

A handbook for  
parents, caregivers,  
and organizations to  
help protect kids they  
care about from going  
down the wrong path.

# PARENTING IN A CRISIS

Pick tips and techniques from this toolkit to improve your relationship with your teenager, help them lead a happier life, and prevent substance abuse and other harmful issues from creating a crisis.



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## INTRODUCTION

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# Parenting in a crisis with PACES for Parents

*Statistics show that most families will face a crisis at some point, but when it's your family, it may seem like the world is coming to an end.*

*Unfortunately, with the epidemic of teenage substance abuse and mental health issues these days, this heartache strikes thousands of families every day. The good news is there are things parents can do to help, but the first step is to understand the nature of the problem ...*

**ALMOST ONE HALF OF FAMILIES IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY DEAL WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE.**

**FENTANYL IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR PEOPLE IN THE U.S. AGES 18 TO 45.**

**9 OF 10 PEOPLE WITH ADDICTIONS START BEFORE AGE 18, AND ONLY 10% GET HELP.**

The issues facing young people these days are more than substance abuse alone, and the problems are getting worse.

**1 IN 11 YOUNG PEOPLE ATTEMPT SUICIDE, AND 19% CONSIDER IT.**

**ONE HALF OF ADOLESCENTS HAS A MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES.**

**COVID ESCALATED ALL CRISIS STATISTICS, AND OVERDOSE DEATHS ROSE TO AN ALL-TIME HIGH.**

Meanwhile, parents are juggling a busy schedule with a host of activities competing for their time. For a while, things seem to move along smoothly enough—until the teenage years. Kids change when they become teenagers, and the issues and risks they face change as well. Which means parents need to change to keep up with those challenges, so they never have to make frightening statements such as:

- “We thought substance abuse only happened to other people.”
- “We didn’t think our kid’s problems were that serious or dangerous.”
- “We couldn’t communicate with them once they became teenagers.”
- “We didn’t know what to do to help them when they were struggling.”
- “We should have done something sooner, but we waited too late.”

Amazingly, every one of those statements above is preventable! “PACES for Parents” is a proven parenting methodology that can keep those situations from becoming a reality, and it will help prevent a dangerous crisis that could tear your family apart. “P-A-C-E-S” is an acronym to help you remember five steps you can take to build a happier family: Preparation, Awareness, Connection, Education, and Steps.

This guide will go through those areas of PACES and present techniques you can pick from to fit your situation. In each section, select one or two items that apply to your family. Write them down for future reference, and before you know it you’ll have a “Proactive Parenting Plan” that can help your family not only deal with a dangerous crisis but come out the other side in a happier and healthier place.

Now, it's time to take the next right step ...



## How preparation helps parents prevent a crisis

*I have had the challenge—and drama and pleasure—of talking to thousands of parents with teenagers who are struggling. Many of those families are in crisis, and I tell them something they don't want to hear: "You need to prepare for the worst while you work hard for the best."*

*How do I know? Because I've been there. I started drinking in high school and struggled with alcohol for over 30 years. My older son battled drugs and alcohol after first trying them in middle school. Since those times, I've studied, written about, and spoken on preventing addiction and proactive parenting for well over a decade. I know that even in the best of families, sometimes bad things still happen.*



### HOW CAN YOU BE PREPARED FOR A POSSIBLE CRISIS WITH YOUR TEENAGERS?

#### Create a “Proactive Emergency Plan” for your kids

Write down a plan to prepare for dangerous situations related to substance abuse, mental health issues, or self-harm. Commit to stop the insanity of “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

#### Take at least one positive step forward today

Sometimes, parents are slow to act out of uncertainty, embarrassment, or procrastination, so don't let your emotions interfere with the well-being of your kids. Get into motion and take a step, and you will feel better when you do.

#### Help avert a potentially deadly fentanyl crisis

Any kid can be tempted to, “Try this pill, it's no big deal, and you'll like it.” But any pill or drug could be laced with fentanyl, and a few grains of fentanyl can be fatal. Ensure your kids understand that very realistic and deadly risk.

If you're prepared, you will be better positioned to take the right steps to help your kids in a crisis. You must be ready and willing to hang in there with them when times get tough. Especially if it's hard, and even if it goes on for a long time. Keep doing your best and keep inspiring them to do the same.

You should know — deep in your heart — that your kids can still have a very positive future. You need to share that assurance with them so they know it too. And both you and your kids need to realize something very important: You can build that positive future one step at a time.

If your kids are struggling with problems like substance abuse or mental health issues, there is a very real risk that things may keep going downhill. There are dangers involved, and moms, dads, and other caregivers put their kids at greater risk by ignoring the warning signs and doing nothing.

But there's also good news, because you can have a very positive impact on your kids. In fact, over 80% of teenagers say the biggest influence on their choices about drinking is their parents. You can't control teenagers, but your support helps. No matter how bad things seem now, they can get better. Hundreds of thousands of teenagers have successfully gotten through what your kids are facing now.

Research also shows there are positive steps parents and teenagers can take that have been proven to work to help prevent a crisis. “PACES for Parents” is a methodology that can help parents and care givers equip kids for the sometimes-risky teenage years. The word “PACES” is an acronym, and the “P” stands for “Preparation” which is the critical first step to help prevent a family crisis before it happens.

All parents and care givers must understand that harmful problems such as substance abuse or mental health issues can happen to any kid in any family. And no parent ever wants to say, “We didn't think it could happen to us.” If you or someone you know is facing or fearing a crisis, it's time to take action.



# Should you be worried about your teenager's safety?

*Parenting is hard.*

*And when kids become teenagers, it gets even harder, because things change. Which means parents need to change too.*

*There's a lot riding on how Moms and Dads make that transition. Sometimes, the safety of their kids. Because there are many things to worry about during the teenage years, and it helps to be prepared.*

*In this article, you'll learn five reasons why you hopefully should not have to worry about your kid's safety during those years. But you will also see ten reasons why you should.*

*Because the last thing you want is to look back on what has become a dangerous situation in your family and sorrowfully think, "We thought substance abuse only happened to other people."*



I don't remember my parents worrying about me and things like drinking when I was a teenager. In retrospect, I wish they had.

At the time, it may have seemed there wasn't much to be concerned about. We had a good family, and I was a good kid. In high school, I didn't get into trouble and was Valedictorian and President of the Honor Society. Teenagers like that from families like that don't have issues with drinking and drugs, right?

But in my teens, I began a drinking experiment that turned into an occasional pastime which evolved into a regular habit that became an addiction which haunted me for 30 years.

More times than I can count—or want to think about—I endangered myself, friends, family, and others by driving when I should not have. I believe it is only through God's grace that something terrible didn't happen, and I am incredibly grateful for that miracle.

I know a lot of parents who were not so lucky.

I've met too many who lost a son or daughter in the teenage years. My son has been to three funerals of

guys he used to run around with in high school. We have good friends with a son in prison because an innocent night out drinking led to someone dying in a car accident. I've worked with many dozens of Moms and Dads with kids who are struggling and suffering due to substance abuse, and there are millions more of them out there.

Should you be worried about your teenager's safety? Let's look at both sides of that question ...

## TEN REASONS YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED

Some of the reasons below apply to every teenager in every family. How many of them fit yours?

### 1. ALL TEENAGERS WILL FACE RISKS AND BE TEMPTED BY DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.

- There are many risk factors which can contribute to the development of substance abuse. They include heredity, upbringing, a new town or school, divorce or other traumatic situations, and medical and psychological issues such as depression and ADHD.
- Drugs are prevalent and easy to obtain, and every teenager will know many kids who drink alcohol or use drugs. Temptations and access to substances are as close of our kid's cell phone through social media, the internet, and texts or messages from friends.
- The alcohol industry pours millions of advertising dollars into trying to influence our children. There are many longitudinal studies that link youth exposure to alcohol advertising to the likelihood that kids will begin drinking early or drink more.
- Research confirms teens find it more difficult to control impulsive or risky behaviors when their friends are around. (Scholastic)



## **2. VIRTUALLY EVERY TEEN HAS UNMET NEEDS AND ISSUES THEY WANT TO SOLVE.**

Teenagers do what they do for a reason. Parents should seek to understand the needs and issues that are important to their kids and help them navigate them safely rather than choosing to use alcohol or drugs to solve their problems. Here are some examples:

- Nathan likes to have fun and being the life of the party gives him acceptance.
- Mary is going through a rebellious stage and—deep inside—she wants to be seen.
- Tim is insecure, doesn't fit in at school, and is increasingly feeling hopeless and alone.
- Betsy is good at school yet feels pressure to make perfect grades so she is not less than.
- Bobby sees on social media how great his friends are doing, and he thinks he is broken.
- Nancy has anxiety about lots of things and desperately wants to feel more normal.

## **3. ANXIETY IS AN ESPECIALLY PERVASIVE PROBLEM WITH MANY YOUNG PEOPLE.**

- Temptations, needs, and issues can sometimes pile up on a teenager.
- Clinical anxiety disorders for young people are 70% higher than adults.
- Almost 1 in 3 teenagers will experience some form of anxiety disorder.
- Two-thirds of college students say they experience “overwhelming anxiety.”

## **4. TEENAGE BRAINS ARE NOT YET DEVELOPED TO EVALUATE RISKS EFFECTIVELY.**

- Our brain's control center is the prefrontal cortex which performs functions including weighing outcomes, forming judgments, and controlling impulses. This part of a young person's brain is not fully developed until their mid-20s.
- Many teenagers live in the moment and do not evaluate future risks well. Some believe they're bullet proof, and they don't think much about negative outcomes such as being arrested, accidents, or overdose.
- When they're under the influence of substances, a teenager's decision-making can become horrible.

## **5. MOST HIGH SCHOOLERS WILL TRY, USE, OR ABUSE ALCOHOL OR DRUGS.**

- Drinking, vaping, and smoking pot are largely seen as normal behavior with little stigma or risk, and they pose significant attraction for many young people.

- Most drugs are easy to obtain from friends or other sources.
- 75% of high school students will use addictive substances. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse)
- 40% of high schoolers will abuse dangerous substances. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse)

## **6. THERE IS A “PERFECT STORM” CREATED BY DANGEROUS OPIOID DRUGS.**

- Opioid pills such as hydrocodone (Vicodin) and oxycodone (OxyContin and Percocet) are generously prescribed by doctors and dentists and very widely available including at home, from friends, and over the internet.
- Those pills can lead naturally to another opioid drug—heroin—that is cheaper and feels even better than pills, and heroin does not have the stigma with young people that it did a generation ago.
- Any of those or other drugs could be laced with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more powerful than heroin.
- The amount of fentanyl that can fit on the tip of a pencil can potentially be deadly. In recent years, fentanyl has now become the leading cause of death for young adults 18 and over.

