

Parent Coaching

Typical vs. Troubled



Changing appearance

Typical teen behavior: Keeping up with fashion is important to teens. Avoid criticizing and save your protests for the bigger issues. Fashions change, and so will your teen.

Warning signs of a troubled teen: Changing appearance can be a red flag if it is accompanied by problems at school or other negative changes in behavior. Evidence of cutting and self-harm or extreme weight loss or weight gain are also warning signs.

Increased arguments and rebellious behavior

Typical teen behavior: As teens begin seeking independence, you will frequently butt heads and argue.

Warning signs of a troubled teen: Constant escalation of arguments, violence at home, skipping school, getting in fights, and run-ins with the law are all red flag behaviors that go beyond the norm of teenage rebellion.

Mood swings

Typical teen behavior: Hormones and developmental changes often mean that your teen will experience mood swings, irritable behavior, and struggle to manage their emotions.

Warning signs of a troubled teen: Rapid changes in personality, falling grades, persistent sadness, anxiety, or sleep problems could indicate depression, bullying, or another emotional health issue. Take any talk about suicide seriously.

Experimenting with alcohol or drugs

Typical teen behavior: Most teens will try alcohol and smoke a cigarette at some point. Many will even try marijuana. Talking to your kids frankly and openly about drugs and alcohol is one way to ensure it does not progress further.

Warning signs of a troubled teen: When alcohol or drug use becomes consistent, especially when it is accompanied by problems at school or home, it may indicate a substance abuse issue or other underlying problems.

More influenced by friends than parents

Typical teen behavior: Friends become extremely important to teens and can have a great influence on their choices. As a teen focuses more on their peers, that inevitably means they withdraw from you. It may leave you feeling hurt, but it does not mean your teen does not still need your love.

Warning signs of a troubled teen: red flags include a sudden change in peer group (especially if the new friends encourage negative behavior), refusing to comply with reasonable rules and boundaries, or avoiding the consequences of bad behavior by lying. Similarly, if your teen is spending too much time alone that can also indicate problems.

Authors: Lawrence Robinson and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., 2020