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FOREWORD

My father, Rabbi Jacob J. Hecht, *obm*, founded Operation Survival in 5748 (1988) to counteract a tide of drug abuse that was seeping into our communities. In those years, it was still taboo to speak about things like addiction, and most doubted that substance abuse represented any danger for their own children.

Mr. Michael Behrman, *obm*, was chosen to develop and lead the program, which he did valiantly until his passing, some thirty years later. Changing the perceptions about the dangers of addiction wasn't easy. Boruch Hashem we've seen in recent years a huge increase in awareness and people seeking mental health help and addiction help.

Today, Operation Survival teaches critical life skills in local yeshivas and public schools. Through its programs, which include everything from art to rap groups, Operation Survival promotes positive alternatives and crisis assistance to thousands of young people each year.

The program also networks with other appropriate agencies to disseminate information to educators, clergy, social service, and medical professionals and community agencies. With the help of an experienced staff including Rabbi Yaacov Behrman, Program Director, Miriam Simon, Assistant Program Director, Dena Gorkin, Director of Community Outreach, Shlomo Mahana, Prevention Educator, and Leontine Thompson, Prevention Educator. Operation Survival has seen an increase in awareness and people seeking mental health help and

addiction help, and has also produced educational media that has reached an audience of over 300,000.

I think you'll find this book informative and practical, and I invite you to reach out to us if we can ever be of assistance.

Rabbi Shea Hecht

Chairman of the Board of N.C.F.J.E

INTRODUCTION

This project, *Prevention 101*, was undertaken several years ago in order to provide families with the necessary tools to prepare their children for real-world challenges. We invited parents to submit their questions regarding drug and alcohol abuse, and connected with appropriate mental health professionals to respond with honest, informed answers to these questions. The results were transformed by Operation Survival into bi-monthly videos, articles, and brochures, were distributed to hundreds of houses of worship and educational institutions and are available to the public on operationsurvival.org.

I edited and compiled the most impactful *Prevention 101* content into this book, to serve as a practical guide to raise children who are strong, confident and prepared for the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

We often hear the concerns of many parents regarding the teaching of substance abuse prevention—doesn't this introduce their children to the world of drugs and alcohol? The truth is that in our times children are exposed to these challenges at an increasingly early age. It's becoming more and more important that they have the knowledge and skills needed to make informed and healthy decisions. This book is a resource for parents to help their children make these good choices.

I want to acknowledge Peninah Baumgarten, Art Director at P.Graphics, for designing the book, and for her valuable insight, Brochie Perl for transcribing the audio interviews, Haley Hampton and Dena Gorkin for editing, Chana Grifkin and Zelig

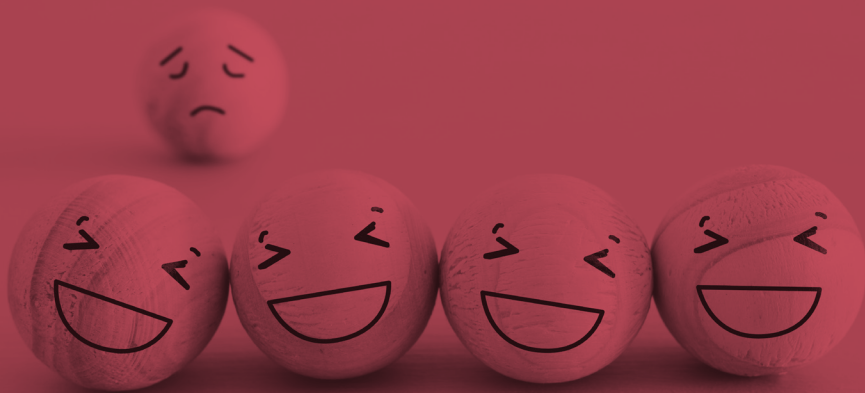
Katzman for proofreading, and Rachel Shemtov, Dena Gorkin, and Miriam Simon for providing practical, hands-on assistance and advice in the formation of this book.

This project is a product of the dedication and professionalism of the staff of Operation Survival, to whom I am ever grateful. I'd also like to thank the Board of Trustees of the National Committee for Furtherance of Jewish Education, Rabbi Shloma L. Abramowitz, Ellen Gross, Rabbi Shea Hecht, Chairman, Sholom Jacobs, President, Charlie Kupferman, Neil Kupferman, Esq, Yossi Popack, Dr. Steve Rubel, and Jay Wartski for their support, and to Assembly Member Brian Cunningham who has been an unfailing ally to Operation Survival and the communities we serve.

Rabbi Yaacov Behrman
Director of Operation Survival

BULLYING

INTERVIEWS WITH
DR. RONA NOVICK, PhD



What is bullying?

The term “bullying” is used frequently, and while there certainly is a great deal of bullying happening, it is important to know that bullying is a very specific type of aggressive behavior.

Very often children fight over things. Two children want the same ball on the playground, or two children want to be first down the slide. This is fighting between two peers of equal power. It is not bullying. It may be behavior that we want to work on, but it isn’t bullying.

Bullying is the deliberate abuse of power to harm another person. There are three critical components in that definition, so let’s consider each of them:

DELIBERATE:

It’s not accidental. We sometimes hurt other people’s feelings when we do not mean to, but bullying has a deliberate component to it.

ABUSE OF POWER:

In bullying, a power imbalance must exist. In some cases, it could be many against one. In other cases, it could be the most popular child against the least popular, the most athletic against the least athletic, etc.

TO CAUSE HARM:

The intention to cause harm is the final piece of bullying. There are three types of bullying defined by the type of harm they cause.

The easiest to spot is physical bullying. It is hitting, kicking and punching, and it causes physical harm. Equally noticeable is emotional bullying, which is a very well known and recognized form of bullying. This is name calling and teasing. We see this happen at all ages and among both genders. This type of bullying occurs not only in the real world but also in the virtual world, which has become increasingly more common.

The third type of bullying is the kind that children, parents and teachers are least likely to recognize, and it's called social bullying. This is bullying that harms us by excluding us from certain social areas.

We see it even in the preschool set when they say things such as, "I made a club, and you and you are in it, but you can't be in it." We see it on the ball field when boys say, "I brought the ball so I decide who plays." We certainly see it with girls who create very tight social networks through middle school and high school and decide who can be a friend, who is in, and who is out.

Now, there is some discussion about whether something that happens just one time should still be called bullying or if bullying only applies to recurring behavior. All

**Bullying is
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children will tease each other sometimes in good fun, and all children will be aggressive from time to time. It is the pattern of behavior that usually indicates bullying—targeting an individual over and over. This is different from other kinds of aggression.

Imagine the following scenario.

Every day at lunchtime, there is one student who pushes everyone out of the way to get the chocolate milk. The school never orders enough chocolate milk and this child loves chocolate milk, so he or she pushes everyone out of the way to get the chocolate milk. That is not bullying. It is aggressive behavior, but it would be solved by ordering more chocolate milk.

Educators and parents have to deal with BULLYING as an issue of the imbalance of power, and the deliberate abuse of that power to hurt other people.

However, if the same child pushes everyone out of the way not because there's not enough chocolate milk, but because they like the feeling of power, then we have moved into bullying. They want other children to feel dominated by saying, "I'll decide whether you get any chocolate milk today or not." This will not be solved by ordering additional chocolate milk and it isn't going

to be solved by looking for more resources.

Controlling the distribution of chocolate milk might seem like "innocent" bullying, but bullying of this nature

cannot be left unchecked. The need for power will only grow in these children, and using that power to harm others will escalate. While we must be careful not to label all aggressive behavior as bullying, we must be sure that bullying is not being ignored as simple aggressive behavior. Educators and parents have to deal with it as an issue of power, specifically the imbalance of power and the deliberate abuse of that power to hurt other people.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

What should I do?

My child is being

bullied in school and

no one seems to care?

Parents and schools share a common purpose — they want to educate the children in their care and ensure they grow to be healthy adults. However, there is one place where parents and schools diverge in their goals.