## **7. IMPAIRED DRIVING IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST DANGERS FACING TEENAGERS.**

- The leading cause of teenage deaths and disabilities is motor vehicle accidents. (CDC)
- Kids may get in the car with an impaired driver knowingly or unknowingly. In surveys, 17% of high school students reported riding as recently as during the last month with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. (Tracking System Direct)
- All substances, including alcohol and marijuana, limit driving awareness and slow reaction time.
- Traveling at 70 miles per hour, a hesitation of only 1 second allows a vehicle to travel more than 100 feet.

## **8. SUICIDE IS A VERY REAL DANGER FOR MANY YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY.**

- A teenager's world is largely made up of their immediate surroundings as they currently see them. One or more incidents such as a break-up, being shunned by friends, public embarrassment, or bad grades may lead a young person to feelings of hopelessness.
- Tragically, about 9% (1 in 11) of high schoolers attempt suicide, and 19% (1 in 5) consider it.



- The proliferation of drugs makes suicide-by-overdose easier to execute than it used to be.

## 9. SUBSTANCE ABUSE CAN HAPPEN WITH ANY TEENAGER.

- Many young people don't view substances as that big a deal, and their friends don't either.
- There is a correlation between attributes that lead to high achievement and those of addiction such as a sense of control, intelligence, perfectionism, and self-sufficient decision-making.
- Many academic high-achievers feel pressure for getting the highest grades possible, and they may turn to attention-enhancing drugs such as Adderall to help them do better at school.
- One of the most powerful forces acting on teenagers is a desire to fit in. If they are outgoing, they may want to have fun and party. If they are insecure, they just want to be accepted by others.

## 10. SUBSTANCE ABUSE CAN HAPPEN IN ANY FAMILY.

- In studies, people who identify as Christian were as likely to have used marijuana as those who consider themselves an atheist.
- Many churches don't address issues such as alcohol and drugs effectively or at all, and many Christian schools are the same.
- Kids growing up in wealthy neighborhoods may face additional stress from high expectations, see alcohol as widely accepted, and be taught that they shouldn't share their problems with others.
- If there is substance use in the family, the odds are 50% higher it will continue into the next generation, but it also happens when there is no substance use at all by the parents.

Should you be worried about your teenager's safety? The answer is: "Yes, you should."

Because then you will hopefully do something about it. But if you become informed, proactive, and intentional

about preparing for the teenage years, you can feel more competent and more confident about what may happen—or not happen.

So you never have to say, "We thought substance abuse only happened to other people."

### FIVE REASONS YOU SHOULD NOT WORRY

Rather than allowing worry to immobilize them, parents should harbor a healthy concern for the safety of their teenagers. They can use this awareness as a catalyst to prepare for the teenage years. Here are five reasons parents can consider that can lessen their worry and lead to better lives for their kids:

#### 1. THINGS CHANGE FOR TEENAGERS, BUT PARENTS CAN CHANGE TOO.

- Being a good parent is a choice, and any Mom or Dad can do it if they commit to do their best.
- Become more proactive and intentional in their parenting. This starts by not allowing busy-ness, naivete, laziness, or being uncomfortable keeping them from doing what is best for their kids.
- Be thoughtful rather than random or impulsively driven by the emotions of the moment.
- Being balanced in their parenting to avoid either over-parenting or under-parenting. This includes watching for codependency to avoid being too controlling (which exasperates them) or too enabling (which cripples them from learning to live life effectively).
- Getting more informed about the teenage years, which is what this article is about.

#### 2. PARENTS CAN BE A VERY POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON THEIR KIDS.

- 80% of teens say the biggest influence on their decision to drink is their parents. (Children's MD)
- Parents can learn to communicate better with



their kids. This starts by striving to understand them and their needs, showing empathy, and connecting with them right where they are.

- Kids learn from the example set by their parents—good or bad. By focusing on living a positive lifestyle themselves, parents can model the way for their kids to live in a healthy manner.
- Moms and Dads don't have to be perfect to be great parents, just do their best. Kids can learn from a parent who is humble about the things they are working on themselves, and this sets a great example for their kids to do the same.

### 3. NO MATTER HOW MUCH KIDS STRUGGLE, THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE.

- Most teenagers who try, use, or even abuse substances will eventually get better.
- Tens of millions of people have prevented or recovered from addiction successfully.
- There are positive steps that teens and parents can take that are proven to help.
- If parents are proactive, they will feel better knowing they are doing their best.
- God is always there, and he does some of his best work in our toughest times.

### 4. MANY SITUATIONS THAT ALLOW SUBSTANCE USE TO ESCALATE ARE PREVENTABLE.

- "We thought substance abuse only happened to other people."
- "We didn't think their problems were that serious or dangerous."
- "We couldn't communicate with them once they became teenagers."
- "We didn't know what to do to help them when they were struggling."
- "We should have done something sooner, but we waited too late."

### 5. THERE ARE POSITIVE STEPS PARENTS CAN TAKE TO HELP PROTECT THEIR KIDS.

- **Preparation** - Become proactive and prepared to protect your kids from substance abuse.
- **Awareness** - Be aware of what your kids are going through and challenges they face.
- **Connection** - Deepen and strengthen your relationship with your son or daughter.
- **Education** - Equip your kids to deal with life issues and situations they will face.
- **Steps** - Build a plan to help them become the man or woman they are meant to be.

PACES for Parents at [StepsProactiveParenting.com](http://StepsProactiveParenting.com) is an online learning center with simple, effective resources you can use to help your teenagers thrive and protect them from substance abuse. This material addresses all five of the areas mentioned above.

Parents who use this online education will worry less because they are doing what they can for their kids. Their teenagers will appreciate how their parents have changed, and it will help them work on changes they need to make in their own lives.

Parenting is hard, and parents deserve all the help they can get. Especially with teenagers, but also with pre-teens, because studies show that drug and alcohol use often start in those years. And the last thing parents want to worry about is the safety of their kids.

## STARTING POINT

From 1 (low) to 10 (high), how prepared are you to deal with a crisis with your kids?

## NEXT RIGHT STEPS

What are 1 or 2 small steps you can take to be more prepared to handle a crisis?

## GOING DEEPER

1. How good of an understanding do you have of the risks and dangers facing teenagers today?
  - Have you accepted that addiction and mental health issues can happen in your family?
2. In what specific areas are you most concerned about your kids during their teenage years?
  - For each of your kids individually, what are 1 or 2 areas you should be prepared for?
3. What feelings or habits do you have that might keep you from being as prepared as possible?
  - Do these feelings affect your parenting: fear, worry, shame, laziness, procrastination?
4. To what degree are you a good influence on your kids for living a responsible and safe lifestyle?
  - How can you help them take personal responsibility to make safe and healthy choices?
5. In what ways are you willing to keep preparing to parent your kids effectively in the teen years?
  - What is the most urgent step you should take to help protect your kids from a crisis?





## How Awareness helps parents be ready for a crisis

*If you met with a counselor because you were worried about one of your kids, that conversation would include questions—lots of them. Because before you can help your kids deal with a problem or an issue they are facing, you need to understand it first. That starts by increasing your awareness.*

*When my older son began making increasingly bad choices, the uncertainty and fear my wife and I felt grew. We made lots of mistakes, but one important thing we focused on was becoming as aware as we could be of what was REALLY going on with him. Parents must make choices—hopefully thoughtful ones—on how to raise and help their kids, and they need information to make good decisions.*



### HOW CAN YOU BE MORE AWARE IF YOUR KIDS ARE APPROACHING A CRISIS?

#### Do more to learn what's going on with them

You need more information to help protect your kids from harm. That means spending more time with them, being more vigilant, asking more questions, listening more, and paying more attention to their habits, friends, and use of time and money.

#### Document a “Proactive Wellness Assessment”

If you have a teen at risk, capture in writing what you observe that gives you concern. Go back a year to spot changes and focus on the direction they are moving. Update the assessment often and use it to inform people who can help your family.

#### Make the commitment to be there for them

It is an investment in your kids' well-being to understand what's going on with them so you can help most effectively. To do that, you must be there for them: be available, be willing, be ready, be proactive, be thoughtful, be empathetic, and be compassionate.

If you are not intentional about increasing your awareness of what is going on with your kids, you're probably seeing only the tip of the iceberg of their situation. You will need to be vigilant to understand what's really happening, and it's much harder to protect them if you don't know what's going on.

There are risk factors and warning signs you can learn that will increase your awareness. Even better, if you include empathy and understanding in your approach, you can actually improve your relationship with your kids by demonstrating your interest in their well-being and willingness to be there for them.

About 75% of high schoolers try addictive substances and half struggle with a mental health issue at some point. Often, they don't talk to their parents about what's going on, at least not all of it. Could that be happening with one of your kids? If they are making choices they know you will disagree with, is it possible they could be lying and deceiving you? Do you really know what is going on with them?

There are positive steps parents and other caregivers can take that have been proven to help prevent a crisis such as substance abuse. “PACES for Parents” is a methodology that can help parents understand and equip their kids for the teenage years. The word “PACES” is an acronym, and the “A” stands for “Awareness” which is an important step to help prevent a family crisis before it happens.

If you feel something bad is going on with your kids, you're probably right. It's critical to understand the situation to help you make wise decisions. You can't control your kids, but you can influence them and help prevent the situation from getting worse.

Here are three key things to consider that will help.



## Do you know what is really going on with your kids?

*If you had reasons to believe one of your kids might have cancer, what would you do about it?*

*Would you put off checking it out because you were too busy or work hard to find out what was really going on with them? Would you leap to conclusions on the diagnosis before you had all the information or consider the situation more thoughtfully?*

*Would you accept it if they told you they were fine or do whatever it took to care for their well-being out of your love for them?*

*Most parents can answer those hypothetical questions quickly and emphatically. But why is it hard to make the same choices when our kids may be engaging in activities such as drugs or alcohol that are potentially dangerous—even deadly—for them?*



### BEING A GOOD PARENT INCLUDES BEING AWARE

Our job as parents includes being aware of what our kids are going through and challenges they are facing. That way, we can equip them to grow up to handle what life may throw at them. And it will help ensure we never have to look back on a tragedy and realize, “We didn’t think their problems were that serious or dangerous.”

When our son was involved with alcohol and drugs, we had to make some tough choices along the way. Looking back, we know there are things we could have done better, and no parent is perfect. But one thing we did focus on was doing all we could to understand what was really going on with him.

Knowing what we learned in the process may have made all the difference. But it wasn’t easy, and we made lots of mistakes.

We didn’t have the **10 Ways to Know What is REALLY Going On** below. We pieced together ideas from books, other people, and talking together. In each of those 10 areas, we did some things well, did others not-so-well, and had no idea about many of them.

