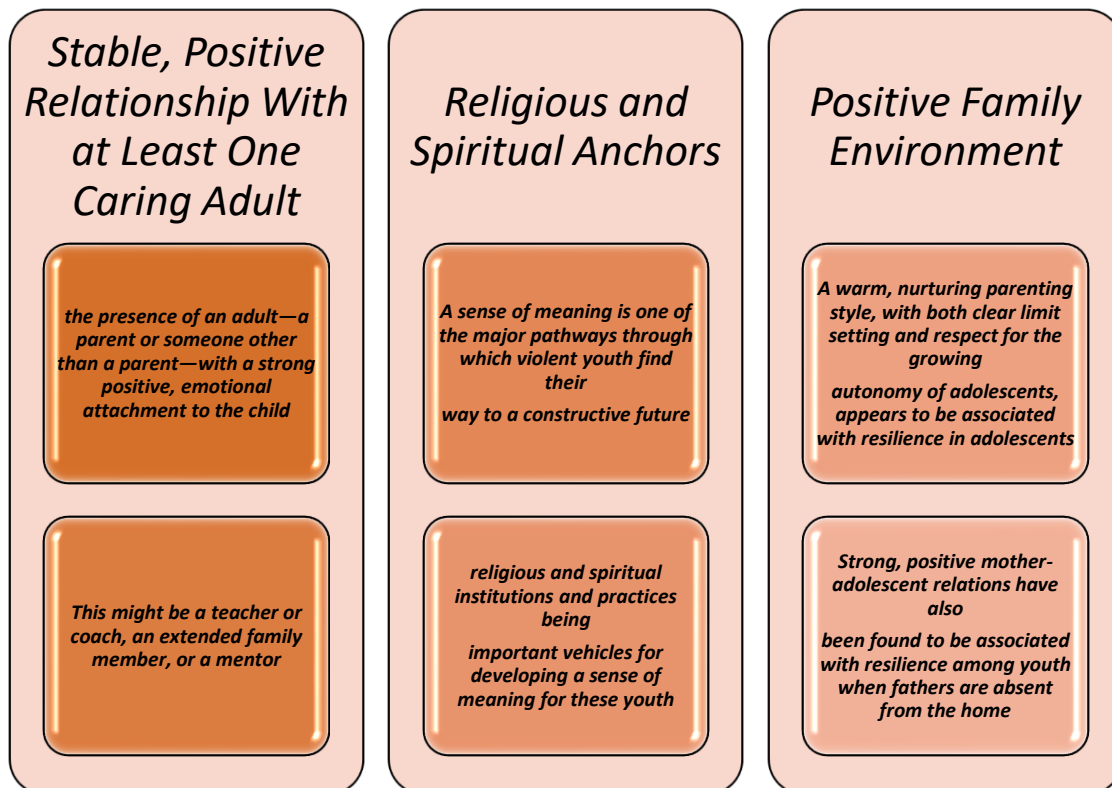




## Delinquency, Crime, and Violence

Qualitatively different patterns of delinquency and antisocial behavior (e.g., shoplifting, using drugs, or otherwise breaking the rules of society) have been noted. For the majority of adolescents who act out, their behavior reflects a gap between their biological and social maturity. Young people commit these acts impulsively and, if handled in a way that discourages them from this type of behavior and puts them back on the right track, most cease all forms of this type of behavior by adulthood. This is not to say that the youths who commit these acts are not at risk for further trouble. For example, youths whose one-time antics put them in contact with more seriously offending youths may be influenced by these youths, who reinforce their antisocial behaviors. But single acts, particularly those that occur in adolescence without any antecedents in childhood, are of less serious concern than multiple acts or acts that follow aggressive behaviors in childhood.