The parents are, rightfully, always looking to protect the interests of their own child. The school, though, must protect the interests of all the children. Most of the time these two things go together, but sometimes, especially in bullying situations, they may diverge.

Teachers and administrators are often confronted by hurting parents whose child is being bullied and they feel the school is not doing enough to stop it. There are several difficult truths that must be confronted in this situation. The first is that the very best bullying prevention programs being rolled out in schools are accomplishing somewhere

between a thirty to forty percent reduction in bullying, in spite of all their resources.

Basically this means that even if your school is doing everything they should be doing, the international standard suggests there will still be quite a lot of bullying that parents and children will have to deal with.

The next difficult truth is that not all problems are bullying; some of the problems are aggression-related and are not bullying. These problems will not respond to anti-bullying programs.

It is important to realize that while there are things your child's school can and should be doing, it is not necessarily going to solve your child's problem. A parent might say, "I need my child isolated," or, "I need total attention and supervision provided to my child in order for x, y, or z to happen." A school cannot do that without sacrificing the service that it provides to all the other students in the building.

There is also a legal issue at play here. Very often parents will not know and will never be able to know how much a school is doing to deal with a bullying problem.

By law, schools are prohibited from sharing information about other students.

To better understand this issue, you need to think about how you

Parents may never know how much a school is doing to deal with the problem.

By law, schools are prohibited from sharing information about other students.

would feel if the school shared information about your child with other parents, whether it is related to discipline, academics, or personal situations. A school might be taking very appropriate and serious actions toward a known bully, but they can't tell you that.

Another complication is that most bullying is witnessed by children and not adults, so a lot of the information that comes to a school comes to them by hearsay. Can and should

The types of interventions that seem to have the best impact have been ones that schools are doing with the knowledge of very few people.

a school take action against a student based on the reports of other students when no adults saw it? Doing so sets a dangerous precedent. What if a group of students ganged up against your child, went to the administration, and said your child did x, y, or z? Based on those rumors with no physical evidence and no staff witnessing it, would you want the school to take action? That is the dilemma many schools

find themselves in.

Sometimes, schools may be hearing all kinds of information and are investigating the situation. It may look as if schools are doing nothing, but in fact, they are being cautious.

Bullying is tricky. Very often, the first thing adults want to do is actually the worst thing they could do. When a child who is not socially integrated at recess is being teased, alienated, and ostracized, it is very tempting to say, "Let's throw an

adult in there to play with that child or to protect that child.” But that will only further alienate the child and mark him or her as different and unusual. Adults, especially educators, have to be very careful about how they intervene and what they do. Dr. Rona Novick says that the best interventions she has seen have been ones that schools are doing without the express knowledge of many people, but the people who need to know are aware of what is going on. These types of intervention seem to have the best impact.

Parents should share their concerns and frustrations with school personnel, but they should remember that schools are often taking action but are unable to share that information with parents. It is important to not assume that schools are ignoring a situation just because they do not immediately tell a parent how they are responding.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

Is my child a bully?

It is difficult to determine what causes bullying but there are usually specific indicators which we can learn to recognize. In order to do so, we must first understand the temperament of children and how they develop.

All children have inborn, pre-wired temperaments which are evident from infancy. Some babies are more assertive about letting others know what they need, while other babies are more passive and will wait until someone takes care of them. Children who are aggressive and like to be in charge are at risk for becoming bullies while shy and passive children are much less likely to become a bully.

A lot of bullying, especially among girls, has to do with language. A child who has very strong language skills knows how to use a turn of phrase to make people laugh or to make people cry. These children are at greater risk of being bullies than a child who struggles with language.

Since no one is actually born a bully, what can parents, educators and communities do to prevent it?

We must recognize that children may be born with bullying tendencies, but as with everything we do with our children, we shape them. We do that by modeling appropriate behavior. If our children see us abuse our power and deliberately torment the dry cleaner, the butcher, the principal, our neighbors,

or people in our own families, then they learn to do so as well. By demonstrating these behaviors, we teach our children that bullying is a reasonable way to accomplish our goals.

We also model based on how we respond when we see bullying. We may not do it, but when we see an older sibling mistreating a younger sibling, do we turn a blind eye? Every time a parent or an educator reacts with neutrality to children's behavior, children read that neutrality as approval. If children bully in front of us, either to their siblings or their peers, and we do nothing, then they have every reason to believe this is acceptable behavior. They will continue to do it.

When we hear from the school or parents of our children's friends that our child is bullying, what can we do?

We need to talk with them. We need to give them alternate ways to accomplish their goals socially. We need to teach our children the rules of social discourse. We need to explain how to be a mentch and how to become a good person with a kind heart. Children must understand that good people with kind hearts would never deliberately abuse their power to hurt another person. Every parent will need to have this conversation with their children at some point. Even the best of children may inadvertently bully others. Parents need to talk with their children and explain

Since no one is actually born a bully, what can parents, educators and communities do to prevent it?

how to avoid that behavior. Prevention is worth twenty tons of cure.

Before children become Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah age and before a Shabbaton or trip, parents should sit down with their children and talk about how to respond to invitations from people. As a family, the following questions should be discussed. Do we only go to parties of the people we like or is it our job to rejoice with the celebrant of every occasion? On a school trip, do we ask to room only with our friends or will we be open and welcoming to others? Discussing these questions and making the decisions as a family will help children learn appropriate behavior and how to deal with social situations in a polite way.

Having frequent and age-appropriate conversations about how to interact with peers and handle various social situations will help a child develop into a well-balanced individual who does not need to resort to bullying.

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Is bullying really that bad?

Bullying is devastating for those who experience it, and it is extremely unpleasant for those who witness it as well. Bullying doesn't just impact the lives of victims and the bullies themselves, but it also affects those who see it happen in the school or the community.

Imagine if every day when you went to work there was a strong possibility that one of your colleagues was going to be brutally teased, socially excluded, or embarrassed. It wouldn't be an easy place to function. How can we expect children to learn if our school environments are rife with the feeling that at any moment somebody could be a victim in a similar situation?

Bullying has become a serious and widespread problem. It has become so much worse with the increased accessibility of information and communication methods. In the past, bullying was a school-day phenomenon. No matter how bad they were treated in school, at the end

The impact on victims is devastating, both in the moment and years later.

of the day, at least the victim went home to a place of safety. The school day was over so the torment was finished. But now, the torment follows victims on their phones and other devices. It shows up in WhatsApp groups and social media messages.

This has led victims to feel as if there is no escape, and in some heartbreaking instances, it has led to the suicide of young people who, instead of feeling loved and valued in the world, are experiencing a life of torment.

The impact on victims is devastating, both in the moment and years later. Research suggests that victims carry the scars of this abuse well into their adulthood. It is so important that we address bullying in our schools and communities.

Bullying will only be reduced or eliminated when parents and educators take action to prevent bullying and help children understand the need to treat their peers kindly.

We must raise a generation of upstanding bystanders. We need a generation that knows that when they see bullying—not as the bully or the victim, but as a witness—they have the power to make a difference and possibly save someone's life.

Bullying is not a problem that will go away or improve by ignoring it. Bullying will only be reduced or eliminated when parents and educators take action to prevent bullying and help children understand the need to treat their peers kindly.

Children must be taught that their actions matter and that they can make a difference.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.



- **Students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression**

Center for Disease Control, 2017

- **Students who experience bullying are twice as likely as non-bullied peers to experience negative health effects such as headaches and stomachaches.**

(Gini & Pozzoli, 2013)

- **Youth who self-blame and conclude they deserved to be bullied are more likely to face negative outcomes, such as depression, prolonged victimization, and maladjustment.**

(Perren, Ettakal, & Ladd, 2013; Shelley & Craig, 2010)

What can I do to prevent cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is one of the most dangerous forms of bullying for the simple reason that online we are given the luxury of anonymity and we are often our worst selves when we are anonymous.

We are angrier and meaner, and we do and say things we would never do or say in person. It's easy to make cruel remarks to others when you don't have to do it to their faces.