It’s hard knowing what is really going on with teenagers, especially when they are working just as hard to keep things from us. Which means that normally what we see about our teenager is just the tip of the iceberg of what is really happening.

The best advice I would give parents—including myself—is to utilize as many of those suggestions as make sense for each situation. That way, we will have the knowledge to better understand the trajectory our son or daughter is heading in because, to do that, we need to gather as much information as possible.

In parenting, ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance can hurt our kids.

Being the best parent we can be is one of the most important roles we ever play. And it’s different from being their friend, their enabler, or their boss. Being a parent is hard, and we need all the help we can get.

### 10 WAYS TO KNOW WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON

Below are 10 concepts and techniques to help parents know more about what is really going on with our kids. We can use this list as a “Tool Kit” of ideas we choose from to meet the needs of our family situation. And if something dangerous is going on with one of our kids, we can know better what to do.

#### 1. REMOVE BLIND SPOTS THAT LIMIT YOUR AWARENESS.

To know what’s going on in our kids’ lives, we should conduct a personal inventory to remove things limiting our awareness if we’re:

- Too busy, distracted, or preoccupied to spend quality time with our kids so we can better see how they are doing day to day.



- Assuming problems can't happen in our family, believing teens always tell the truth, or being in denial of what's really going on.
- Codependent and enable our kids by ignoring warning signs or leap quickly into "control mode" before we know what's going on.
- Engaged in negative habits of our own that make it uncomfortable for us to face up to harmful activities our kids are engaging in.

## **2. USE ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH.**

Parents are to love their kids with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that is a good way to increase our awareness as well.

- Our heart – Most parents have instincts about their kids, and it's worth paying attention to them. If we "just have a feeling" that something is happening with one of them, it is possible there could be a reason. Sometimes, "Where's there's smoke, there's fire."
- Our soul – God prompts us with insights about our family, and our job is to listen to what he may be communicating to us.
- Our mind – A must-do for parents is to get educated on issues facing their kids so they can spot them and deal with them early.
- Our strength – Parents should observe their kids, investigate irregularities, and get in the way if they head in the wrong direction.

## **3. BE AWARE OF RISK FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT THEM.**

The odds of kids having issues with substance abuse increase from risk factors involved, so we should notice if they are affected by:

- Heredity if family members had addictions, trauma from abuse, divorce of their parents, or the death of someone close to them.
- Medical or emotional issues like depression, anxiety, or ADHD or their lives are disrupted by a move, new school, or breakup.
- Personal factors such as a need to fit in which makes them feel left out and that can bring on feelings of low self-worth.
- Being prone to peer pressure or an impulsive risk-taker who wants to have fun and doesn't evaluate consequences well.

## **4. LOOK FOR WARNING SIGNS OF SOMETHING GOING ON.**

If parents watch closely, we can spot warning signs earlier rather than later and help prevent issues from getting worse.

- If our kid's demeanor becomes more negative, habits change or grades worsen, or they switch friends or begin to isolate.
- Lying or disobedience increase, or we detect a pattern of suspicious activities our kids do not have good explanations for.
- Self-absorption and entitlement increase or spiritual vacancy sets in if our kids move away from God and talks about religion.
- Our kids become manipulative, willing to lie or steal, or show hostility, especially if confronted, and patterns of hurtful behavior.

## **5. GET ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM OTHER PEOPLE.**

Teenagers don't share a lot with their parents. If they are doing things we won't like, they share even less, so we need information.

- Often, "We are who we hang around." Do what we can to be around their friends. If they change friends, get to know them.
- Talk to the parents of their friends, form an alliance, and share information with each other on what is going on within the group.
- Ask our other kids what is going on. Say we want to help their brother or sister, and they can help them by being honest with us.
- Talk to teachers, coaches, and others who know them. Ask what they have observed and give permission to be open with us.

## **6. PRACTICE HAVING DEEPER INTERACTION WITH THEM.**

Teenagers are harder to talk to than young kids, and we need to find ways to have good conversations with them on deeper topics.

- Talk to them about their activities, ask open-ended questions, and listen with empathy and compassion rather than judgment.
- Ask neutral questions that allow them to share information such as, "Do kids at school use drugs? Why do you think they do?"



- Tell our kids it's okay to have issues, and they aren't alone. Give them hope and make them comfortable admitting things to us.
- Make it safe for them to share. Reward openness and honesty. Don't punish them for small infractions so they remain open. Consider giving them "no-penalty" opportunities to share. If they admit something, calmly help them work through the situation.

## 7. HELP EQUIP YOUR KIDS TO BE MORE SELF-AWARE.

A great thing we can do for our kids is help them become self-aware and self-managing so they can live life well on their own.

- Get in the habit of asking our kids how they are feeling and why they make the choices they do. Encourage them to think.
- Ask our kids to talk about their world. Understand they think differently than we do, so let them process things on their own.
- Ask what situations make them uncomfortable and what they can do about them, and keep the conversation comfortable.
- Have them write things down such as: "What are your goals?" or "Things that bother you and what you can do about them."

## 8. NOTICE HOW THEY USE THEIR TIME AND MONEY.

If our kids get into alcohol or drugs, it affects how they use their time and money, so we need to pay close attention to those areas.

- Make it mandatory that they keep us informed of where they are so it becomes a regular habit. Occasionally, check to confirm.
- Use "Find My Phone" or another tracker app on their phone and a GPS tracker on the car and make it mandatory for all our kids.
- Stay aware of how much money they get and

how they spend it. This should include from family members and what they earn.

- Teenagers who buy drugs have creative lies about mysterious Venmo payments. If we see issues, don't allow those phone apps.

## 9. PAY ATTENTION TO THEIR TRAJECTORY OVER TIME.

As we collect information on what is going on in their life, we can look for patterns, especially to spot if things are getting worse.

- Examine risk factors and warning signs for our kids using a STEPS Teenage Assessment at [StepsProactiveParenting.com](http://StepsProactiveParenting.com).
- Evaluate the trajectory our teenager is moving in by getting as many data points as we can on their ongoing behavior.
- Think about what they were like a year ago and when they were younger to look for clues for any issues they are facing.
- Focus on what has changed and ask our teenager to talk about the reasons and root causes of their new behavior patterns.

## 10. IF ALL ELSE FAILS, CONSIDER SNOOPING ON THEM.

This is a complicated issue, but I believe it is warranted in some instances for the well-being of our kids.

- If we have our child's best interests at heart and see a trend of dangerous warning signs, I believe it is okay to snoop on our kids.
- Options include searching their room, checking their cell phone messages, and putting tracking software on their computer.
- We shouldn't act on small indiscretions but look for serious things they are involved in and clues about their inner motivations.
- Gather information to help us make wise and loving decisions. We want to know their heart with a goal of awareness, not control.



## BEING AWARE MEANS BEING THERE FOR THEM

It takes commitment, understanding, and compassion for parents to know what is really going on with their teenagers. It all comes down to our heartfelt choice to be there for them. Which we can do by being aware, being wise, and being loving.

### BE AWARE

We need to learn what is really going on with our kids so we understand, “Where are they?”

**Be willing** – Being a parent includes doing some things even when they are hard. And it is hard to understand a teenager who doesn’t hang around us anymore or share what’s going on with them. It gets harder when they lie to us and become incredibly creative about hiding their behavior.

**Be available** – Most parents are busy, which means we must focus on not being distracted so we aren’t present and observant.

**Be proactive** – It’s helpful to anticipate problems to help our kids and set boundaries early rather than waiting until it’s too late.

*“AS KIDS REACH ADOLESCENCE, THEY NEED MORE THAN EVER FOR US TO WATCH OVER THEM. ADOLESCENCE IS NOT ABOUT LETTING GO. IT’S ABOUT HANGING ON DURING A VERY BUMPY RIDE.”  
- RON TAFFEL*

### BE WISE

We need to assess the direction their actions are taking them to know, “Where are they going?”

**Be thoughtful** – Here’s a list of behavior reminders for parents: remain calm versus get angry, pause to think versus react emotionally, and equip our kids versus frustrate them. Others include: support versus control, encourage versus attack, help versus belittle, and connect versus exasperate.

**Be balanced** – It’s easy to “under-parent” by being unaware or enabling or to “over-parent” by trying to control our kid’s every move. But we can emulate how God parents us by seeking a balance of grace and understanding with a focus on truth, even when that means showing “tough love.”

**Be strategic** – We can better care for our kid’s long-term well-being by taking the time to understand the trajectory they are on.

*“WISDOM IS THE RIGHT USE OF KNOWLEDGE.”  
- CHARLES SPURGEON*

### BE LOVING

We need to care enough to make tough choices to answer, “What are we going to do about it?”

**Be empathetic** – Parents, like all people, can be self-absorbed, so we must focus on working to understand our kid’s world.

**Be compassionate** – Sacrificial loves means doing things which may be unnatural to us at times. In some situations, that may be to show grace and forgiveness even when we are angry with our kids. Or it could be to remain patient enough to earn their trust as we calmly walk alongside of them.

**Be courageous** – If our kids are moving in a risky direction, our job is to get in the way and “stand in the gap” between them and danger. Helping delay their initial use of substances by a year can make a big difference. Finding out they are using opioid drugs such as pills or heroin could save their life.

*“GOD LOVES US THE WAY WE ARE,  
BUT TOO MUCH TO LEAVE US THAT WAY.”  
- LEIGHTON FORD*

## STARTING POINT

From 1 (low) to 10 (high), how aware are you of what is going on with your kids?

## NEXT RIGHT STEPS

What are 1 or 2 small steps you can take to be more aware to handle a crisis?