### Factors Associated With Positive Outcomes





In practice, we have seen a fair number of youthful casualties of risk-taking over the years, and some of the determining factors have been

Electing to be in the wrong place at the wrong time

Rushing so fast there was no time to think

Ignoring danger in order to act or appear brave

Feeling immune to harm

Feeling despondent and not caring what happens

Feeling too scared to refuse taking a risk

Feeling too angry to weigh the consequences

Trusting others to determine what risks you take

Seeking thrills for excitement's sake

Feeling so bored anything feels worth trying for relief

Going along with the group to belong

Substance use altering one's judgment

Taking a dare for reputation's sake



## “Intervention” strategies for parents

### Keeping your child safe

- Knowing that teenagers test limits doesn't make thrill-seeking and risky behaviour any easier to live with. Here are some ideas to help your child think about consequences and stay safer.

### Talking about behaviour and consequences

- Talking about behaviour and consequences can help your child learn to work out how much risk is involved in different situations. But be careful it doesn't come across as a lecture or a ban on the behaviour, because this could encourage your child to rebel.
- For example, you might say, 'There are going to be times when it's really hard to say no to drugs. But you know how bad they are for your health and other parts of your life. I really hope you can stay strong'

### Working out agreed rules

- If you work with your child on rules and consequences for breaking them, your child is more likely to follow the rules. You'll need to be flexible and adapt the rules as your child grows and shows she's ready for more responsibility

### Talking about values

- Knowing what's important to your family will help your child develop responsibility and personal values. You can back up family values by being a good role model in things like drinking alcohol, driving and treating other people respectfully





**Keeping an eye on your child**

- Knowing who your child is with and where he is can help you protect your child. For example, when you negotiate rules with your child, a rule might be that your child lets you know where he's going to be and that he phones you if his plans change

**Staying connected to your child**

- If you stay connected and build a strong relationship with your child through the teenage years, she's likely to do better at handling situations like pressure to use drugs or be involved in sexual activity.

**Encouraging a wide social network**

- You probably can't stop your child from being friends with a particular person or group – but you can give him the chance to make other friends through sport, church, community or family activities. And if you make your child's friends welcome in your home, it gives you a chance to get to know them

**Helping your child handle peer influence**

- If your child feels peer influence to fit in, you could help her think of ways to opt out without losing credibility. For example, she could tell her friends that smoking gives her asthma. Or she can't stay out partying because she has a big game the next day and needs to get some sleep.



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Encouraging  
safe thrill-  
seeking

- Teenagers need to take some risks to learn more about themselves and test out their abilities. This means that wrapping them in cotton wool is likely to backfire.
- If your child is into thrill-seeking, try **channelling this energy into safe and constructive activities**, like rock-climbing, martial arts, canoeing or mountain biking. Some teenagers might find they love the 'rush' of performing in drama or creative arts



Give your child autonomy and independence in some areas, so that he/she can explore his/her freedom without rebelling.



## Support for handling risky behaviour

If your child occasionally stays out past curfew, you might not worry too much. But if he regularly does things with dangerous consequences – like using drugs, getting into fights, drinking or breaking the law – consider seeking help and support

Also seek help if you're worried that your child's behaviour is self-destructive or might be a sign of a deeper problem

The best way to start is by asking your family GP for a referral to a psychologist or other mental health professional

If you're having a hard time talking with your child about risky behaviour, it might help to ask a relative or trusted family friend to raise the subject. Some teenagers find it hard to talk about sensitive issues like sex and drug use with their parents, but they might be willing to talk to somebody else. You could also ask your child's school counsellor for advice



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## What to do when your child is abusing drugs or alcohol

### Get educated

- Whether you have just discovered your child's drug problem or have already placed your son or daughter in a drug rehab program, the importance of education is paramount. There are many misconceptions surrounding the disease of addiction, and as a parent of an addict, it is ever-important to understand that your son or daughter did not choose this path. While he or she may have made the initial choice to use drugs, your child did not choose to become an addict. Addiction affects a user's brain, how they think and feel, how they make decisions, and how they handle impulse and self-control. By educating yourself on this disease, you can further educate others and diminish the stigma around substance addiction.