For better or worse, anything published online is public and permanent. These are two important 'p' words that today's generation does not understand. They will say "I deleted it",

but it doesn't matter if we deleted something from our devices. Once it is out there in the cyber world, it exists forever in the public domain.

Understanding this cyber environment can also be difficult for older adults who are cyber-immigrants and will thus never be as comfortable as their children in the cyber world. Even adults in their twenties are not as proficient with technology as the younger people of today.

The anonymity of being online can cause individuals to be meaner and nastier than they would otherwise be in person.

The gap in knowledge and experience in the cyber world only grows larger. So, who is going to teach children cyber manners? Who is going to supervise their cyber presence? Who is going to help them be their best selves, whether they are face-to-face or in front of a screen? If we don't, no one else will.

To teach them cyber-manners and how to be caring individuals in cyberspace, we have to go deep into uncharted territory. We have to supervise them, know their passwords, and have access to their online presence and profiles.

If our children push back and tell us this is an invasion of their privacy, we need to help them understand that if they want privacy they should write it in a paper diary under lock and key. We need to make sure that children understand that what they do virtually is never private; there is always someone with the ability to access it.

Children need to know that anything they share on social media should be something they would willingly share with their parents. Anything that goes out into the world, anything that friends, future employers, and possible predators could see, needs to be seen by their parents as well.

It is a huge shift for parents to get on board with the amount of supervision and education they need to provide for their children when it comes to technology, but it is dangerous to ignore the issue.

Children must never be left alone online. Parents must have access/ passwords to all online profiles.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

How can I help someone who's being bullied?

When discussing bullying it is important to raise the issue of bystanders. Bystanders are present in at least eighty percent of bullying episodes. This percentage increases when we consider that people take pictures and record incidents on their phones and then share them through text messages and social media. Thus about ninety-nine percent of all bullying happens with an audience, typically an audience of peers.

If people know bullying is wrong, why don't they do something? It is not simply children who do not step forward in these situations. We have plenty of adult examples where people failed to step in and help someone in need. In Queens, a woman screamed for help as she was stabbed thirty-nine times, but nobody came to her assistance. History is unfortunately full of examples of individuals, agencies, and entire nations who stood by while large groups of people were mistreated. The awful truth is that it is much more common for bystanders to do nothing rather than intervene.

Part of the reason no one steps forward, particularly with children, is that they seem to have limited options. When we ask children in third grade or lower what they

should do when they see bullying, the only two things they think of doing are either to tell the teacher or tell the bully to stop.

Sometimes, they do tell the teachers, and the teachers do not know what to do. Some teachers may even say, “That is tattling. Solve the problem by yourself.” There is no guarantee that every teacher will respond in the best way possible.

When children in fourth grade and up are asked this question, they only offer one option: tell the bully to stop. Telling the bully to stop is daunting and, in reality, might not be a wise choice.

Most adults have never directly told a bully to stop. It is potentially dangerous and definitely scary, especially for children. If that is the only option available, most bystanders will never get involved. The solution is then that we need to offer other strategies. We need to teach children that they don’t have to do anything to the bully or with the bully.

One strategy is to engage with the victim. If Jessie is being teased, we don’t have to talk to Jessie’s teaser. We can go up to Jessie and say, “Oh, I love those sneakers. They are really cool.” Or, “Did you see the game last night?” It can be anything. This not only provides support for the victim, but it also distracts the bully. Bullies operate by making their victims seem deval-

Telling the bully to stop is daunting and, in reality, might not be a wise choice.

ued, unimportant and invisible. Every time we respond to bullying by saying to the victim, “We see you. We are here. We are going to talk to you, and we are going to include you,” we take away the bully’s power. We can use distraction, humor (carefully), and any novelty that breaks the dynamic between the bully and the victim.

Children should be encouraged to tell adults when bullying happens, but Dr. Rona Novick says it is important to prepare children for a poor response from some adults. When she works with students, she always tells them that adults aren’t all created equal, and sometimes the child will need to go to three or four adults until they get the help they need. It is also important for children to understand that they need to tell an adult what they do and do not want. Children should be specific if they do not want their peers to know they are the ones who reported the situation. Naming

children who report problems potentially leads to additional bullying and will prevent other children from stepping forward.

Dr. Rona Novick provides children with a script they can use. For example, a child could say, “There’s something happening in seventh period that is really mean. I don’t feel comfortable and I don’t know what to do about it. But I don’t want anyone to know that I’m the one who told you. I don’t want you to go on the school

Teaching children to pay attention to peers who are alone and encouraging them to ask that child to join them will help prevent bullying.

PA system and make an announcement saying, ‘So and so told me about the seventh period problem.’ I don’t want you to take away everyone’s seventh period study hall because I’ll be blamed.”

Although telling adults or authority figures is important, the most powerful thing people can do to prevent bullying is staying connected with victims. The minute a child is together with even one other person, the likelihood of that child being bullied decreases by more than fifty percent. Teaching children to pay attention to peers who are alone and encouraging them to ask that child to join them will help prevent bullying. It is an important and effective strategy, and it provides children with options other than confronting a bully.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

Why is my child being targeted by bullies?

Experts do not exactly understand why some students are targeted as victims and others are not. When we look at research, physical characteristics are not clear indicators. Unusually tall or short children, children with braces or glasses, and children with freckles or weight problems are often teased, but this does not mean they will become a serious and persistent victim of bullying.

However, studies show that the best indicator for whether or not a child will be targeted is usually how they react to teasing.

Bullying is about power. If a bully teases a child because he or she is much shorter than the other children, but that child shrugs it off and doesn't seem bothered, then that child is not a likely victim. A child who is teased and runs out of the room crying has shown the bully that he or she has power over the child.

Adults blessed with children who are very sensitive, kind hearted souls know it is virtually impossible to tell such a child, "Don't react, don't cry, don't be upset." This is at odds with the child's biological reality. Shy and anxious children are shy and anxious. They can eventually outgrow it and get past it, but it is in their genes. Not reacting is very difficult for them. What can

we do to help our children and our students who are victims?

First and foremost, we must validate them. They need to hear us say that whatever is being done to them is not justified, and they need to believe us when we say this.

They need to know we believe no one has the right to make other people feel devalued or unimportant. Whatever has happened, whether it was their snack that was stolen yet again or something they did and people made fun of them, nothing justifies the bullying behavior. Most importantly, they need to know it isn't their fault.

After validation, we now have to say to the victim, "How do we help situations like this in the future?" Sometimes, the best option is careful planning. We can encourage them not to take out their really yummy snack and have everybody bother them about sharing it. We can show them how to keep their homework in a place where someone cannot grab it. It is important that the children understand these safeguards are not because it's their fault that the bullies act as they do, but because the only thing a person can change is what he or she does. We must teach our children that they can only control their actions and are not responsible for the actions of others.

Related to reactions, sometimes, we have to teach our children to be really good actors and actresses. We have to help

Studies show that the best indicator for whether or not a child will be targeted is usually how they react to teasing.

them understand that, like actors, how we feel on the inside doesn't always match what we show on the outside. If a child is Abe Lincoln in the President's Day play, he or she has to stand tall, stiff, and straight with the stovepipe hat on, even though inside he or she might be shaking and nervous. This is the same thing we have to teach our victim children to do when they get tormented and feel as though they are going to react. Children need to know it is okay to have those feelings inside, but they should try to think about their favorite superhero or movie character so they can act stronger or braver than they feel just for a minute until they can get themselves to a safe place.

Some victims benefit from attending social skills groups and learning social skills such as how to have conversations, how to break into a conversation, how to go beyond some of their reactivity and shyness, and how to deal with conflict in social situations. All of that can help.

While there are many strategies we can teach our children who are being bullied, we should never do any of that without first validating that we understand how painful this is for victims and emphasizing that it's not their fault. Bullies make victims feel insignificant and make them believe something is wrong with them. The best defense is to help these children believe in themselves and see that the fault lies with the bully and not them.

After validation, we now have to say to the victim, "How do we help situations like this in the future?"

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

How can I detect bullying in my classroom?