## GOING DEEPER

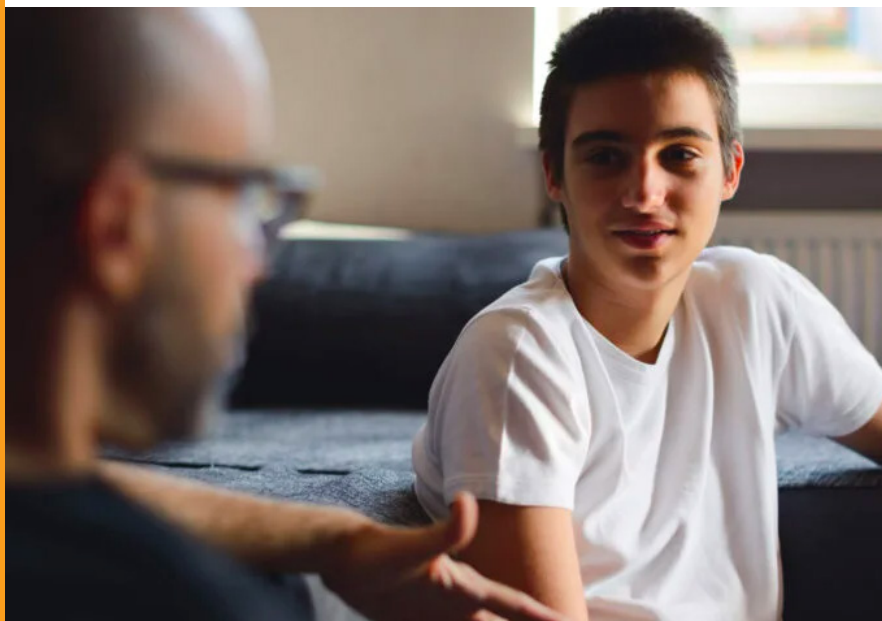
1. How aware are you of the situations, issues, and personal problems that may concern your kids?
  - For each of your kids individually, what is 1 personal issue that deeply concerns them?
2. What are the different things you do to stay aware of what is really going on with all your kids?
  - What is 1 thing you are not doing now that you should consider doing in the future?
3. What circumstances or feelings make it harder for you to be more aware of your kids’ lives?
  - How can you deal with those situations or feelings so they aren’t an issue anymore?
4. What harmful habits, behaviors, or substances might each of your kids be involved in now?
  - How can you become more aware of what they’re doing and why they’re doing it?
5. Are you close enough to your kids in terms of empathy and trust to know what’s in their heart?
  - How willing are you to commit the energy to understand and help with their problems?



## How Connection helps avoid a crisis in your family

*Do you want to be the best parent you can be? And protect your kids from harm at the same time? All while building a happier family and a calmer, more enjoyable lifestyle with less stress and turmoil?*

*Developing trusted, open connection with your kids is an effective way you can do all those things, and it is guaranteed to have a positive impact on them. It also helps avoid problems when your kids struggle by providing support and a safe outlet for them to work through their issues—before a crisis happens.*



**HERE ARE THREE WAYS YOU CAN IMPROVE CONNECTION IN YOUR FAMILY AND HELP AVOID A CRISIS:**

### **Stop causing harm by how you communicate**

Without knowing it, parents can make a situation worse by how they talk to their kids. The way to avoid that is to stop harmful communication styles you use such as anger, control, being condescending, using hurtful words, and focusing only on the negative.

### **Stop enabling and weakly giving in to your kids**

Don't promote harmful behavior by shielding your kids from negative consequences of their bad choices. That's not connecting, it's enabling, and it allows dangerous behavior to escalate. It also cripples your kids from learning how to deal with life themselves.

### **Help your kids connect to positive, helpful people**

When your kids are struggling, help them connect with people who can be a good influence. This can be an encouraging relative, friends who set a good example, an older mentor, a counselor they feel comfortable with, or an understanding youth pastor.

The way you connect with your kids helps them or hurts them, especially in a crisis. Communication is a critical part of your relationship, and we all have blind spots in how we interact with our kids. I know, because I've heard many parents talk about their mistakes, and I made many of them myself.

But any parent can improve how they connect with their kids. Take it one step at a time and work on your weak areas. Spend lots of time with them with less judgement and no yelling. Offer them a safe lifeline of support by listening, understanding, and encouraging. You can make a huge difference in your kids' well-being, and you can help avoid a crisis in the family, one conversation at a time.

All kids change when they become teenagers, and it becomes harder to stay connected to them. I know, because it was tough for me when my first son got older, and I made a lot of mistakes. I've heard similar stories from many other parents who say, "It used to be so easy when they were younger."

A first step in improving connection is to stop doing harm, because many of us share more harsh words with our kids than encouragement. But good parenting doesn't stop there. It's also critical to initiate important conversations so your kids hear encouraging words such as: "It's okay not to be okay; we love you unconditionally just as you are; and you have great value and a positive future in front of you."

"PACES for Parents" is a methodology that helps parents and caregivers communicate with their kids and equip them for the teenage years. "PACES" is an acronym and "C" is for "Connection," which is a critical part of raising teenagers effectively and helping avoid a family crisis at the same time.

It takes balance to connect with your kids on their terms versus forcing them to do things your way. This doesn't mean giving in to everything they want, and it's important to still set boundaries.

But it's also helpful to show you love them and you're willing to adapt your parenting to stay connected to them.



## What do you do when you can't talk to your teenagers?

*I know a lot about how to communicate with teenagers. Because when our older son was in his teens, I did much of it wrong.*

*When kids become teenagers, it's normally harder to talk to them than when they were younger. They're not around as much and are often more independent and less open about their feelings. If they're making bad choices, it gets even harder.*

*Caretakers such as Moms, Dads, grandparents, and others don't have to be perfect. No one is, so we can only do our best. But since our kids change when they become teenagers, we need to change as well, especially in how we communicate with them.*

*We do that by being prepared, aware of what is going on, and thoughtful rather than emotional. By adjusting our communication style to fit the situation and the needs of each of our kids. In other words, by being proactive in our parenting.*

*If you're a parent or caretaker who is finding it hard to talk to your teenager, you're not alone. But you need to know something: you are making a positive impact, even if you don't see it. Studies show that parents are the biggest influence on their kids' choices. Don't give up, and don't give in to the frustration you may be feeling. Keep doing your best to stay connected to them.*

*Your child's well-being—and sometimes their life—could depend on it.*

### 10 THINGS NOT TO DO (A TRUE STORY)

When our older son was in Junior High, things changed with him, and he began heading in an alarming direction we didn't understand. When we tried to talk to him, he didn't share much. When he did, we wondered how much of it was the truth.



Things got worse, and our lives became a roller coaster with highs on good weeks and frightening lows when he made increasingly bad choices. We tried to connect with him, but I now see I could have done better in all 10 of the areas discussed in this article.

What did I do wrong?

1. While my wife enabled our son to some degree because of her love for him, I tried to fix or control him for the same reason. Which meant we sent different signals to him, and he was clever enough to exploit those situations to his advantage.
2. My wife and I should have reached out to other people earlier rather than worrying, "What will people think about our family?"
3. I wish I had studied the craft of connecting with teenagers earlier than I did, because there were things we could have learned.
4. I thought I could get him to change through long and detailed talks, but I didn't notice he turned me off minutes into those lectures. I also sent messages through facial expressions, tone, and body language I later wished I could take back.
5. If I was doing it again, I would be more vulnerable about my weaknesses to let him see it's okay to have issues, and we can all work on them. Understanding it's okay not to be okay, and that's normal, can be a breakthrough for a hurting teenager.
6. Later, he learned from being around older mentors and positive groups, and I wish we had tried to encourage that earlier.
7. On topics like the dangers of drugs and impaired driving, I could have been more calmly focused on facts rather than preaching.



8. I worked hard to intervene in his downward trajectory starting early. If I was doing it again, I would slow down in the early stages to focus on empathy and understanding his world rather than moving straight into, "How are we going to fix you?"
9. I should have talked more with his brother on how he was doing, because everyone in the family is affected by substance abuse.
10. I was connected to God and talked about him to my son, but I could have better modeled God's love, grace, and forgiveness.

People grow by learning from the mistakes of others. The bad news is, I made a lot of them. The good news is, you don't have to.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T TALK TO YOUR TEENAGER

Below are 10 things you can do when you find it hard to talk to a teenager who may be struggling. See this as a "Tool Kit" of techniques and concepts you can use as appropriate. Pick a few, or only one, and start taking positive steps forward.

#### 1. MAKE SURE YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE REMAIN CONNECTED.

When there are two parents or multiple caretakers looking after a teenager who is getting into trouble, they will often have a different approach for how to handle the situation. If those differences are not resolved, it will be harder to maintain a healthy environment in the family. Parents should talk about their parenting styles with each other, discuss options for how to handle each situation, and take a common position with the young person or communication, discipline, and family serenity will suffer.

#### 2. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF BY CONNECTING TO OTHER PEOPLE.

Teenage substance abuse and related struggles can take a serious toll on the well-being of parents, but we can take better care of our kids if we also take care of ourselves. When we are carrying burdens of anxiety, frustration, or fear, it affects how we deal with our kids. When we can't talk to our teenagers anymore, it helps to find a person or group we can talk to and share our feelings with them. This takes some of the weight off our shoulders and helps us stay healthy and balanced in our parenting.

#### 3. CONDUCT AN ASSESSMENT OF HOW YOU TALK TO YOUR KIDS.

Good coaches stress the importance of players practicing the fundamentals of their sport over and over until they are proficient at them. We can approach parenting the same way. The STEPS PACES for Parents tool kit on "How Parents Can Connect with Their Teenagers" equips parents on the

fundamentals, and here are three of them we should continually practice: focus on understanding our kid's world, tell them we love them and are proud of them, and work to build trust in our relationship.

#### 4. GET RID OF REMAINING NEGATIVE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION.

As parents, we should work on our self-awareness and watch what works and what doesn't when we talk to our kids. Here are some things that do not work: yelling, criticizing, impatience, emotional rants, preaching, lecturing, uninformed warnings, being condescending, setting unclear boundaries, hypocrisy, insincere flattery, giving in all the time, and inconsistency in our positions. A good start on improving how we talk to our kids is to eliminate those bad habits and then move on from there.

#### 5. SET AN EXAMPLE FOR CONNECTING IN A VULNERABLE MANNER.

One of the most powerful things a parent can do with a teenager they are struggling to connect with is to apologize to them. Not a perfunctory, "I'm sorry," but a vulnerable, heart-felt apology for mistakes the parent feels sorrow for and one that includes asking our kids for their forgiveness. We can model for them humble acceptance of our wrongdoings coupled with a sincere desire to do better, and sharing our weaknesses with a hurting teenager gives them permission to do the same with us.

#### 6. HELP YOUR KIDS CONNECT TO POSITIVE AND HELPFUL PEOPLE.

If your kids won't have good conversations with you, maybe they will talk to someone else. Encourage connections with friends or siblings who are a positive influence. Think of adults such as relatives or friends who could mentor them. If they are introverted or socially insecure, give them pointers about the art of conversation: show interest in the other person, ask questions, follow up, and share some of yourself with them. Remember that people need community, even if they don't act like they do.

#### 7. INSIST ON HAVING CRITICAL SAFETY-RELATED CONVERSATIONS.

Your kids will likely not want to talk to you about their safety, but you need to anyway. Do research and prepare your thoughts, be factual rather than preaching, and keep it relatively short. Let them know you are doing it because you love them. They need to hear the facts about things like the very real dangers of impaired driving and of drugs being laced with fentanyl (Google it if you don't know). If you have any reason to feel they may be considering suicide, ask them about it. Then listen, and listen some more.