### Stop enabling

- As a parent of an addict, you must ask yourself, "Am I helping or am I enabling my child's addiction?" Because there is a very fine line between the two.
- Helping your child through drug addiction means that every action, every rule, every conversation, every effort you put forth is contributing to a healthy and sober life. It means acting in your child's best interest and paving the path for recovery. Enabling, on the other hand, means making it easy for your son or daughter to continue using drugs. Often, enabling is unintended yet disguised by good intention. Do you bail your son out of trouble when he needs? Do you give your daughter money to buy lunch or gas? Do you make excuses when your son or daughter can't attend a family party or make it through the school day? Enabling often comes in the form of a parent offering help when their child should take care of it on their own.



## Establish trust

- As your child's drug use progressed, you may have found yourself getting angry, distant, and sad. Rightfully, you are experiencing many challenging emotions. However, these negative emotions (combined with your teen's negative behaviors) can create a great sense of distrust and dishonesty in your relationship. As a parent, it is up to you to set the stage for positive and productive conversations, for openness and forgiveness. By doing so, your child will gain more trust in you, confide in you, and listen to what you have to say.

## Encourage treatment

- Try not to focus on your child's mistakes or the poor decisions he or she has made. Rather, remain optimistic and help your child see that he or she can do better. Encourage your teen to recognize his or her potential, make positive changes, take positive actions, and build a healthy life.
- Through encouragement, you can also help your child take the positive (and necessary) step into a drug treatment program. As a parent, you can research the types of drug treatment facilities and talk to your son or daughter about the different options. You can listen to his or her needs, goals, and find a treatment program that aligns with them. You can also find a young adult treatment center that will allow you to stay involved, understanding that family support is a major component of recovery.
- If your son or daughter is already enrolled in a drug treatment program, it is important to recognize that your work as a parent is not necessarily done. Rather, this is the time in which you must also take measures to rehab your life and your relationships. Your child's addiction, undoubtedly, has taken a toll on you too. This is the beginning of your child's and your recovery journey – it is also time to make the most of treatment.



### Take care of yourself

- You have just made a major decision for your child. Now it's time to focus on you. Get enough sleep. Leave yourself time to relax, exercise, and nourish your body and soul. Keep self-care a part of your routine, to keep your head from spinning. Your child is safe in a treatment facility; you can breathe.
- As a parent of an addict, you should also look into therapy, meetings, and family support groups. Keep going to meetings until you find one that you like and feel comfortable in. Meetings and support groups are a great opportunity for you to hear about other families' experiences with addiction, and to get firsthand advice for parents of addicts. If your child's treatment facility offers workshops or family programs, go. And go often. Get support. Talk it out. Learn what to expect and how to cope with your child's addiction.