To detect bullying in the classroom, teachers must be keen observers of their students' interactions. They must pay attention to the social climate and social fabric.

This means noticing who works with whom and who never has a partner. It means looking for those subtle signs of eye rolling every time somebody answers a question. Teachers must look at who brought invitations to school and who they give them to. They need to notice who plays with whom during recess.

There are also many ways to create an inclusive culture on a much grander scale. For example, a kindergarten classroom was getting a new student mid-year. The day before the new student came, the teacher said, "We are taking down all the pictures and emptying all the cubbies because tomorrow we have a new class. Today, we are the class without Char-

Teachers must pay attention to the social climate and social fabric in the classroom.

lie, and tomorrow, we are a new class because we have a new member.” This was a powerful message that conveyed how much the teacher valued every individual in the class.

Teachers must be proactive, setting up rules and procedures that communicate how everyone is valued, everyone matters, and everyone is treated nicely.

Teachers must be proactive, setting up rules and procedures that communicate how everyone is valued, everyone matters, and everyone is treated nicely. Teachers must also be reactive. When adults see bullying happen and do nothing, they send two really dangerous messages. They send a message to the bully that this behavior is tolerated and condoned. Even more dangerous and potentially deadly, this inaction tells the victim, you are not protected or cared for. Even adults will let this happen to you. We can't afford for children to feel the level of desperation that comes from that kind of non-response from adults.

Teachers play an important role in teaching children to treat their peers with kindness, but it is not only the teacher's job. Parents also need to be involved in teaching their children how to interact appropriately with their peers. Together, teachers and parents can create a generation that does not resort to and does not tolerate bullying.

Based on interviews with Dr. Rona Novick, PhD, for Prevention 101.

SUBSTANCE

ABUSE

INTERVIEWS WITH
MRS. DENA GORKIN, CPP & DR. MIRIAM GROSS



Tools for parents to help protect kids from drugs.

In the field of substance abuse prevention, there is a concept known as protective factors.

These are conditions or behaviors present in an individual's environment that decrease his or her chances of falling prey to addiction and other risky behaviors. The following are some protective factors that parents can provide, no matter the age of their children.

COMMUNICATION

In real estate, the three most important words are “location, location, location.” In parenting, the three most important words are “communication, communication, communication.” It is important for parents to always maintain open communication with their kids from a young age. Parents need to make it very clear to their child that there is nothing he or she can tell them that is too scary for the parents to handle, and that the parents will not judge the child when the information is communicated. Parents need to be the people children always feel safe talking to.

By opening these lines of communication, children are much more likely to confide in their parents when they see their peers behaving in ways that are not healthy.

BELONGING

As part of ensuring open communication, parents need to build their children’s feelings of belonging — in their family, in school, and in the community. Parents can foster belonging by creating a family culture where they address topics by starting with a phrase such as, “In our family, we do . . .” Creating this culture and this sense of belonging as a family and then talking the same way about the community and the school makes a child feel as if he or she is part of something bigger.

Children need to feel connected to their environment and the people in it. The more healthy connections people have, the less likely they are to be susceptible to addictive behaviors.

The more healthy connections people have, the less likely they are to be susceptible to addictive behaviors.

COMPETENCE

Parents also need to give their children a sense of competence and self-worth. This does not mean constantly praising them and telling them they are amazing, but rather giving them skills. This could mean teaching them a musical instrument, giving them art lessons, or simply helping them find what they are good at and ways to develop it.

A sense of competence breeds self-confidence in a child, and self-confidence breeds all kinds of positive things, such as the ability to resist peer pressure.

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PASSION & PATH

We often talk about two essential building blocks to a productive life: PASSION AND A PATH.

Passion is self-explanatory. The most successful people are those who discover something they love to do or be involved in. A child who has a passion for something, whether it is music, art, sports, woodworking, or whatever it may be, is more likely to turn to that when they need down-time or a boost.

But aside from passion, a person needs a direction in life, a path, so they know where they are going. These two

ingredients will help children maintain healthy behaviors, which will, in turn, ward off negative influences. When children have a passion and a path, they know what is expected of them. This creates a lot of internal structure and feelings of safety.

When parents work to create and maintain good communication with their children, give them a real sense of belonging, provide them with the skills to develop self-confidence, and help them find both a passion and a path, they have set up powerful protective factors for their children.

Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

Why are so many teens self medicating today?

Anxiety and depression in preteens and teenagers are more prevalent today than five years ago.

One potential contributing factor that has increased dramatically in the last five years is children's access to social media from a very young age.

By fifth grade, many children have cell phones, which provide almost constant access to social media. By the time they are teenagers, they have been exposed to social media for several years.

Most of the current adult population did not have this same experience in school. There was, of course, school pressure and social drama, but the minute a student walked out of the school building, the social drama was over until the next day. At that point, the worst that could happen was someone called and said something

Now, not only does social drama occur throughout children's regular school days, but as soon as school is over, they are on Instagram and Snapchat.

nasty to the young person. People did not have to pick up the phone or their parents might not even have allowed them to use the phone. Social drama did not extend to after-school hours.

Now, not only does social drama occur throughout children's regular school days, but as soon as school is over, they are on Instagram and Snapchat.

They are counting their likes and how many people responded to their posts. The social drama from the school day continues and even escalates. Children's anxiety levels might have been kept at bay if the social drama was only taking place at school, but now, the drama follows them through the evening until they drop off to sleep with their phones in their hands. Children cannot easily escape, so their anxiety levels only continue to rise.

Social media has contributed enormously to anxiety in young people. Before cell phones, in order to find trouble and be exposed to the high life, one had to leave his or her home.

Now, children can find these things without leaving their rooms. On social media, they see all these wonderful, beautiful people engag-

ing in risky behaviors or having what appears to be a great time.

The devices we deem "normal" contribute to the increased anxiety in young people. According to Dena Gorkin, these devices have created a new form of addiction.

Children often feel their lives do not match with the lives they are seeing online, and for some children, they might be having a rough time at home. To escape, they stream content all evening—television, movies, and social media. By constantly comparing their lives to what they see in social media, they begin to feel inadequate. They feel as if they are missing something from their lives. This also increases anxiety.

The devices we deem “normal” and believe that every child should have, contribute to the increased anxiety in young people. According to Dena Gorkin, these devices have created a new form of addiction.

It is important for parents and other adults to monitor their children’s emotional state and evaluate their children’s use of social media and electronic devices.

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Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

Does the legalization of a substance make it safe to use?

Alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs, though legal, are often abused.

People can get these substances whether they are of age or not, and the same thing is happening with marijuana.

Walking through almost any neighborhood, one can smell marijuana everywhere. Dena Gorkin recalls walking down the street with her twelve-year-old daughter and her daughter said, “Smell that, Mom? That’s marijuana.”

There was a time when twelve-year-olds did not know what marijuana was, but now they know what it is and how to recognize it. With any substance that is potentially addictive, it is important that adults give children information. Adults must teach children about the real dangers. At the same time, it is very important to not give them exaggerated information. If a child or teenager is warned, “One marijuana joint will melt your brains and you’ll never be able to concentrate in school again,” they may try it anyway to see what happens. When what they were told inevitably does not happen, the adult loses all

credibility and from that point on, any information that adult tells a child about other drugs or substances is potentially ignored because it is deemed unreliable. False information is not an effective way of keeping children away from drugs and other harmful substances.

People often ask, “What is marijuana, and how does it affect the body and the brain?”

Marijuana is a psychoactive substance. In other words, it is a substance that affects brain functions. The active chemicals in the cannabis plant, from which marijuana is derived, bind with sensitive receptors in the brain. These receptors, while bound to the chemicals in marijuana, affect certain brain areas or cells that subsequently affect the entire body. Marijuana will affect perception, memory, learning, problem solving, coordination and appetite. It also affects our internal reward system.

The reward we are talking about is not “getting high.” In the brain, a “level of reward” system enables us to feel good, which is not the same as feeling pleasure. When a person feels accomplished, they feel good. While a person is using marijuana, this reward system becomes temporarily impaired, so that now they need more activity in order to get the “I feel accomplished, I feel good” reward response. This often results in increased anxiety and paranoia.

