

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My daughter is just thirteen but refuses to listen to me and is disrespectful. Up until recently, Beth was an excellent student but she's barely making passing grades now and has actually failed two classes. I also suspect that she has been experimenting with drugs and alcohol. She's gained weight, is moody, and has dropped out of the school activities that she used to love. She sleeps away most weekend days and refuses to do any of her chores. When I approach her about all this, she screams at me, cries, and slams the door to her room. She constantly threatens that she will run away and has on two occasions although she only went to a friend's house and came back several hours later. I'm at my wit's end. Her father (my ex-husband) doesn't seem concerned and says that she's just being a teenager. But I'm worried. I've tried to talk with Beth but she just clams up. My friends with teenagers don't seem to be having these same kinds of problems.

-- Concerned Mother

Dear Concerned Mother,

There is no question that the teenager years are ones of great change for kids and families and there are many behaviors that make parents want to pull their hair out. However, from your description, Beth's anger, disrespect, failing grades, threats of running away, and possible use of drugs and alcohol are beyond the "normal" range of healthy teenage behavior. Her weight gain, excessive need for sleep, moodiness, and lack of interest in her favorite school activities are also cause for concern. She is expressing many of the symptoms and behaviors of adolescent depression.

Most people mistakenly think of depression as an adult problem, but teenagers are not immune to this disorder. In fact, The National Institute of Health advises that approximately four percent of teenagers become seriously depressed each year. Everyone experiences fluctuations in mood and it's understandable that people respond to some life problems with sadness, but depression is more than just being moody. Beth should be evaluated by a professional if she's experienced five or more of the following symptoms for two weeks of more:

- ? She feels sad or cries a lot and it doesn't go away.
- ? She feels guilty for no reason; she feels like she's no good; she's lost her confidence.
- ? Life seems meaningless or like nothing good is ever going to happen again. She has a negative attitude a lot of the time, or it seems like she has no feelings.
- ? She don't feel like doing a lot of the things she used to like—like music, sports, being with friends, going out—and she wants to be left alone most of the time.
- ? It's hard to make up her mind. She forgets lots of things, and it's hard to concentrate.

- ? She gets irritated often. Little things make her lose her temper; she over-reacts.
- ? Her sleep pattern changes; she has started sleeping a lot more or she has trouble falling asleep at night. Or she wakes up really early most mornings and can't get back to sleep.
- ? Her eating pattern changes; she's lost her appetite or she eats a lot more resulting in either weight loss or weight gain.
- ? She feels restless and tired most of the time.
- ? She thinks about death, or feels like she's dying, or has thoughts about committing suicide.

Talk with Beth's father and share this information. Beth is not just "being a teenager." It's important that you both present a united front to your daughter. Talk with your family doctor about a referral to a mental health professional and set up an appointment for Beth. Then you and Beth's father must sit down and talk with Beth in a calm and loving way.

Tell Beth that you're worried about her and want to help. Let her know that there is every reason to be optimistic that she can feel better about her life but that she needs to work with a counselor or therapist to get to the root of the problem. Therapy – sometimes with the addition of medication – offers good results and most people begin to improve in a short time. If she is like most teens, Beth will be resistant to this approach but it is important to be firm as well as compassionate and get her the care she needs to reclaim her life.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.