### Re-strengthen your relationship with your child

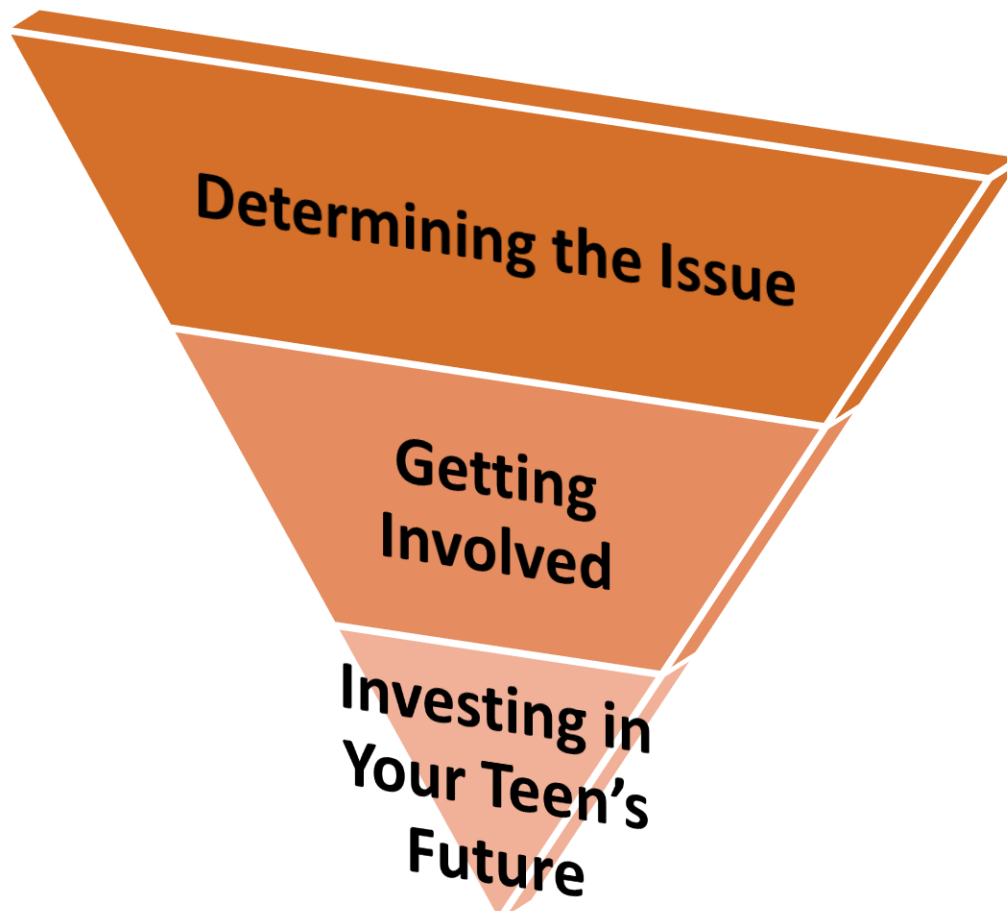
- Throughout your child's drug use, you lost trust. You became distant. Your relationship with your son or daughter changed. Your teen became deceitful and manipulative. He or she lied to you on multiple occasions, and did not listen to your requests.
- In his or her addiction treatment program, your child is learning how to strengthen his or her sense of self. Your child is also learning healthy lifestyle habits and how to become the best person he or she can be. He or she is learning how to build meaningful, trusting relationships without drugs behind them. All of this will lead to a better relationship with you.
- As a parent of an addict, you should take initiatives to do the same – to rebuild and re-strengthen your relationship with your child. This is not just a new page, but a new chapter; a new book. Communicate with your child. Let your child know how much you support them. Be there, always. But be firm, be productive, and stay positive. This will help both yours and your child's recovery process