Different people react in different ways just as they do

Marijuana will affect perception, memory, learning, problem solving, coordination and appetite.

with alcohol. Not everybody has the same reaction. However, some common reactions have been observed. One common reaction is people becoming very desensitized. Clinically, this is called “amotivational syndrome.” Amotivational syndrome means a person has little or no desire to do anything - whether it is working, socializing or even completing simple tasks.

When we combine this syndrome with a teenager’s developing brain, serious developmental issues arise. Teenage marijuana use affects memory, learning, and interpersonal relationships. Teenagers are still learning how to perform in life as they

are discovering what they are good at. They need to put significant effort into their studies. They are learning how friendships work and are beginning to understand the dynamics of healthy friendships. These are the building blocks for a successful life. When a person becomes unmotivated, life becomes difficult, and this is particularly true for a teenager.

Marijuana use that begins in the teenage years has been associated with lower career success and income, as well as an increase in problems with interpersonal relationships. When teenagers use marijuana, it permanently affects their developing brain, which, in turn, im-

pacts the rest of their lives.

Just as it is important to give children accurate informa-

Marijuana use that begins in the teenage years has been associated with lower career success and income, as well as an increase in problems with interpersonal relationships.

tion about the risks and dangers of various substances, it is equally important to talk to kids about what they should do when their friends are involved in using these substances. Parents and adults cannot assume children will never be exposed to these substances. Indeed, one should assume children will be exposed to a potentially addictive substance sooner rather than later, so it is important to have these discussions early and frequently. These conversations need to happen about both illegal and legal substances.

Open, honest communication is the best way to prepare children to make informed decisions and to handle a situation when they are exposed to potentially harmful substances.

When teenagers use marijuana, it permanently affects their developing brain, which, in turn, impacts the rest of their lives.

Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, & Dr. Miriam Gross for Prevention 101.

What should I do when my teenager goes to a party where alcohol & drugs may be present?

For most teenagers, parties are a rite of passage and attendance or lack of attendance at a party can significantly impact their social standing. In today's society, young people feel the pressure and opinion of their peers constantly, thanks to social media and the "standards" set by celebrities and social media influencers.

It is very important that parents communicate with their children concerning parties where alcohol and drugs may be present. Forbidding a teenager from going to one of these parties is ineffectual in the long term, and it shuts down open communication between the parent and the child.

Instead, before the party, the parent should say, "I know there may be drugs and alcohol present at this party, and there's going to be potentially risky behaviors. I love you and

I care about you, and I hope you are strong enough to resist them.”

Then, the parent and the teenager need to discuss how the teenager can extract himself or herself from one of these situations without appearing weak in front of friends. Parents should say, “If you see yourself getting into a situation where you can’t resist, but you want to, we are going to have a code that you will text to me.”

This code could simply be the number nine, a special word, or any message the parent and child develop together. It should be something short that is only used in this situation. In case a friend sees them sending the message, it should not be something that would make the friend guess it was an “escape” message. When parents receive a text message with this code, they will know they need to get their child out of that situation immediately.

How is that done? A parent will call the teenager and say, “Hey listen, I need you to come home right away. Something came up, and I need your help immediately.” The reason can be anything from, “I just crashed the car, and I need you to come home,” to, “I have to leave unexpectedly, and I need you to babysit for your younger siblings.”

The parent and the teenager need to discuss how the teenager can extract himself or herself from one of these situations without appearing weak in front of friends.

By keeping the lines of communication open with teenagers and respecting their need to socialize with peers, parents can be there when potentially harmful situations arise.

Whatever is said, this phone call now gives teenagers an excuse to leave that risky situation without having to display any perceived weakness in front of their friends because they are leaving when the fun is beginning. After the call is made, the parents should quickly pick their children up themselves or send a car service or a trusted adult friend to get them so they can be safe from that situation.

By keeping the lines of communication open with teenagers and respecting their need to socialize with peers, parents can be there when potentially harmful

situations arise, without damaging their child's relationship with his or her peers.

Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

What do I do if my child is using drugs?

If you suspect a teenager is abusing drugs or alcohol, do not panic and do not immediately speak to the teenager about the situation. Speaking to the teenager before you have a plan usually backfires because the conversation quickly disintegrates into a confrontation, which accomplishes nothing.

The first thing you need to do is think of people in your life who can be helpful and think of professionals to contact.

Determine if there is another adult—an uncle, older brother, or favorite cousin—with whom the child has a good relationship and may have some positive influence.

Is there a member of the clergy that can be helpful? Does the child have a pediatrician who has been a regular part of his or her care? Think of people in your life who can connect with the child you are concerned about. Enlist one or more of these people to spend time with the child, since he or she might open up to this person when not being open to a parent.

The first thing you need to do is think of people in your life who can be helpful and think of professionals to contact.

After you have created this list, go through your cabinets and check all the different medications that can be addictive, such as medications for pain or anxiety like oxycodone, Xanax or Valium.

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Ensure these medications are stored properly so the child will not have access to them.

Ensure these medications are stored properly so the child will not have access to them. If those medicines are no longer needed in the house, find out the proper way to dispose of them. There are many pharmacies where you can drop off prescriptions that are no longer needed.

It is also important to consider if there are other homes where your teenager could be getting access to powerful medications. For example, does the child regularly visit his or her grandparent who has a variety of pain medications? Speak with the grandparent or other individual about storing or disposing of their medications correctly.

After these precautions have been taken, it is time to locate Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or even Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. You can also search for Al-Anon meetings, which are for family members of addicts. Any of these programs can provide a lot of information.

There are many meetings available at different locations and at different times of the day. It is also extremely important to contact a professional who specializes in addiction. This professional can guide you through determining how treatment should be pursued, whether it is in-patient rehab or outpatient treatment. With outpatient treatment, the child might still be able to go to school while also going to individual and group therapy three to five times a week and being continuously monitored for drug use.

The detoxification process, often referred to as simply “detox,” is also something that needs to be considered. Detox occurs as the body adjusts to not using drugs. Detoxing is not just a matter of willpower, it is a matter of physical health. If a person stops using drugs suddenly, it can be life-threatening because the nervous system is used to certain substances and will automatically crave them. Because of drug use, some body systems may have stopped working, and doctors need to regulate how to get the body back to normal functioning without causing more damage in the process. A medical professional should address the best route for each individual’s detox process.

After researching the above resources, it is time to have a conversation with the child, but do not approach the conversation as if

Teenage drug use is something that needs professional attention. Do not panic. Get the proper help. Interventions and treatments do work.

you are requesting information. Most likely, if you straight out ask, “Are you using drugs?”, the answer will be, “No.” Instead, initiate a conversation about their friends, what their friends are up to, and what’s going on in their social circles. A child is much more likely to tell you a friend is using drugs and how that friend’s parents reacted. This can open up a conversation about drugs.

Regardless of how the conversation goes—if it goes anywhere at all—teenage drug use is something that needs professional attention. Do not panic. Get the proper help. Interventions and treatments do work, and the child can, with the proper intervention and treatment, build a beautiful and successful life.

Based on interviews with Dr. Miriam Gross, for Prevention 101.

How to spot the early warning signs

The teenage years are delicate years. Typically, teenagers move away from listening to their parents or seeing their parents as the ultimate authority.

Beyond that, they view their parents as people who do not understand them or what they are going through, so they look to their peers for validation.

Having a conversation with a teenager can be difficult, but this is not unusual and should be expected. Mood swings and emotional outbursts are common in teenagers as well.

Parents often wonder how they can know if their teenager is using drugs when his or her behavior is so erratic under normal circumstances.

Parents should look for sudden changes in a teenager's appearance, hairstyle and friendships, especially if the new friends are very

Parents should look for sudden changes in a teenager's appearance, hairstyle and friendships, especially if the new friends are very different from the teenager's previous peers.

different from the teenager's previous peers. Pay attention to the pictures teenagers hang on their walls because they could indicate a connection with drug use. They will not be putting up pictures of drug paraphernalia, of course, but rather they will have pictures of people they look up to who are associated with the drug community or with using drugs. The appearance of drug paraphernalia, such as rolling papers, is something else parents should look out for at home.