#### 8. CAREFULLY AND LOVINGLY HOLD A "PROACTIVE INTERVENTION."

If you're deeply worried about the direction your







teenager is heading, it's hard talking to them, and you've tried everything you know to do, what do you try next? With love and empathy, you get in the way of their downward spiral into darkness, and you stand in the gap between your teenager and the heartbreak, danger, and sometimes death that comes with substance abuse. One way to do that is to hold a "proactive intervention" as the next step in your desire to connect with them.

What is a proactive intervention?

It is a conversation between you (with your spouse or another caretaker if there is one) and your son or daughter when you feel they are in danger and nothing else has worked. This is not the type of formal intervention you see on TV shows but a supportive talk you have with them that includes messages like:

- **"You seem to be hurting, and it's leading to bad choices. Can you help us understand how you are really feeling?" (Now listen.)**
  - › "We are concerned you're heading in a dangerous direction, and we can't stand by and do nothing and watch you get hurt."

- **"We love you unconditionally just as you are, and we are on your side all the way. How can we help you?" (Now listen.)**
  - › "We will do anything we can to help you avoid the pain and danger of substance abuse, such as setting more boundaries and consequences if we have to. This also includes considering if a recovery program is what is needed to help protect you."
- **"We aren't proposing a plan at this point. We want to work together to help you and for you to do your part. What steps are you willing to take to move in a positive direction so the situation gets better rather than worse?" (Now listen.)**
  - › "We believe in you, and you have a very positive future. God designed you, and he has a wonderful plan for you. We are praying for your well-being and safety, and we are also praying that God gives us the wisdom to know how to help you."

For now, that's enough of a conversation, but continue to think about proactive intervention in the coming weeks and months.



## 9. NOTICE FAMILY ROLES AND BUILD A “PROACTIVE FAMILY PLAN.”

Each family has its own dynamics based on the people involved. Since substance abuse and related issues affect everyone in the family, that gives each one an opportunity to play a positive role in what is going on. The first step is for each person to become aware of and change behavior that may be contributing negatively to the situation, then take positive steps in the right direction.

Parents should thoughtfully consider the role each person plays in the family and find reasonable ways to encourage each one to contribute positively to the situation. There are often common roles that parents can identify such as:

- **Enabling caretaker** – A parent who covers up for a teenager or protects them from consequences of their bad choices cripples them from growing up in a healthy manner. They should hold onto their compassion but support enforcement of boundaries.
- **Controlling caretaker** – A parent who uses anger or overly-harsh discipline to control a teenager frustrates and exasperates them instead. They should hold onto their desire for healthy behavior but focus more on grace, compassion, and forgiveness.
- **Hurting sibling** – A brother or sister who feels unseen or unwanted because the parents focus all their attention on the teenager getting in trouble should be invited to share their feelings more openly so the parents can care for their needs as well.
- **Observing sibling** – One who removes themselves or isolates to avoid the tension and conflict in the family should be listened to by the parents and invited to play a more active role, perhaps by becoming an encourager for others in the family.
- **Struggling teenager** – Rather than asking a teenager dealing with significant personal issues to change everything overnight, they can be encouraged to halt the most dangerous activities and take a few small, simple steps in some key areas.

The parents need to navigate personalities carefully, but each person should be asked to rally around the well-being of the family.

## 10. STAY AS CONNECTED TO GOD AS YOU CAN.

Even if our teenager is not listening to us anymore, God is, and he wants to hear what we have to say. He loves us and our kids, and he is always there for both of us. And when times are tough are when he

does his best work, so we always have hope that things will work out in the long run. Our role is to surrender our will and our kids to him, and then do that over and over. We can also model for our kids our trust in God and make sure they know God loves them too, and they can talk to him at any time.

Know that you are not alone if you find yourself saying, “It’s hard to communicate with our kids now that they are teenagers.”

The good news is there are things you can do about it.

### STARTING POINT

From 1 (low) to 10 (high), how connected are you with each of your kids?

### NEXT RIGHT STEPS

What are 1 or 2 small steps you can take to be more connected to them?

### GOING DEEPER

1. In what ways do you communicate with your kids that may be ineffective or even harmful?
  - What is the biggest thing you can work on to communicate effectively with them?
2. How often do your kids hear that you love them and will support them unconditionally?
  - What would be a good way for you to express unconditional love and support?
3. In terms of codependency, do you err more toward control or enabling and to what degree?
  - Based on how you are now, how can you become more balanced in your parenting?
4. How willing are your kids to have meaningful talks with you about things that bother them?
  - How could you let your kids know it’s okay not to be okay and they are not alone?
5. How many people can you name that provide a positive example or support for your kids?
  - Who are positive people that it would be helpful for your kids to connect to more?



## How Education helps parents deal with a crisis

*If your kids are struggling or in a crisis, you're probably scared. Frustrated, angry, and confused. You've never been where you are now, and you don't know what to do. I get it, because I've been there too, and thousands of other parents have as well. But you can't stay there, and you need some education.*

*Start by learning more about their situation. What problems are they trying to solve? What feelings do they want to achieve? Use this article and related material to learn how parents can equip their kids to deal with issues, temptations, and risks they are facing. Use that knowledge to talk to your kids about how they can address their issues in a healthier way and turn things around before they get worse.*

If substance use is an issue, tell your kids you will consider a recovery program if their bad choices continue. Suggest that you work together instead to learn and apply recovery principles earlier in the process. Recovery concepts have transformed millions of lives. I experienced that breakthrough in my own family's struggles with addiction, and years of experience and research have proven it to be true.

Recovery principles are built into the "PACES for Parents" methodology that can help you equip your kids—and yourself—to live life better. "PACES" is an acronym, and the "E" is for "Education" which is a critical part of raising teenagers effectively and one of the steps you can take to avoid a family crisis. You can use PACES for Parents resources to build a happier family and prevent problems from getting worse.

No matter how bad things seem, know that many other parents have been where you are. Parenting is hard, and it's even tougher when your kids struggle.

It's likely your first time dealing with this type of situation. That's why education is important to learn how to make good choices on what to do next.



### HOW CAN GETTING A LITTLE EDUCATION HELP YOUR FAMILY DURING A CRISIS?

#### Get more education on their issues and the risks

It's understandable if you aren't sure what to do when your kids struggle, but that's not an excuse to do nothing. You need to educate yourself quickly about the specific emotional issues, circumstances, and addictions your kids are dealing with.

#### Become more proactive and focus on prevention

If your kids are moving in a dangerous direction, things may get worse. Do some research and then initiate calm discussions using facts, suggestions, and questions. Ask how they can adjust their behavior to avoid negative outcomes their choices are creating.

#### Learn about recovery to build a "pre-recovery" plan

If your child is moving toward addiction, tell them a recovery plan may be needed. Encourage them to develop their own "pre-recovery" plan instead to turn things around. Learn about the useful principles of recovery and practice those behaviors as a family.

You have likely heard the saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If your kids face struggles in their pre-teen or teenage years, you need to do something different than what you have been doing. That starts with getting some education.

You have taken an important step by reading this article, so congratulations! Keep taking positive steps by continuing your education and putting the principles you learn into practice. Your kids—and you—may still struggle at times because we all do. But know that things can get better one step at a time.



## How do you help your kids when they're struggling?

*No parent likes to see their kids struggle. The good news is there are things we can do to help them.*

*Parenting is hard, and it's harder when our kids are getting into trouble. But too often, we procrastinate on tough issues like substance abuse. We need to realize doing nothing is a decision, a choice we sometimes make without even thinking about it.*

*If one of your kids is struggling, don't do nothing.*

*It's understandable if you don't know what to do. The good news is you can learn, and there are 10 things you can learn to do in this article. So you never have to say, "We didn't know what to do to help our kids when they were struggling."*

*It's a choice parents make whether they realize it or not: "Will we be part of the problem by doing nothing or part of the solution?"*

### YOU CAN HELP WITH PREVENTION AND PRECOVERY

A parent's role includes equipping our kids to deal with issues and situations they will face. This behavior helps prevent problems such as addiction as well. When we focus on prevention, we keep them from having to struggle in the first place.

But sometimes bad things happen anyway.

When our older son was in his early teens, I was already in recovery for my own issues with alcohol. Which meant I knew about the dangers of substances, and I was well aware the principles of recovery help with both prevention of addiction and living life the way it was designed to be lived. Yet things still went wrong.

I didn't know as much about prevention and precovery then as I do now. But I knew almost everyone who winds up with an addiction problem starts before age 18, and 90% of them don't get help. I didn't want my son to be one of those. So we tried lots of parenting techniques: some worked, some not so much, and others we may never know. But he's alive.



And he's thriving. And he's better off for what he went through because of what he learned. And for all that, I am enormously grateful.

But if your son or daughter is struggling, it is no longer "business as usual." Things have changed, so you have to change too. You need to have a sense of urgency, and you need to rearrange your life to have the margin to focus on the well-being of your family.

In the article ***What Do You Do When You Can't Talk to Your Teenagers?*** we introduced the concept of a "Proactive Intervention" as a deliberate conversation you have with one of your kids who is heading in a dangerous direction. If you have had a conversation like that and you try the prevention concepts below and your teenager is still struggling, it will be time to take the next right step which is to build a "Proactive Precovery Plan." But what is that?

It is a plan you implement to take a more specific, urgent, and tactical approach to helping protect your teenager from the danger they are heading toward. To reverse the downward trajectory they are on and help them return to a healthy, safe lifestyle where they are consistently making good choices rather than dangerous ones.

Below are 10 things you can do to help your kids when they are struggling and build a Proactive Precovery Plan.

See this list as a "Tool Kit" of tips and techniques you can choose from to fit your family situation. Pick a few ideas or even just one, but commit to take at least one next right step. Then take the next one, and the next.

So you never have to say, "We didn't know what to do to help them when they were struggling."

***"TODAY, ENORMOUS EFFORTS ARE BEING EXPENDED TO ACCELERATE PRECOVERY PROCESSES FOR CANCER, HEART DISEASE,***



**DIABETES, ASTHMA, AND OTHER CHRONIC DISORDERS. ISN'T IT TIME WE DID THE SAME FOR ADDICTION?" - WILLIAM L. WHITE**

**INCREASE YOUR FOCUS ON PREVENTION**

Why should parents wait until someone they love is deeply hurting before doing something about it? We shouldn't, and there are things we can do to help prevent our kids from moving deeper into the pain and danger they may be experiencing.

**1. BE PROACTIVE AND FOCUS ON PREVENTION**

If our kids are struggling, it's our job to do anything we can to help them, and the sooner we start, the more effective we can be. That means we should be proactive. The good news is parents can make a difference, and research shows parents are the biggest influence on their kids' decisions on things like drinking alcohol. Our role is to take the next right step, and the one after that.