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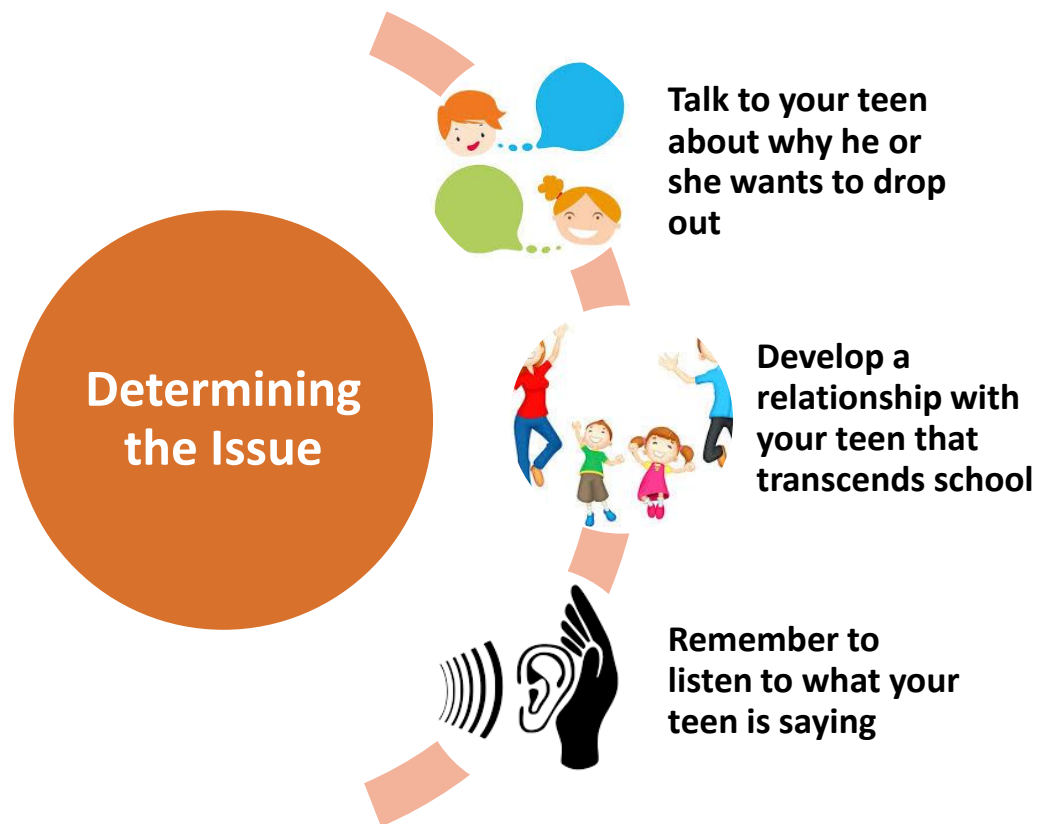


How to prevent your teen from dropping out of school





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**Reach out to your  
teen's school**

**Become a part of  
the PTA**

**Getting  
Involved**

**Develop a  
relationship with  
the parents of  
your teen's friends**

**Have your teen  
see a professional,  
if needed**



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# Investing in Your Teen's Future



Encourage your child to get involved in extracurriculars



Openly talk with your teen regularly about what's going on at school



Help your teen develop and work toward future goals



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## Preventing juvenile delinquency

There are many things that families can do to discourage juvenile delinquency and raise their children to be happy, healthy, responsible adults. As a parent, you can play a major role in deterring your child from engaging in criminal activity by shaping their attitudes, morals, and understanding of the law. Below, we've listed six essential tips.

### Talk to your child

It can be difficult to discuss issues such as drug and alcohol use, sex, and crime with your child, but communication with your child is one of the most important steps in preventing juvenile delinquency. If you do not talk to your child about these issues, he or she will almost certainly learn about them from peers, television, and movies. You should make sure your child understands your rules and expectations, and lay out clear consequences for going against them.

### Encourage extra-curricular activities and hobbies

Not only does involvement in afterschool groups and extra-curricular activities keep your child in a safe and supervised environment, it can help them feel motivated, engaged, and accepted. Children who feel like they are a part of a community and who are actively involved in an activity they are passionate about are much less likely to be exposed to or tempted by criminal activity.



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## Stay alert

You should keep abreast of red flags and common criminal trends of modern-day teens in your area. Educate yourself on issues such as local gang symbols, popular drugs, and the symptoms of intoxication. Learn how to recognize signs of alcohol and drug use in your child, so you can immediately step in if you notice something amiss

## Do not leave your child unsupervised

If you cannot supervise your child after school, you should find another adult who can look after them or enroll them in some kind of activity program. Remember that even the most responsible and brightest teens can be tempted into trouble when they are allowed to do whatever they please in the absence of adult supervision



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## Remain firm

If your child gets into trouble at home, school, an organization, or a friend's home, you should take a firm approach to punishment. By following through with the expectations and consequences you established, you help your teen understand that they can't get away with poor conduct and wrongdoing.

## Spend time with your child

Try to find regular opportunities to spend time with your child. Help them with homework, go to a sports game or movie, or simply watch a favorite TV show together. Whenever possible, sit down together as a family for dinner. During this time, you can model good behavior for your growing son or daughter, while learning more about your child's interests and activities, answering questions, and helping him or her feel more comfortable with reaching out to you in times of trouble or need.