Another indicator to watch for is a decline in school performance. Even if a child has never excelled in school, sudden changes beyond typical poor performance, especially in several classes at once, is a warning sign adults should investigate.

Another indicator to watch for is a decline in school performance. Even if a child has never excelled in school, sudden changes beyond typical poor performance, especially in several classes at once, is a warning sign adults should investigate.

Sometimes, the warning signs can be one of two extremes. If money begins to disappear or if the teenager suddenly has a lot of money, then parents need to pay close attention. Money disappearing frequently could indicate drugs are being bought regularly,

and the appearance of a lot of money could mean they are dealing drugs. Sudden weight loss or sudden weight gain can also indicate drug use but are the result of different types of

drugs. It might seem overwhelming that two completely opposite symptoms can both indicate the same problem, and that is why looking at the overall picture is important. Pay attention to what is new and different, especially if an explanation is not readily apparent.

Changes in personal hygiene should also be noted. If a teenager suddenly begins using a lot of body deodorants or sprays, especially right before they come home, this could indicate they are trying to mask the smell of drugs, alcohol or smoke. An increase in the use of eye drops can occur because some drugs dry out the eyes or cause redness.

When the signs discussed here are apparent, they provide a good starting place for parents concerned about their child's potential use of drugs.

It is important to consider all the different signs versus confronting a teenager about one thing. When teenagers are confronted about the appearance of drug paraphernalia, for example, the most common answer is, "They belong to my friend. His parents are going to throw him out of the house if they find it, so I'm keeping it for him." They are not going to be straightforward and honest. To learn the truth, parents must consider all the different signs they see and evaluate the entire picture.

It is important to consider all the different signs versus confronting a teenager about one thing.

Based on interviews with Dr. Miriam Gross, for Prevention 101.



How to spot the early warning signs.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Loss or increase in appetite; unexplained weight loss or gain
- Small pupils, decreased respiratory rate and a non-responsive state are all signs of opioid intoxication.
- Nausea, vomiting, sweating, shaky hands, feet or head, and large pupils are all signs of opioid withdrawal.

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Change in attitude/personality
- Change in friends; new hangouts
- Avoiding contact with family
- Change in activities, hobbies or sports
- Drop in grades or work performance
- Isolation and secretive behavior

- Moodiness, irritability, nervousness, giddiness, nodding off
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts or layers of clothing out of season
- Stealing

ADVANCED WARNING SIGNS

- Missing medications
- Burnt or missing spoons bottle caps
- Missing shoelaces/belts
- Small bags with powder residue
- Syringes

Should the schools be talking to our children about drugs?

There has always been a debate about whether we should expose children who are clueless about drugs and substance abuse to information about these sensitive topics.

There are powerful arguments for both sides of this issue but in a school setting, where children are not segregated according to their levels of innocence, it may be necessary to expose the more innocent students to this information in

order to inform and protect those who are engaging in risky behaviors. Dena Gorkin, CPP, believes it is better to inform innocent children than to leave the exposed kids unprotected.

In schools, there generally are kids who know about drugs and kids who do not. But these children learn

There generally are kids who know about drugs and kids who do not. But these children learn together, play together and share information.

together, play together and share information, and an unexposed child who has never heard of any drugs and is completely uninvolved, needs only to walk home from school one day with another child who is more informed.

During the conversation on that walk home, the unexposed child is given information, but he or she is not armed with protective knowledge to combat it. He or she may have just heard about how much fun it is to smoke or drink, but this child does not know of the possible consequences of doing so.

It is always safer to err on the side of caution and give the information to all children. While schools can certainly target groups of kids who are known to be involved in risky behaviors with more specific information, general education about being safe and being aware should go to everyone.

Prevention is always better. The old adage, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” has merit.

This can include measures taken by schools to prevent substances from being brought into school or on trips. Before a school trip, school personnel might talk to students and say, “No substances are allowed on school trips. We realize this

While schools can certainly target groups of kids who are known to be involved in risky behaviors with more specific information, general education about being safe and being aware should go to everyone.

may be a challenge for some students. If this applies to you, then you need to be honest with yourself. If you can't control yourself from bringing this substance, then we ask you to please refrain from joining the trip."

Each school and each parent must determine how conversations and other situations related to drugs and other substances are handled.

If adults have an honest relationship with students, most of them will be able to have a frank conversation about this. Some schools have students sign a piece of paper that says the student agreed there will not be any substances on the trip, and if there are, the student will be sent home in the middle of the trip.

There is not a single perfect solution to this issue. Each school and each parent must determine how conversations and other situations related to drugs and other substances are handled. When

making these decisions, it is important to remember that children will inevitably be exposed to harmful substances. The more knowledge and information they have, the more likely they are to make healthy, wise decisions.

Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

MENTAL WELLNESS

INTERVIEWS WITH
DR. DOVID SCHWARTZ, Psy.D., LCSW



Living with mental illness

People living with mental illness are often ashamed or even afraid to tell others what they are going through. They are worried about the judgments people will make about them if they know that they are taking medication or seeing a therapist.

It is important for people to remember that there is no shame in getting help with mental illness, like depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and there are many different types of help in today's world.

It is important for people to remember that there is no shame in getting help with mental illness.

In the 1980s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote a letter to someone who was experiencing a psychological problem, and he said medication may be needed. In those days there were only a handful of drugs on the market.

Today there are many new medications available. While medication is not the only option available, it is appropriate in certain cases. People who need medication should not be hesitant to

make use of that help.

Dr. David Schwartz worked with a young bipolar man who was taking medication. He was dating, and the relationship was getting serious. The young man spoke with his rav, who said he had to tell the young woman that he was taking medication. On their next date, he told her. She opened up her purse and said, “So am I.”

The young man was shocked. He had been scared she would reject him but instead learned that she was just like him and they were both just people getting the help they needed.

The most important step in treating a mental health condition is finding a mental health professional.

A trustworthy and knowledgeable mental health professional will be a valuable ally. It may take a little time and persistence to find someone whom you feel comfortable working with.

We live in a world where people help each other get through challenges. That help can be through medications, therapy, exercise, hobbies such as music and art, or a combination of these methods. A person dealing with a mental illness may feel as if the situation is hopeless. This is simply not true. Help is available, and there is no shame in getting that help.

The most important step in treating a mental health condition is finding a mental health professional.

Based on interviews with David Schwartz, Psy.D., LCSW, for Prevention 101.



- **Approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S.—43.8 million, or 18.5%—experiences mental illness in a given year.**
- **Approximately 1 in 25 adults in the U.S.—9.8 million, or 4.0%—experiences a serious mental illness in a given year that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities.**
- **Approximately 1 in 5 youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. For children aged 8–15, the estimate is 13%.**
- **18.1% of adults in the U.S. experienced an anxiety disorder such as posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and specific phobias.**
- **Among the 20.2 million adults in the U.S. who experienced a substance use disorder, 50.5%—10.2 million adults—had a co-occurring mental illness.**

(Source: NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness)

What causes depression?

Can it be prevented?

There are many different types of depression, and the causes for depression are varied and extensive. Depression could be the result of chemical imbalances in a person's brain. Medication can help with these imbalances to reduce the symptoms, or sometimes, to relieve them completely.

Even when the depression is situational, the depression does not always show up at the time the causative event occurs. This makes determining the reason for depression difficult.

For example, a five-year-old child loses her mother. We know such a loss can have a profound effect on a child's psychological development, but the effect on the child, and the potential resultant depression, might not show up for many years.

In this situation, it might be difficult to determine the cause of the depression when it appears, but once the history is known, the cause is fairly straightforward.

Depression can be caused by less traumatic life experiences than the loss of a loved one. For example,

The causes for depression are varied and extensive, from chemical imbalances to challenging situations.

adults whose lives revolve around work can become depressed if they lose their jobs, and even if the person was not attached to his or her job, the sudden loss of financial security could cause depression.