Almost 300 years ago, Benjamin Franklin recognized, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Why don't parents recognize that now? Because the earlier we start helping our kids deal with their issues, the more good we can do. Doing nothing is a decision, sometimes a costly one, and our kids' well-being—sometimes their lives—may depend on what we do.

**2. EQUIP YOUR KIDS TO MANAGE THEIR LIFE**

Teenagers have personal needs, temptations, and risky situations to deal with, and we can help our kids be ready for them. One of the best things we can do is to have conversations with them about situations before they happen. It can be as simple as asking them about what they are struggling with and encouraging them to think of positive steps they might want to take.

We can also suggest things they could do in those situations and ask which they think would work best for them. One idea is to teach them to use their mind to manage situations: (1) Pause (step back from the situation); (2) Evaluate (think about what they should do); and (3) Choose (make a conscious decision rather than reacting impulsively). We can also have conversations about risks they will face such as driving under the influence or the widespread danger of drugs laced with deadly fentanyl.

**3. STOP REPEATING THE SAME MISTAKES**

In the Education section of the PACES for Parents online learning center is a video on "10 Mistakes Parents Make and How Not To." It shows how we can help our kids develop in a way that will protect them from issues such as substance abuse and help them lead a happier, more effective life. This simple

material helps parents understand why kids do what they do and how parents can help.

Because all of us, including our kids, do what we do for a reason. And there are certain behaviors parents want to discourage rather than unknowingly encourage which are: entitlement, worry, pride, lack of self-awareness, resentment, isolation, impulsivity, stress, insecurity, and depression. All of which are root cause issues that can lead to problems for them as they grow older.

**4. GET MORE EDUCATION ON WHAT TO DO**

Hopefully, proactive parents embrace the challenge to raise healthy kids and prevent issues before they happen. One way to do that is to: "Equip your kids to deal with life situations they will face," and that is what the Education section of PACES for Parents is all about. That way, parents can avoid ever having to say, "We didn't know what to do to help them when they were struggling."

If we have a teenager now who is struggling with substances or related issues and we don't know what to do, the solution is the same: go through the material in the Education section of PACES for Parents. There we learn about how to deal with teens who are experimenting with drugs and how to be a great parent even when our kids are struggling. Are your kids worth the time?

**5. GET INPUT FROM OTHERS ON WHAT TO DO**

One of the tragic aspects about the millions of people who struggle with substance use or mental health issues is that the vast majority of them don't get help. It's the same for parents of kids who struggle. Don't be one of those people, and don't let your son or daughter be one either. Get some help! Not "when you have time" or "if things get worse." Now.

The good news is there is always someone we can talk to who can help. No matter what our kids or we are going through, God is there for us, and he does his best work in our toughest times. We can pray for guidance and draw on the only supernatural source of help available in the universe. There is nothing else we can do that is as powerful as this one critical step.

One of the best investments we can make in the well-being of our kids is to be proactive and prevent issues before they get worse.

**BUILD A PROACTIVE PRECOVERY PLAN**

If we have a teenager who is heading in a frightening direction, we've tried the prevention activities above, and we still don't know what to do to help, we may need to engage in a Proactive Precovery Plan. This should be a written plan that is thoughtfully created by taking into





account the specifics of our kid's situation, needs and issues, and personality.

## 6. SET AND MAINTAIN CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are pre-set rules with consequences. They are good for teenagers and absolutely necessary when they're making bad choices. Boundaries set expectations, help them handle temptations and risky situations, and lead them in a healthy direction. Our kids may act like they don't like them, and it's not critical they do, but they should confirm they understand them when given.

Good boundaries are: (a) clear and precise; (b) fair with consequences in line with the behavior; (c) managed calmly and with love; and (d) applied consistently. Here's an example: "If you're not home by 10:00, you lose the rights to go out for a week." Consequences should escalate over time if our kids continue to break the rules and show disregard for their behavior.

Good boundaries take much of the emotion out of the discipline process. In effect, the teenager is given responsibility to manage their activity. If they overstep a boundary, they should see it was their choice to bring the consequences on themselves. Boundaries are one of the best ways parents can equip their kids to deal with issues and situations they will face and prepare them for life.

## 7. DON'T ENABLE AND CRIPPLE YOUR KIDS

Enabling is when we support negative behavior or rescue our kids so they don't experience the painful consequences of their bad choices. It is one of the most common—and harmful—mistakes parents can make, and it cripples our kids rather than helps them. Parents may do it out of an ill-founded sense of love for their kids, but they are hurting their growth process instead.

Examples of what not to do include: (a) letting them use the car if they have shown unsafe behavior; (b) giving them money when we don't know how they're spending it; (c) allowing them to act in a way that hurts another family member; (d) protecting them when they make bad decisions; (e) covering up for them; and (f) lessening consequences because they complain or we feel guilty.

Parents must realize that by lessening the short-term pain of consequences, we are teaching our kids that rules, responsibility, and character don't matter. Even worse, we are keeping them from growing up, and we may be inadvertently leading them toward bigger mistakes in the future. Mistakes that may hurt them a lot more than being grounded or losing their cell phone for a while.

## 8. EQUIP THEM TO IDENTIFY THEIR "WHY"

People need a reason to change their behavior. They must want to change, and this goes for teenagers and adults. We can help our kids make good choices by coaching them through a process to help them identify the pain and benefits of their decisions.

We can help them understand the pain of bad choices by: (a) "counting the cost" and listing negative results to them and others; (b) "playing the tape forward" by visualizing longer-term outcomes they may not think of otherwise; and (c) educating them on the emotional and physical effects of substance abuse and the spiritual and social impacts of selfish, low-character choices.

We can help them appreciate the benefits of good choices by: (a) encouraging their dreams of a wonderful future enabled by their healthy decisions; (b) writing down all the positive outcomes of good choices; and (c) sharing God's forgiveness and promises of a good future that will hopefully inspire



them to want to make good choices out of gratitude for God's grace.

## 9. TEACH THEM HOW TO PREVENT ADDICTION

Addictions are behaviors with negative consequences we repeat over and over and find hard to stop. They slowly worsen over time without us noticing the increasing harmful effects and the associated rewiring of our brain. Addictions become a disease that can bring us great harm and even death. For parents, that sounds like something we should do our best to prevent.

In the STEPS article titled "How to Prevent Addiction (Part 2)," there is a description of the journey toward addiction showing 10 stages someone may pass through along the way. Understanding those stages can be powerful because that knowledge gives us 10 opportunities to become more aware of what is going on and make a healthy choice to go a different way.

Even if our kids do not see themselves in danger of addiction, they will identify with at least the early stages of this journey. It's worth the time for parents to educate their kids on this gradual descent into unhealthy decision-making. It will help them understand things their friends may be going through and how human behavior works. And it might save their life.

## 10. HELP THEM BECOME WILLING TO TRY PRECOVERY

During a time when I, my wife, and our son were dealing with addiction issues and engaged in recovery, I came to an epiphany: "Why don't we teach the life-transforming principles of recovery to everybody earlier so they live life better and prevent addiction from happening in the first place?" That led to my first book STEPS: A Daily Journey to a Better Life.

Later, after founding STEPS Ministries, we built the PACES for Parents online learning center for parents of pre-teens and teenagers. The word "PACES" is an acronym, and below I will use that structure to convey a simple version of a precovery methodology parents can talk to their kids about. Often, the most profound, life-changing wisdom is simple and familiar:

- **Preparation** – Understand our "WHY" so we change and become willing to be open to God to model that behavior for our kids.
- **Awareness** – Help them take a personal Inventory of their behaviors and needs and become willing to humbly face their issues.
- **Connection** – Encourage them to accept Accountability and become willing to be honest with other people, starting with us.
- **Education** – Teach them to aim at daily Progress rather than perfection and become willing to focus on making good choices.

- **Steps** – Commit to being more Intentional and become willing to have a plan for how they can keep taking positive steps.

I hope this article encourages you to equip your kids to deal with issues and situations they face so you never say, "We didn't know what to do to help them when they were struggling." Because parenting is hard, especially with teenagers.

But now you know what to do.

*"PRECOVERY INVOLVES SEVERAL SIMULTANEOUS PROCESSES. IF THERE IS A CONCEPTUAL BREAKTHROUGH OF NOTE IN THE ADDICTION FIELD IN RECENT YEARS, IT IS THAT SUCH PROCESSES CAN BE STRATEGICALLY STIMULATED AND ACCELERATED."  
- WILLIAM L. WHITE*

### STARTING POINT

From 1 (low) to 10 (high), how educated are you about your kids' issues?

### NEXT RIGHT STEPS

What are 1 or 2 small steps you can take to get educated in those areas?

### GOING DEEPER

1. What aspects of the teenage life experience do you not understand or know much about?
  - How can you get more educated about what life is really like for your teenagers?
2. How well do you understand the specific issues that each of your kids may struggle with?
  - What issues, problems, habits, substances, or behaviors should you learn about?
3. What do you do now to equip your kids to prevent or handle issues in the teen years?
  - What can you do to help your kids deal more effectively with risks and dangers?
4. How much do you know now about substance use disorder and mental health as diseases?
  - Since odds are high some of your kids may be affected, how can you learn more?
5. How much do you know about the life-changing principles of recovery and how it works?
  - Thinking of 1 of your kids, how do you select the best program to help them?



## How to take the right Steps in a family crisis

*Sometimes, even in good families, bad things happen. I've talked to many parents with teenagers in a crisis, and it's often the worst thing they've ever experienced. It's important to have a plan in place just in case, so you never have to say, "We should have done something sooner, but we waited too late."*

*A teenage crisis may be a period of trouble or danger, but it's also a time when critical decisions must be made. The crisis may become a turning point in your kid's life—for bad or for good. The plans you make and the steps you take can help them turn things around and begin moving in a positive direction.*

*Hopefully, things start to improve. But if they don't, you will need to be ready to make even tougher decisions, and you do not want to make them emotionally or impulsively. That's why you should hope and pray for the best, but plan for the worst. This may include insisting they see a counselor, giving them an ultimatum to turn their lives around, or holding an intervention to put them into a recovery program.*

"PACES for Parents" is a methodology to help parents equip their kids for the teenage years. "PACES" is an acronym, and the "S" is for "Steps" which is a key part of raising teenagers effectively. Building a plan of the steps you will take is one of the best things you can do to prevent or deal with a family crisis.

If your son or daughter continues to make bad choices that are creating a crisis in your family, you will need to accelerate the steps you are taking. It is far better to adjust what you are doing before things get worse rather than delaying and naively hoping they will get better on their own.