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PARENTS let us raise good productive children!

Do not turn a blind  
eye when your child  
is doing wrong

Give your children a  
strong foundation of  
discipline and godliness



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Do not start disciplining your children at the adolescent stage. At this stage, their mind-set is already developed and is open to peer pressure

Start disciplining at the toddler stage

Tell your children that you love them and show that your love is unconditional

Make communication a priority



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Set limits and be  
consistent with your  
discipline

Teach them that manners,  
respect for themselves  
and others will take them  
through the world





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## Chronicle of success

### Story 1

*The young man comes from a legal relationship and he has a little sister too. He says that his material situation was good, both him and his parents were working in a material factory from home town. Currently the parents of the interned person are working in England to gain money so the young could pay the damages established by sentence. He is involved in a relationship for almost a year, stating that he is in good relations both with the girl and her parents.*

Therapeutical programs: cognitive-behavioural, nondirective, occupational therapy, art-therapy

These programs have as primary objectives:

- reorganizing the emotional awareness within the daily experience
- the enhancement and the restructuring of the inter-personal relations
- the understanding and the recognition of his own personality conflicts (disharmonics)
- the enhancement of both abilities to manage his life and his abilities to adapt to different situations

The educational programs include social rehab activities developed within community: different visits in parks, exhibitions, museums, public institutions, shops, movies, theaters, sport events, school camps, trips, cultural events, schools competitions

The activities and the programs presented have different stages, covering the entire custodial period. Every stage has its own objectives and specific developments.

The adaptation period was mandatory, covers 21 days and consisted of the following: receiving the juvenile offender and a briefing covering the basics (interior rules, visiting the center), medical examinations; observation – collecting significant informations regarding his history, identifying the psychological-behavioral profile, juvenile's interests and motivations; evaluating juvenile's personality and filling his personal development file which will be the basis for the personalized intervention plan.

Intervention itself - when the youngster participates actively in different planned programs and activities, while the inter-disciplinary team monitors his evolution, through intermediary evaluations, analysing his progress and the quality of his accumulations.

The inter-disciplinary team meets on a weekly basis to discuss youngster's evolution, to establish if the personalised intervention plan is adequate enough and to adjust it in accordance with his needs and self enhancement possibilities.

The preliberation period is mandatory and it started 3 months before setting the teenager free. In this time the youngster was included in specific programs aiming his preparation for the



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social, family, professional and school reinsertion. He also has facilities contacting social reinsertion and assistance agencies, unemployment agencies and local community representatives.

The educators and the social worker informs the juvenile about their possibility

- to contact the social reinsertion and assistance agency
- to be included after they are set free in vocational counseling programs, helping them finding a job or continuing his studies.

During the execution of the educational measure he has been sustained by the family and had a proper behavior, which led to his release at half of the punishment. Now he is working with legal forms so he is self-sustaining.

## Story 2 ITALY

The minor joined groups of children at risk and committed a crime of aggravated theft. He was identified by the police and reported to the Judicial Authorities. He entered the criminal circuit and this experience had an emotional impact on him. He was sent for trial during which he was granted a probation period of 9 months. The USSM of Bari (Juvenile Social service of the penal area) developed a project for him. It was assigned to the experimental day centre for minors in the penal area "Chiccolino" of Bitonto where he deepened his personal condition, its potential and activated recovery activities and social inclusion through the development of an individualized project.

The child's family context is severely deprived economically and culturally with poor educational effectiveness. The aggressive and violent educational style of his paternal figure and inadequacy of his maternal figure, too weak and with depressant traits, led the boy to have strong personal insecurities, bad anger management, low self-esteem and school dropout.

The strongly conflicted relation with his father determined in the child a provocative relational style, impulsive and aggressive toward peers and adult figures. Distrustful towards adult figures with strong ambivalence in building lasting bonds of trust.