Sometimes, the cause is hereditary. If a person's parents or grandparents experienced depression, then he or she might inherit that disposition. Studies have shown that adopted children can develop characteristics of their biological parents, including a propensity toward depression.

There are also forms of depression where we cannot determine the cause. There are some people born with a depressed disposition, but there is no history of it in the family. Many mental health diagnoses have a depression aspect, which can make determining the cause difficult.

Drugs and alcohol can also lead to depression. A psychiatrist will usually try to wean a depressed substance abuser off of the drugs and alcohol before making a diagnosis. It might even be necessary to wait a few months for the person to be completely clean in order to definitively say the depression was there before the alcohol and drug use started.

Even if the cause is not certain, depression can usually be treated, and sometimes, it can even be prevented. Let's

Talk therapy and medication are common methods of treating depression. Studies show the best way to deal with depression is a combination of medicine and talk therapy.

consider the five-year-old child who lost her mother. How can we prevent depression that might erupt or evolve in that situation? If the child is given the necessary support and skills to heal emotionally, she will be able to move forward in life without becoming disabled by the loss.

Talk therapy and medication are common methods of treating depression. Studies show the best way to deal with depression is a combination of medicine and talk therapy.

While determining the cause of depression can be difficult, treatment is possible. Depression can even be prevented in some cases when steps are taken to help people cope with situations and events that often lead to depression. Regardless, there are always options for people suffering from depression. If you are worried you or a loved one might be suffering from depression, schedule an appointment with your primary care physician or a licensed mental health professional to talk about your concerns.

Depression can even be prevented in some cases when steps are taken to help people cope with situations and events that often lead to depression.

Based on interviews with Dovid Schwartz, Psy.D., LCSW, for Prevention 101.

Depression can lead to a range of behavioral and physical symptoms.

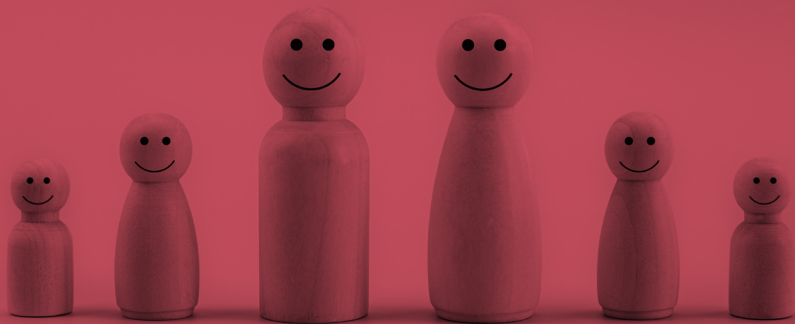
PEOPLE MAY EXPERIENCE CHANGES IN:

- **MOOD:** anxiety, apathy, general discontent, guilt, hopelessness, loss of interest, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, mood swings, or sadness
- **SLEEP:** early awakening, excess sleepiness, insomnia, or restless sleep
- **WHOLE BODY:** excessive hunger, fatigue, loss of appetite, or restlessness
- **BEHAVIOR:** agitation, excessive crying, irritability, or social isolation
- **COGNITIVE:** lack of concentration, slowness in activity, or thoughts of suicide
- **WEIGHT:** weight gain or weight loss
- **ALSO COMMON:** poor appetite or repeatedly going over thoughts

Depression requires a medical diagnosis. Consult a medical professional for advice.

FAMILY

INTERVIEWS WITH
MRS. DENA GORKIN, CPP
& RABBI SHEA HECHT



Is there a respectful and healthy way to argue in front of our children?

Most parents have heard the adage to “never argue in front of the children.” But this might not always be the best advice, especially if we know how to “argue” in a constructive way.

Very few of us are taught how to argue, so when moments of disagreement arise, we cling to our viewpoints and feelings and stop listening. This always leads to trouble, and it becomes a vicious cycle. Rabbi Shea Hecht believes showing children how to discuss, disagree and debate in a way that conveys our ideas to the other person respectfully, might be the greatest tool we ever give children.

If two adults are engaged in unfair and dirty arguing, then that type of arguing should be out of sight and earshot of children. Arguing that includes name calling and putting each other down only damages a child’s ability to interact effectively with others. This type of arguing sets a bad example.

Healthy arguing and lively conversation at the dinner table sets a good example. Encourage children to share their

perspectives if they have a different idea or look at the world a little bit differently. This is a good argument. We are explaining our ideas and listening to theirs. It is productive and constructive.

What actions can we take to argue in a healthy way? Rabbi Hecht has two helpful tips. First, when arguing with someone, make sure to use “I” rather than “you” when discussing a negative situation. I feel disappointed. I feel hurt. It was something done to me. I feel bad about this, and it doesn’t seem to be right. By doing this, we put the responsibility for our feelings on ourselves, not on the other person. This way, the other person doesn’t feel blamed or get defensive, and they are more willing to listen to what we have to say. After all, arguing is all about getting our points across to someone else so they understand and see the situation the way we do.

The second tip is never to blame the other person or call him or her names. We should never use terms or adjectives that we know will offend the other person. Our goal is to share our ideas with them and make our feelings known, but perhaps they have a better idea that they will share with us. A good argument always starts with listening closely to what the other person is saying, and then we are able to formulate our idea and

Showing children how to discuss, disagree and debate in a way that conveys our ideas to the other person respectfully, might be the greatest tool we ever give children.

present it to them. When both parties remain open to what the other person is saying and are willing to at least listen to the other viewpoint, compromise becomes possible. At the very least, both parties will walk away feeling respected and heard.

Start with these strategies. Use “I” messages, talk about the issues, and don’t make it about what is wrong with the other person. If we do this, our next argument will result in an exchange of ideas and mutual respect. Both parties will be a little smarter in receiving the other person’s knowledge and accepting his or her ideas.

When arguing with someone, make sure to use “I” rather than “you” when discussing a negative situation. This way, the other person doesn’t feel blamed or get defensive, and they are more willing to listen to what we have to say.

Once we have successfully implemented these techniques into our arguments, we must teach our children these strategies as well. The earlier children learn to discuss their ideas calmly and with respect while also listening to others, the better equipped they will be to handle conflict with their peers.

Based on interviews with Rabbi Shea Hecht, for Prevention 101.

My child is hanging around a rough crowd – what can I do?

All parents worry about the influence other children have on their own children.

And all parents want to protect their children from negative influences. But when parents tell their child not to be friends with another child, it usually has the exact opposite effect.

Pointing out that another child is a bad influence creates resentment and anger. So what should an adult do when a child has started hanging out with individuals who are having a negative influence?

First, we must consider what creates bonds between people.

When we have something in common with somebody, we think, “Oh, I like that person. She gets me. We have the same interests.”

When parents tell their child not to be friends with another child, it usually has the exact opposite effect.

If a child gravitates toward friends who are interested in smoking, hanging out on the streets late at night, or other negative or risky behaviors, that means the child feels accepted by those people and may have some common interests or, in many cases, some common pain.

Pulling children away from these negative friends will not work, because there is a common bond. Instead, we must help children develop healthy interests and behaviors. We must help them get to a better place emotionally and find more positive interests.

The more positive and healthy interests a child has, the more likely he or she will cultivate friends who have those same interests.

The healthier a child is, the more likely he or she will associate with healthy friends.

The more positive and healthy interests a child has, the more likely he or she will cultivate friends who have those same interests.

Remember, we can't usually pull children away from unhealthy friendships, but when we foster newer healthier mindsets, we can gently nudge our children toward healthier friends.

Based on interviews with Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

How do I figure out what is keeping my child from succeeding in school?

This is one of the most common questions that I'm asked. There are many reasons a child might not be succeeding in school. A lack of certain skills, a learning disability, a physical health issue, a mental health issue, difficulty focusing and past or ongoing trauma are among the most typical reasons for a student's academic struggles.