### HOW CAN YOU KEEP TAKING POSITIVE STEPS IF YOUR TEENAGER IS IN A CRISIS?

#### Talk to them about taking steps toward recovery

Tell your kids that because you love them, you will do whatever it takes to protect them and help them



get better. If the prevention steps you have tried before haven't worked, it's time to consider if they should go into a recovery program.

#### Get help for them versus waiting until it's too late

Your son or daughter can benefit from informed help from people who understand what they're going through. Contact the best person or organization you can find and set up the first appointment now. If that resource doesn't work out, try someone else.

#### Have a plan for what you will do in an emergency

While you hope for and pray for the best, you need to plan for the worst, just in case. Build a plan for dangerous situations that could occur and decide when and how you will hold an emergency intervention to help save your son or daughter.

Each of the areas in the PACES for Parents methodology can help you protect your kids in a crisis, so include all of them in the plan you build. Keep taking those steps and adjust as you go. Continue to love and encourage your kids, teach them right from wrong, and provide boundaries to help keep them safe.

You can influence the future of your son or daughter, but you can't control them or the outcome. No parent is perfect, you may make mistakes, and that's okay. Keep doing your best, and that's all you can do. In the long run, these trials may shape all of you in positive ways you can't even imagine now. God is good at using our toughest times to do some of his best work, and he is with you every step of the way.





## What if nothing is working with your teenager?

*Parenting is hard. When our kids become teenagers, it gets even harder. When they keep moving in a dangerous direction and repeatedly refuse to honor healthy boundaries or act in a safe and responsible manner, it can be downright frightening.*

*This article is about a situation I hope you never face. But you might, no matter how good a parent you are or what neighborhood you live in, and it may be the most heart-wrenching decision you ever make. Or you may face a related situation where these principles can help you think it through more clearly as your kid's behavior becomes more harmful and dangerous.*



The question is: “When do you give your kids an ultimatum to change their behavior, go into recovery, or leave the home?”

Giving our kids an ultimatum is one of the hardest challenges parents face in raising their kids. By this point, hopefully the parents have used all the resources in the **PACES for Parents online learning center** which provides simple, effective techniques parents can utilize to help their teenagers thrive and protect them from the dangers of substance abuse.

Because we want parents to take steps so they never have to say, “We should have done something sooner, but we waited too late.”

If parents find themselves facing the difficult decision of giving their kids an ultimatum to make a drastic change, get professional help, or leave the home because of substance abuse or other issues, it may seem like a no-win situation with problems and risks on both sides. But the good news is there are steps parents can take to navigate such a crisis.

At this point, parents and caregivers should step back and assess the steps they are taking. They can review all five of the areas of “PACES for Parents” which are Preparation, Awareness, Connection, Education, and Steps and pull together the plans from those areas into one overall “Proactive Parenting Plan.” Then, think and pray about the next steps they will take to deal with the crisis facing their family.

What is a crisis? There are several definitions of the word, and all of them are applicable to this dilemma about giving someone we love an ultimatum. Because a crisis is simultaneously:

- A time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger.
- A time when a difficult or important decision must be made.
- The turning point of a disease (substance abuse is a medical disease) when an important change takes place that could lead either to recovery or death.

A crisis can happen in any family. Because no matter how good a job parents do, sometimes bad things happen anyway.

**“INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS.” - ALBERT EINSTEIN**

### FIVE BIBLICAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARENTS

Giving our kids an ultimatum with drastic consequences is a hard decision, and there is risk involved: Risk of our kids feeling useless if they think we don't love them. Or hopeless with no chance for a positive future. Risk of them choosing to use drugs to ease their pain. If it comes down to asking them to leave, there can be legal issues as well as moral ones if our kids are less than 18.

But there may also be risks of doing nothing.

Risks that our kids continue down the path of insanity until it harms or kills them or someone else. Or they make it through the teenage years alive but go on to a life marked by addiction or the inability to live in a responsible fashion. Or they harm—physically or emotionally—other people, including members of the family.



Parenting is hard, and parents need all the help they can get, especially when making tough decisions like giving our kids an ultimatum. Here are five principles from the Bible that offer some guidance:

1. Love your kids unconditionally, be there for them, and forgive them when they do wrong.

***“THIS IS MY SON, WHOM I LOVE; WITH HIM I AM WELL PLEASED.” - MATTHEW 3:17***

2. Do not exasperate or belittle them but encourage them and give them hope for a positive future.

***“FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER, BUT BRING THEM UP IN THE INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD.”  
- EPHESIANS 6:4***

3. Provide for them and offer them resources they need to grow up in a safe and healthy manner.

***“BUT IF ANYONE DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR HIS RELATIVES, AND ESPECIALLY FOR MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD, HE HAS DENIED THE FAITH ...” - 1 TIMOTHY 5:8***

4. Teach them right from wrong and train them how to live in a satisfying and productive manner.

***“TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO; EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.” - PROVERBS 22:6***

5. Provide clear and fair boundaries and consistently enforce discipline out of your love for them.

***“NO DISCIPLINE SEEMS PLEASANT AT THE TIME, BUT PAINFUL. LATER ON, HOWEVER, IT PRODUCES A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED BY IT.” - PROVERBS 23:13***

**GIVING OUR KIDS AN ULTIMATUM  
TO GET HELP OR LEAVE**

I spent time with a family who faced this situation, and I saw how hard it can be on everyone in the family. In this case, the parents had taken a thoughtful and prayerful approach, and they still felt that asking their son to leave was probably the right thing to do.

They realized they couldn't control their son or the outcome of the situation, and they prayerfully sought the serenity of letting go of that compulsion. But they also stepped up to muster the courage to make a tough decision even when it was hard.

Giving our kids an ultimatum is a last resort when we have tried many other things, but they haven't worked. It's a decision that needs to be handled calmly, and our kids need to know we love them and want what is best for them, whatever we decide to do.

Here are ten questions you can ask to help you go through a thoughtful process to make that decision:

- 1. Do you realize it is likely their choices that created the situation, you didn't cause it, and it's not your fault?**

Sometimes, good kids from good families with good parents do bad things. Parents don't need to carry unfounded guilt when that happens, and they shouldn't let fear of such guilt keep them from making the right decisions.

- 2. Are you living in insanity, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result?**

When teenagers are acting out, especially when substance abuse is involved, it may seem like insanity in the family. Parents may feel there is nothing they can do to make things better. But if what they have been doing is not working, it may be a sign that a different approach is called for which ideally still allows them to make a choice that can lead them toward acceptable behavior.



**3. The ways things are now, are you enabling them by protecting them from natural consequences of their bad choices?**

If we shelter our kids from consequences of bad decisions they make, we can cripple their future by not allowing them to grow up in a healthy manner. This maturity is a trait they will use their entire lives, and it needs to be learned during the teenager years.

**4. Are you thinking about what is best for them in the long term rather than only getting by in the short term?**

When kids are acting out, it's easy for parents to procrastinate making tough decisions a week, and a month, and a year at a time. But teenagers' brains are not fully developed, and they don't consider long-term consequences fully, so parents need to.

**5. Are they at risk (e.g. impaired driving, overdose, or suicide) and might doing nothing be the most dangerous option?**

Parents often fear making big decisions about their struggling teenagers, and this is understandable. But they need to consider the very real danger of the current behavior continuing or escalating, and sometimes doing nothing is the riskiest choice of all.

**6. Is the situation negatively and unfairly affecting other members of the family?**

The siblings of a teenager making bad choices can suffer in the process. It is also a valid consideration for parents to consider their own well-being. Parents are called to sacrifice for their kids, but they should take care of themselves at the same time.

**7. If you give them an ultimatum, are there reasonable options they could accept that could lead them to safety?**

Prior to leading up to a forced choice to change or go into a recovery program, we should give our kids options to improve their behavior, respect boundaries, engage in healthy "precovery" activities, and get help. If they wind up choosing to leave instead, they need to know they can come back by demonstrating the right behavior and agreeing to take positive steps to get better.

**8. Have you thought about this decision over a good period of time, including when your emotions are not in control?**

Big decisions should be made thoughtfully and carefully, not in the heat of the moment when we are buffeted by emotions such as anger, frustration, or fear. They should be arrived at more calmly after thoughtful boundaries have been set and ignored.

**9. Have you talked to other people, including some with experience in this area, about what you should do?**

Hopefully, parents get started early talking to other people to get an outside perspective on the situation. As things worsen, they need to reach out to more people, including experts, and get balanced input from a number of sources.

**10. Have you asked God for guidance and surrendered the situation and the outcome to him?**

Sometimes, God does his best work in what seem to be our toughest situations. All the time, he is there to help provide guidance if we turn to him and surrender the outcome to him. These difficult decisions are when we need to turn to him the most.

Which we all need to do, because parenting is hard, and parents need all the help they can get.

*"GOD GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE; COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN; AND WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE." - THE SERENITY PRAYER*

## STARTING POINT

From 1 (low) to 10 (high), how useful are the steps in your parenting plan?

## NEXT RIGHT STEPS

What are 1 or 2 small steps you can take to improve your parenting plan?

## GOING DEEPER

1. How would you feel if one of your kids overdosed and you had waited too late to get help?
  - What steps could you put in an emergency plan to prevent a life-threatening crisis?
2. What do you feel would be helpful elements to include in an effective parenting plan?
  - When will you commit time to document a parenting plan for each of your kids?
3. Are you having proactive talks with your kids about where their choices are taking them?
  - What's a way to talk to them on getting help for substance or mental health issues?
4. How intentional and active are you in leading your family toward wellness and happiness?
  - What are steps your family can be taking to maximize well-being in the long run?
5. To what degree do you have a positive assurance that your kids will stay healthy and safe?
  - What are the most important things you should do to increase that assurance?



## How parents care for their family in a crisis

*Families can avoid struggles and pain by putting into practice the ideas and techniques in this article and the associated helpful material. Will your family be one of them?*

*This material will conclude the series on “Parenting in a Crisis” which features useful techniques from the “PACES for Parents” methodology to help you raise your teenagers effectively. To summarize that approach, “P-A-C-E-S” is an acronym, and each letter represents a step to help you deal with a crisis:*



### HOW CAN YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR FAMILY IF ONE OF YOUR KIDS IS FACING A CRISIS?

#### Choose to keep a positive perspective

This will be a long-term journey for your family, and it's critical for you to persevere and keep taking positive steps forward. Most kids get through these trials, and yours likely will too. Know that God often uses our trials to do good things, and these tough situations can lead to blessings down the road.

#### Continue loving and supporting them

No matter what your son or daughter has done, they need your loving support more than ever before. Continue telling them you love them and support them just the way they are and express your faith in a positive future for them. Make sure they know that recovery leads to a better life afterwards.

