

Helping Teens Thrive • Strengthening Families

Raising a family is rewarding and challenging. Surviving the teen years can be difficult. Your teen may become more defiant, irritable, withdrawn, anxious. Going through periods of other significant family changes such as divorcing or blending families, switching jobs, moving or other stressors can be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Sometimes we get stuck and don't know how to help our child through a difficult time. Family life can become frustrating or be filled with concern, worry or sometimes, even hopelessness.

Once families get to this point, they can benefit from professional help. They say it takes a village to raise a child and that's true. A fresh, objective perspective from someone outside the situation, along with someone to just listen can help get things back on track. Counseling can help family members learn new ways of understanding themselves and each other as well as skills necessary to repair relationships.

Counseling is a partnership between your family and your therapist. You know your family best and know what you most desire. I know a lot about family dynamics, communication and developmental needs, offer an objective role and create an environment conducive for change. Together we can provide the right combination to make things better.

While it may be your teen who is struggling and individual counseling for your child will be important, *family counseling is also frequently helpful*. Despite what most teens say and how they act, family still heavily influences them. Additionally, as you know through your own personal frustration and worry, in families we all feel the ripple effect of each other's choices. Change is more likely to happen when everyone in the family participates and supports it.

The first few appointments are spent getting to know each other and agreeing to goals and a treatment plan that will be most beneficial to your situation. Collaboration with your child's school, physician or other team players is also critical and is done with your permission.

In addition to helping your teen feel more successful and genuinely happy, common family goals often include:

- Repairing trust,
- Building more respect for each other,
- Developing a stronger sense of cooperation and responsibility,
- Having the experience of being listened to and understood,
- Learning how to solve problems with out serious outbursts,
- Finding ways to balance teen's need for independence with parents need to positively contribute to their child's growth and success.



Your teen may not be interested in counseling. That's ok. Teens are often concerned that counseling is a punishment to tell them how "bad" they are or fear it means something is wrong with them. Frequently they secretly want something to change but fear failure or feel trapped in their current scenario. *I acknowledge your child's strengths and offer a non-judgemental place where they can work through stuck negative feelings and destructive behaviors or patterns.* Together we create solutions that give them options they are willing to try.

Seeking counseling can sometimes feel threatening for parents too. *You may feel guilty, hopeless or fear judgment or failure yourself.* You may have already put a lot of effort into trying to resolve the current

situation. Sometimes it takes courage and trust to take the risk of seeking help or to continue to look for new ideas/resources. *That you are willing to take that risk says volumes about the love and commitment you have to your family.*

This holistic approach to counseling is different than what you might find offered by other counselors. It typically includes:

- intentionally building on your child's and family's strengths,
- using art, music and physical interventions to engage your teen through more than just talk,
- creating change by working with your entire family and
- collaborating with other significant players, such as your child's school and/or physician.

The process is focused on creating the greatest opportunity to help your child to thrive and to strengthen your family.

Some of the benefits your teen and your family may experience include:

- Improved self-esteem, increase happiness and sense of peace
- Better cooperation and personal responsibility
- Increased appreciation and understanding of each other
- More honest and genuine communication
- Healthier engagement/interest in the community and with peers
- Better school performance

If you are curious to learn more, check out:

40 Developmental Assets, from the Search Institute, www.search-institute.org/assets/
"I'll Never do to My Kids What My Parents Did to ME!": A Guide to Conscious Parenting.

by Thomas Paris, Ph.D. & Eileen Paris, Ph.D.

Non-Violent Communication, By Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. or check out www.cnvc.org

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys, by Dan Kindlon, Ph.D. & Michael Thompson, Ph.D.

Raising Strong Daughters, by Jeanette Gadeberg

Real Boys, by William Pollack, Ph.D.

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls, by Mary Pipher, Ph.D.

The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World,

by William J. Doherty, Ph.D.

Donna Sigl-Davies, MA, PCC-S is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (PCC) with 20 years of experience working with youth, couples and families in private practice, juvenile justice, public mental health, non-profit and higher education. She serves as adjunct faculty at University of Dayton and the Methodist Theological School. In addition to providing therapy and teaching she facilitate groups and workshops and supervises counselors in training.

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