He joined groups of youngsters strongly at risk of deviance, he experienced early addiction to alcohol and cannabis. These experiences led him to commit crimes to public heritage. The boy started to use cigarettes at about 12 yo, a pack. Since he was 15, he abusing alcohol and resulted positive to Cannabis/Hashish use and at 17 years positive to cocaine.



## INTERVENTION AND METHODOLOGY USED

The methodology used is the systemic-relational. The educational team uses this approach because we consider it the most appropriate method to achieve the maximum benefit of the Users and their kins and to improve and use all the resources that the territory offers. Working methodically with this approach means considering some aspects as fundamental:

- The subject bearing a symptom cannot be assessed in its individuality; the discomfort is always indicative of a state of relational malaise of the family unit;
- The individual may not be extrapolated from its context in the assessment of its behaviour. Every individual has a personal and family medical history, built on a model of interaction and communication.
- The motivation of the subject helps us to focus his position in the family and social context. Motivation and expectations are strongly interconnected and assessing interpersonal skills also means being able to grasp the links and incongruities between a truly lived story and a story told by the same subject. Stress and to support the process of "empowerment" of the family;

The project intervention was structured by the USSM social worker, together with the criminal centre team. The individualized educational project (Italian PEI) was integrated with the MAP project, which included:

- volunteering activities for 9 hours a week at an educational day care centre for disabled people;
- attendance vocational training course;
- toxicological controls by the SerD, blood samples taken at the penal day care centre according to the practices developed with the local SerD;
- weekly psychological interviews at the day-care centre;
- psychological interviews with family;
- educational activities of social inclusion at the day care centre;
- individual interviews with a Social worker, Service of the minor in the penal area;
- pizza maker training course;
- starting with the professional activity at a restaurant
- joint talks with all service professionals involved;
- reconciliation with the victim;
- evaluation and verification of the project;
- monocratic or collegial checks at the juvenile court.

Bi-weekly toxicological checks were performed at the Day Centre and analysed by the SerD, according to pre-established agreements between the two services, sharing the results through meetings of multidisciplinary teams.



## RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS

The boy was able to achieve the middle school diploma. He was included in a professional carpentry and restoration course and a professional baking and pizza making course. Besides all the interventions carried out for the boy, a highly motivating and positive element for his critical review of the crime was the pizza maker training course and the start-up experience at work.

The initial objectives were respected and verified with planned meetings of a multidisciplinary team. *In itinere*, they have been expanded with the addition of other educational objectives.

Positives aspects are found in a constant and assiduous attendance of the boy, both at the day care centre and at the institution where he carries out volunteering. The request by the boy, subject to precautionary measures, to continue attending the centre even after the expiration date of the schedule planning of the MAP.

Characteristic elements of the strong boy change have been:

- the mediation of conflicts between the child and the father that were conducted by the Coordinator of the "Chiccolino" day centre, a family mediator
- interviews conducted by the psychologist of the Ser.D, twice weekly toxicological checks performed at the Day Centre and analysed by the Ser.D, according to pre-established agreements between the two services, sharing the results through meetings of multidisciplinary teams
- sharing and co-participation of the boy and the family during the presentation of the MAP and the IEP
- drafting the letter of reconciliation between the victim and author of the offence. Delivery of the letter from the boy
- *focus groups* on some themes concerning legality
- constant individual and group psychological and educational support
- inclusion of the minor in vocational courses and start-up. Writing of the boy's CV
- Follow up after 6 months from the end of the probation. Contacts with structures for social inclusion of the boy
- Professional autonomy (hired in a pizzeria) harmonization of family relationships
- No relapse (in the penal area and in the addiction progression).

The minor has had an important change experience both on a personal and family level. The boy reached his personal and financial autonomy, works at a restaurant as a pizza maker and restored a balance with the family. Parents realised to have made mistakes and had neglected their son.

The boy has created a very important social network of contacts. He has no longer committed crimes and his professional experience has allowed him to acquire skills in an entrepreneurial perspective to open a restaurant or pizzeria.



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