#### Take care of yourself and your family

It's also important to focus on your own well-being and that of the rest of the family. Restore habits to get rest, exercise, and enjoyment each day. See a counselor or go to Al-Anon meetings. You are doing the right thing to take care of yourself and enjoy life rather than be consumed by the crisis.

If you're facing a crisis, I know how you feel because I've been there, and I've talked to hundreds of parents who have been there too. You and your kids can get through this, and there are steps you can take that will help. If recovery becomes necessary, it could be the best thing that ever happened.

Your teenager needs the help, healing, and hope you can provide. There is a very realistic assurance that things will get better because there are proven steps you can take that will help, millions of people have succeeded, and God is still in control. In fact, God does some of his best work in our toughest times.

**Preparation** – If what's been done so far hasn't worked, you will need to change and prepare to make some tough choices. My wife and I were surprised by how our older son changed when he became a teenager. We never thought teenage substance abuse could happen to us—until it did.

**Awareness** – In a crisis, you must be vigilant to understand what's really going on by listening to your kids but verifying the truth. As our son struggled, I worked hard to track the direction his choices were taking him, and we needed that information to make some hard choices along the way.

**Connection** – If your relationship with your teen gets harder, continue to love and support them. We made mistakes in how we communicated with our son, but we always let him know we loved him and believed in him. We didn't get much feedback, but years later he told us how much that meant to him.

**Education** – You don't have to deal with a crisis alone. You can learn from good resources and get help for you and your child. Our struggles with our son were new to us, and many times we didn't know what to do. But we read a lot and talked to helpful people, and that education made us feel much better.

**Steps** – In a crisis, you need to build a plan and increase the urgency in the steps you are taking. In our family, there were times when I didn't know how we would get through. But we did, and our family is doing well now. Amazingly, it wasn't in spite of our troubles but in many cases because of them.



# How do you protect your teenagers from harm?

*Most families will face a crisis at times, and when it's your family, it may seem like the world is coming to an end. Unfortunately, with the epidemic of teenage substance abuse and mental health issues, this heartache strikes thousands every day.*

*There was a time when my family was in crisis, and virtually everything that could go wrong did. We struggled with substance abuse and depression and making good choices as a parent was hard. It was the most painful period of my life, but (miraculously) good things came from it. It led to a new nonprofit ministry that helps parents deal with a crisis with their kids—or even better, prevent one from happening.*

*If one of your kids is in a crisis, you have likely tried many things already. The 10 techniques below can help even when times are tough, so pick the ones that fit your situation. These 10 steps are part of the PACES for Parents methodology to raise healthy and happy teenagers, and they align to the acronym “P-A-C-E-S.” If your kid’s situation continues to get worse or you face an emergency, get help right away.*



seek a positive approach to take and until they prove through their behavior that you can trust them.

## 2. CREATE OR UPDATE A “PROACTIVE EMERGENCY PLAN” FOR SAFETY.

In that documented plan, create a handy list of emergency phone numbers for substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and suicide prevention. Acquire and learn to use naloxone to help reverse the effects of an opioid overdose which can come from any fentanyl-laced pill. Safety-related discussions with your kids should be reiterated. Boundaries and consequences should be clarified and likely increased for dangerous infractions such as impaired driving including letting the teenager know they will stay in jail if they are arrested.



### MINIMIZE ANY POSSIBLE DANGER AND PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES.

Substance abuse or related issues such as mental health problems can happen in any family. But rather than allowing worry or fear to immobilize you, harbor a thoughtful and healthy concern for the safety of your teenagers to be better prepared for a possible crisis.

#### 1. REMAIN PROACTIVE AND KEEP GETTING IN THE WAY OF TROUBLE.

Never give up on your kids because there is always hope things will turn around. Continue focusing on the fundamentals: remain vigilant, stay in contact with them, keep learning, get help, and pray continuously. It's a time to “pick your battles” and worry less about smaller issues while staying focused on critical areas. Do anything you can to stand between your kids and danger. If necessary, limit their money and transportation while you

### AWARENESS – DIG DEEPER TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION.

It's hard remaining aware of what's going on when your teenagers are lying and hiding things from you. It's not about controlling them, because that won't work, but about doing all you can to understand what's really going on to help you make wise decisions.



### **3. ESCALATE WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.**

It's worth instigating tighter tracking on where money is going including digital transactions and expanding the number of people you are talking to for information. You may consider if you should snoop on your kids if the objectives are to understand their heart and keep them safe rather than control them. Consideration should be given to having them take a formal substance use assessment and putting in place a regular and ongoing drug testing process while you continue lovingly working with them to help them address their issues.

### **4. PERFORM OR UPDATE A "PROACTIVE WELLNESS ASSESSMENT."**

Tough decisions are likely coming, so this is the time to do a full risk assessment about what is going on and write down the information in case it is needed. This should include a summary of drug and alcohol use with as many details as possible about the "what, how, when, where, and who" for those activities. Mental health should be assessed as well as other emotional, social, spiritual, and personal issues. You should capture all you know about changes in behavior, why your teenager is using, and what their personal motives might be.

#### **CONNECTION – WORK WITH THEM AND USE GOOD RESOURCES.**

Even if it's gotten hard talking to your teenager, know that you are still having a positive impact on them. Share your heartfelt belief in them and their positive future. Keep doing your best to stay connected at a heart level because your child's well-being may depend on it.

### **5. SEE A COUNSELOR AND INSIST YOUR TEENAGER MEETS WITH ONE.**

Study good parenting resources so you can help your teenager as much as possible. Both you and they should be talking to someone with experience and wisdom in family crisis situations. If the first counselor or therapist tried is not a good fit, keep trying others until one is found where the chemistry is right. If finances prohibit the use of professional counselors, look for knowledgeable friends or family members who have good judgement and care for your child. The more people involved speaking wisdom into the situation, the better.

### **6. UPDATE INTERVENTION TALKS AND A "PROACTIVE FAMILY PLAN."**

Confirm family members agree with positive roles they can play. Talk to your teen to hopefully avoid a formal intervention. Begin to set expectations that their choices are leading them toward a recovery program: "You have not chosen to adjust your behavior. We will be checking out recovery programs to decide which one to use if you do not change.

We believe in you, want what's best for you, and are here for you every step of the way. Are you willing to make a positive change and how?" Capture their commitments in the family plan.

#### **EDUCATION – LEARN HOW TO USE RECOVERY TO GET BETTER.**

If things get worse, you should take steps toward selecting a recovery plan. Ideally, keep your teenager involved. This lets them see that you are serious, and it is better to hear their thoughts and give them a chance to provide input on the type of program to consider. One of the best outcomes you can achieve would be for them to become interested and willing to find a program to help them live life better.

### **7. BEGIN LEARNING MORE ABOUT POSSIBLE RECOVERY PROGRAMS TO CONSIDER.**

Treatment options include extended counseling, mental health therapy, peer groups, regular recovery group meetings, detoxification, intensive outpatient programs, and residential recovery of various lengths. Considerations may involve cost, insurance, mental health and spiritual counseling, aftercare options, and reputation including talking to people who have used the program. A substance-using teen may fight these discussions or make empty promises to avoid treatment. Even so, gently and pleasantly do your best to involve them in choosing a program. It is far better to be able to offer them options and have them buy into a program they can willingly participate in.

### **8. CAPTURE BOUNDARIES AND CONSEQUENCES IN A "PROACTIVE PRECOVERY PLAN."**

If safety is still a concern, consider banning the use of vehicles and any other boundaries that might limit the danger. An evolving set of behavior boundaries should be set with consequences that lead toward the next level of treatment or recovery if your teenager continues making bad decisions. Keep reminding your son or daughter that these consequences and each level of treatment are choices they are making through their decisions and actions. Continue to reinforce that you are taking these steps because you love them and want what is best for them. But let it be clear that ongoing bad choices on their part will likely lead to a next stage of treatment or recovery.

#### **STEPS – BUILD A LONG-TERM PLAN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY.**

When you have tried everything you know to do and nothing has worked, you may need to muster the courage to put the teenager into an initial level of recovery. This decision is an emotional one but try to handle it calmly while thinking about their long-term well-being





**9. RESET YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR A LONG, BUT STILL HOPEFUL, JOURNEY.**

No matter what happens, continue to tell your son or daughter you love and support them, even if they fight you along the way. If their problems continue, you will need to face the sober yet realistic expectation that it will likely be a multi-year journey for them to become healthy enough to prosper and live effectively. Mistakes and relapses are likely. If it happens, relapse should be seen as a setback rather than a failure, but there can be danger involved if a relapse includes serious drugs. But, no matter what, keep taking steps forward.

**10. PULL TOGETHER A “PROACTIVE PARENTING PLAN” TO GUIDE NEXT STEPS.**

Parents should step back and assess the steps they are taking. They can review the five areas of “PACES for Parents” and combine plans from those areas into one overall “Proactive Parenting Plan.” If recovery is a next step, discuss options with trusted supporters. Spouses should keep talking until they reach a decision they both commit to support. Details should be worked out on how the program will be paid for and what steps are needed to begin treatment. The plan should ideally include counseling for every member of the family. Recovery is smoother if family issues are addressed along the way, and this sets the stage for a positive new future for the entire family.

**CONTINUING THE ONGOING JOURNEY ...**

Some crisis periods pass quickly but some take a few years to resolve, so treat this as a long-term journey toward wellness. There are resources you can use to continue dealing with the crisis, so keep educating yourself and trying things until the situation has improved.

**Parenting in a Crisis** – This article is part of an online “toolkit” of resources to help parents deal with a crisis. Watch one-minute videos, read short articles, and use associated resources to “self-coach” your family. Find it here: [“Parenting in a Crisis to Help Protect Your Kids.”](#)

**PACES for Parents** – Use additional helpful resources to learn what to do to help your kids thrive during the teenage years and become equipped to prevent serious problems or a crisis from happening. Find it here: [“PACES for Parents” online training center.](#)

There is a very realistic assurance that things will get better because there are proven steps you can take that will help, tens of millions of people have succeeded, and God is still in control. In fact, God does some of his best work in what we see as our toughest times.



# Are you worried about your teenager?

Are they struggling with peer pressure, addiction, anxiety or depression?

Consider PACES for Parents, an online toolkit that helps parents connect with their teenagers.



[StepsProactiveParenting.com](https://StepsProactiveParenting.com)



A five-step journey that will help you prevent problems before they occur.



## PREPARATION

Become proactive and prepared to protect your kids from substance abuse.

## AWARENESS

Be aware of what your kids are going through and challenges they face.

## CONNECTION

Deepen and strengthen your relationship with your son or daughter.

## EDUCATION

Equip your kids to deal with life issues and situations they will face

## STEPS

Build a plan to help them become the man or woman they are meant to be.