

# From Tween to Teen

Are you faced with the prospect of a child leaving elementary school to begin junior high in a new and unknown environment?

Many parents are anxious about their child's adjustment and the social situations they will face.

This transition is called

**From Tweens to Teens**, and parents need to be aware of the following areas:

- mental health
- drugs/alcohol
- sexuality
- asset building

## Mental Health

Tweens are flooded with developmental tasks that can be highly stressful on themselves and also those around them. It is a time where a child seems to be in constant change as they struggle to form their own identity. Ongoing external pressures, conflicts with those around them, puberty, fluctuating self-esteem and daily demands can become overwhelming at times.

It's important to differentiate age-appropriate behaviors/phases from potential mental health related issues that cause significant impairments in daily functioning.

If you detect a possible mental health issue it's important to access appropriate early intervention programs.

**Further information**  
Sherwood Park Mental Health Clinic  
780-467-6562

## Drug Use

Drug use can affect adolescent development and one area of concern is the impact of Cannabis abuse. Research indicates that if a young person starts using marijuana at an early age, he or she is more likely to develop problems with substances in the future than a person who first uses marijuana later in life.

Regular use of marijuana interferes with the ability to concentrate and impairs learning and some aspects of memory. Some research has shown that frequent marijuana use is a risk factor for later depression and anxiety. Frequent users are emotionally in a cloud and miss the opportunity to develop self esteem/identity. Frequent users often feel a lack of initiative and concern about the future/find it difficult to stay motivated and procrastinate about important things. Forgotten birthdays, missed social events and unmet commitments are no big deal. Frequent



users often feel apathetic about many things they used to care about.

Youth who smoke marijuana are often misled into thinking that it is an organic substance. The truth is that marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals some of which are the same cancer-causing substances found in tobacco smoke.

Some helpful guidelines for parents include maintaining a communicative relationship, however difficult it may be at times. Convey your concerns without being judgmental. Stay interested in your teen's activities without appearing to intrude into their lives. Set clear, firm and rational expectations.

**Further information**  
AADAC Sherwood Park Outreach Office  
780-417-7221

## Sexuality

You don't have to be a sex expert to answer a child's questions about sexuality. Generally you will know the answer and if you don't, it will give you the opportunity to visit the library together. Remember, no matter how outrageous the question, don't let your feelings or emotions colour your response. The child deserves a factual answer. After you have answered the question, then you can let the child know how you feel about the facts because those feelings are values.

Perhaps the most important part of this teaching strategy is the idea that children should feel positive about themselves and their bodies. If you can answer your child's sexual questions in a way that will make them feel good about themselves, then you will have won the battle. Learn all you can about sexuality; analyze your values and

responsibilities, then it will be easier for you to share these things with your children so that they can grow up with a knowledgeable and wholesome attitude toward sexuality.

**Further information**  
Strathcona County Health Centre  
780-467-5571

**Asset Building**  
Take a moment and think about a significant person, be it a mentor, coach, parent, or any significant adult in your growing up years. Think about what this person gave you and how they impacted your life – at the time- and in your adulthood. You have just seen a snapshot of asset building.

Now you can be that person for someone else.

Assets are the individual qualities and social supports that help children and youth make good decisions and grow to be healthy and successful. The fewer assets a child/youth has the greater chance they will be involved in high-risk behaviour, the more assets they have the more positive/healthy choices they make.

**Further information**  
**Kids Count** Asset building initiative in Strathcona County  
780-464-4044