

Proactive Parenting

Parents can easily describe many pressures from their own “tween” and teen years which bring back awkward memories and cringe-worthy recollections. However, the world has changed exponentially in the last several decades and continues to undergo rapid changes at an erratic and unpredictable pace.

The world today is filled with what can only be perceived by teens as unsafe events. War, bullying, gun violence, natural disasters, and the constant stream of reporting of these events via every available media source from television to internet streams; there is a never ending, shock provoking flood of horrifying news.

Adults must help adolescents learn how to navigate the perils, reduce anxiety, and build the strength and tools they will need when their instinct is to protect and shelter them as the adult response to the very real threats in the world today may also be an increase in fear and anxiety. Here are three suggestions:

Start by using **supportive problem solving** which gives adolescents the opportunity to learn to think for themselves instead of making decisions for them. Any setbacks or mistakes become learning experiences, while successes allow children the ability to feel truly capable of handling difficult situations. As a result, both their resilience and confidence will grow. Oftentimes, I have coached parents in my practice to ask their kids when they present a problematic situation to them to respond with the question, “Do you want me to help you with this or do you just need to vent?” Kids want someone they trust to listen as they search for the answer themselves.



Be a **model of responsibility** and **allow children opportunities to help others**. A child’s intrinsic need to help triggers anxiety while feeling helpless to improve the state of the world we live in. Conversely, having the ability to actually help others reinforces both responsibility and a sense of empathy while giving kids a sense of ownership and investment in their own destiny. Serving others gives tweens and teens an appreciation of how their actions affect and impact others, and a genuine feeling of positivity and success.

Approach the world with a **healthy dose of optimism, hope, and courage and model this for your children**. We must remember that what is reported on the news and coming across our social media platforms is largely negative, so it is apparent why anxiety, fear, and depression are triggered. As adults we can choose to be optimistic about situations, people, and the future. We can choose hope while instilling courage in adolescents. The solution lies in changing our mindset, shifting our view, and promoting individual strengths instead of weaknesses.

—Tracie Dahl, LCPC
Day Treatment Director

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