The first step in getting to the bottom of a child's lack of school success is getting the child evaluated. This starts with a visit to the pediatrician to determine that there are no physical impediments to learning. A child who has an undetected hearing loss or a visual impairment will naturally find it difficult to pick up reading and other necessary basic skills. A child who has severe allergies or other chronic health conditions will unconsciously be direct-

The first step in getting to the bottom of a child's lack of school success is getting the child evaluated.

If the physical exam does not yield any helpful information, the next step would be to look at the home environment.

ing her energy towards maintaining her physical comfort, which distracts her from learning. Something as simple as an iron deficiency can affect a child's ability to learn. A full physical examination by a competent medical professional can either detect or rule out physiological conditions that might be an impediment to learning.

If the physical exam does not yield any helpful information, the next step would be to look at the home environment. Is there anything going on at home that could be distracting the child

from learning? Is there, G-d forbid, a family member who is ill who is being cared for in the home? Is there abuse or neglect or ongoing fighting between parents? These are situations that can easily affect a child's ability to feel like a normal, capable student. A child who is experiencing this type of ongoing trauma may not be able to learn because the part of her brain that is dealing with the trauma response does not allow the learning part of her brain to be fully engaged in academic activities. It is important to face the issues of the home head on and speak to a coach or therapist to get some guidance as to how to eliminate some of the stress for this child.

If the child seems to struggle with learning in one or two areas but is otherwise doing well, a psycho-educational evaluation should be arranged. In most states this can be done free of charge through the Department of Education. However, in many states these evaluations can take many months to schedule and to complete because of short-staffing in many government agencies. If

the DOE in your area has a wait that is longer than two months, it might be worth it to get a private evaluation. Ask your school or other experienced parents for recommendations of competent private evaluators or agencies. Be prepared to pay a considerable out of pocket fee for this evaluation, as most evaluators do not accept insurance. A child who has a learning disability is, by definition, “of average or above average intelligence.” Some children with learning disabilities actually score very high in areas of intelligence that their disability does not affect. If your child scores significantly below average on a standard intelligence test, then this is not a learning disability, and a plan should be made to address the intellectual deficits of the child.

To determine if a child has a mental health condition such as generalized anxiety, depression, a mood disorder, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder or the like, a psychiatrist must be consulted. The psychiatrist will do a battery of tests and ask a lot of questions to determine the nature of your child’s mental health struggle. Thank G-d we live in an era where there are many effective and diverse approaches to mental health challenges. The psychiatrist may recommend medication, therapy and in some cases, diet or routine changes. If followed, these protocols can be very successful in getting a child back on track in school.

Once parents have some clarity as to what condition or set of circumstances is getting in the way of a child’s academic success, it is of great importance to be in touch with school teachers and principals. If the school has a guidance

To determine if a child has a mental health condition, a psychiatrist must be consulted.

counselor, he or she should be looped in as well. The more they know, the more they can help by providing alternative classroom arrangements, extra individualized study sessions, counseling and other therapies. A child who is evaluated by the Department of Education with a learning disability or other health impairment may be mandated by the state to receive free individual or small group tutoring as well as in-school or out of school counseling and/or speech, occupational and physical therapy. (New York is one of the best states in the country with regard to services, and New York City tops the list of cities where a broad range of services is available in the school setting, free of charge.)

It is of utmost importance for parents to have a good support system when trying to navigate their child's school challenges. Other parents from the school, friends and relatives can be tremendously helpful, especially if they have a child that has gone through challenges. There are also community support groups in some communities as well as many online resources for parents looking for material to read or watch that can help them help their child. Parents may also want to speak to a parenting coach, therapist, or experienced educator to get some guidance. Parents must also make sure that they are doing some self-care that will help them relieve some of the stresses of this period. With organized and consistent effort and the cooperation of the school, children with academic challenges can make it through their school years not only surviving...but thriving.

Parents need a good support system when trying to navigate their child's school challenges.

By Mrs. Dena Gorkin, CPP, for Prevention 101.

How can I help my child set good boundaries with friends?

“I’m not here for myself. I need advice for a friend.”

This is a commonly expressed justification for a teenager to show up at the office of a guidance counselor or trusted mecheaneches. And quite often, after a short time, it becomes clear that the “friend” is actually the self.

Unless it’s not. Sometimes, it is an actual friend.

In twenty-something years of working with teens, I have had many students approach me to discuss some difficulty a friend is having. Sometimes the friend tags along. Sometimes the friend has asked to get some anonymous advice. Sometimes, the friend has no idea that she is being spoken about.

While clearly there is a person in crisis whose needs must be met, what is happening to the loyal friend who is spending hours listening to the pain and suffering of her peer? How is a 14 or 16-year-old meant to handle the heavy emotions of a young friend suffering from depression, abuse or suicidal ideation?

The answer is: She is not. A teenager is not a therapist.

She has neither the life experience, training or emotional maturity to safely and successfully guide another person her own age through a serious crisis.

A teen is not meant to handle the heavy emotions of a young friend suffering from depression, abuse or suicidal ideation.

But young people trust each other and so they confide in their friends, leaving the friends in the uncomfortable, unsure and often frightening position of having to decide how to save them. This scenario repeats itself in every school, camp and social environment in which teenagers are found.

Here are some of the verbal exchanges that make these confidences so overwhelming:

“I’m thinking about killing myself. Don’t tell anyone.”

“_____ is bullying me. If you say anything to her, I’ll never come back to school.”

“I lost 20 pounds in a month. It’s so cool. I’m gonna lose another 20.”

“I’m cutting myself. If you tell anybody I’ll never speak to you again.”

“If you don’t_____ (help me, keep my secret, etc.) I’ll kill myself.”

Statements like these play with a young person’s mind and emotions. Even for a seasoned therapist, hearing about people’s serious issues is difficult. For a teenager, it is unmanageable.

How do we help our children navigate these situations

without becoming overly involved or even traumatized? There are some solid strategies that can easily be learned.

1. Talk to teens about being aware of boundaries. Explain that just like we have physical “personal space” there is also a concept of emotional “personal space.” We don’t want people to stand too close, or touch us when we don’t want to be touched; and we shouldn’t allow people to invade our emotional space. Most people are aware of when their emotional space is being violated. Pay attention to this feeling.

2. Teach phrases that help communicate uncomfortable feelings. Giving teens language to say that their emotional space is being invaded is key to empowering them to make it stop. The following are a few phrases that can be very useful:

This is difficult for me to hear. Is there someone else you trust to speak to about this?

I know someone who can help with this. Let’s go speak to him/her.

I’m only 14 (15, 17...) and I have no experience with this. Let’s speak to _____ (trusted adult).

I’m not a therapist. But I will be happy to help you find one/contact one for you/go with you to one.

3. Encourage students to have a Mashpia/trusted adult to

Explain that just like we have physical “personal space” there is also a concept of emotional “personal space.”

be their go-to person for guidance when a friend is in crisis. The Rebbe gave us this directive for a reason. Enough said.

4. Talk with students about the guilt and fear. Very often, the guilt imposed on the teen is what is driving him/her to continue being involved with a friend in crisis, even though it is overwhelming. Sometimes it is the fear that the friend will harm him/herself, or that the problem will get worse. It is important to help the teen understand that he/she is dealing with someone who needs professional help. If someone is going to self-harm or end a friendship because of what you do, they are not being rational. Threats like these are a warning sign that they need more help than you can offer. You are not responsible for the mental health or life of your friend. No matter how big a guilt trip she takes you on.

5. Ahavas Yisroel does not mean putting yourself at risk. Baruch Hashem, we educate our children to be kind and compassionate to others and the lessons are well learned. However, we also know that we are forbidden to put ourselves in danger. Yes it is important to help a friend in crisis; but the definition of help in this case is very clear. It means getting a responsible and knowledgeable adult involved. It most definitely does not mean attempting to manage a friend's crisis all on your own.

If we provide teens with a safe and non-judgmental space to talk about their issues, they will come to us for guidance when a friend is in crisis. And hopefully, even when the friend is in fact the self.

By Dena Gorkin. A version of this appeared on mymef.org.

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