

The recent rash of teen tragedies in Santa Clara County has us all wondering how this could happen in our community. As a parent, our job of raising our children has just become that much more complicated at a time when our lives are already over taxed.

Teen rebellion and acting out are not new concepts. The trials endured during the teenage years are retold in stories as old as our grandparents. What has changed however is the level of intensity and at times damaging and self destructive ways that some teens are playing out this phase of development. Traditionally, the teenage years encompass a struggle for autonomy and independence. We grow, explore, experiment and develop our own tastes, philosophies and styles. This growth can be encouraged and supported in healthy ways if the structure and system are in place. But not all teens have the strength of a support system to fall back on. Without a structure at home or school, teens are often left to rely for support on friends who may also be in a freefall pattern. Traditional teen networks are stressed to the breaking point with the demands our high paced lifestyles require.

Society provides its own stressors for teens today. Gangs, drugs, violence, sex exploitation and internet addiction all add another level of intensity. Families are stretched thin, not always able to provide enough support. The electronic age of communication: cell phones, texting, social networking sites, all step up the speed with which ideas, information and news travels between teenagers. Peer pressure and the need to fit in are heightened by the perceived influx of information. The lightening fast communication used among teenagers, often done in an anonymous fashion, has sped up response times for teens to instantaneous. Decisions can be made or ideas processed in much less time than was previously spent. This can sometimes lead to wrong or uninformed choices.

Crisis intervention during the recession for families has become all too time consuming. This final bit of gunpowder added to an already charged situation can leave some ready to blow. The recession has added job loss, housing losses, economic loss including college funds and retirement funds as well as the loss of healthcare coverage to the mix. The trickledown effect of these losses affects the family system and support structure in big ways. Teens have to also deal with being “misplaced”, out of their ordinary system of care. Even a teen that is not technically homeless, may be misplaced, losing a house to foreclosure, sleeping on a relative’s couch or moving to a different rental. For a teen this is huge. They may lose their carpool, their computer or workspace in their home, their social network or their privacy. They become unconnected, at a time when they most feel the need to fit in.

So what is available out there for teenagers today? Resources are limited by the economy and the recession as well. However, there are some services for teens feeling overwhelmed, anxious, depressed or simply lost. Most of our school districts provide some school wide counseling. This on-site, individual therapy is free and convenient and is tailored directly to the age group. A wonderful starting point for all teens, referrals can also be made to sliding scale clinics in our community for more extensive work. Groups for teens are also often held at school sites by these same therapeutic professionals. Subjects can range from conflict resolution, anger management, bullying, eating disorders, self esteem workshops, grief and loss, dealing with divorce and social skills among many others. Mentoring Programs are also popular at some sites that partner students with one another to form a support system. Parenting classes are an excellent option for parents and guardians to learn how to communicate better and how to support healthy choices and lifestyles. We need to work hard to put in place a structure that notices when teenagers need help. We need to step up and provide resources to help these kids when they need it.

RESOURCES

Almaden Valley Counseling Service Telephone#: 408-997-0200 6529 Crown Blvd. Suite D San Jose, CA 95120	sliding scale fee- based upon ability to pay no waiting list
Y.W.C.A. Counseling Clinic Telephone#: 408-295-4011 ext.259 375 S. Third St. San Jose, CA 95112	sliding scale fee- based upon ability to pay waiting list
Bill Wilson Center Telephone#: 408-243-0200 3490 The Alameda Santa Clara, CA 95050	sliding scale fee- based upon ability to pay waiting list

TELEPHONE HOTLINES

24-7 Teen Line	Telephone#: 1-888-247-7717
Teenage Health Resource Line	Telephone#: 1-888-711-8336
Substance Abuse & Addiction Hotline	Telephone#: 1-800-729-6686
California Youth Crisis Hotline	Telephone#: 1-800-843-5200
Suicide & Crisis Hotline	Telephone#: 1-408-279-3312

