



Special points of interest:

- > Trend of the month
- > Warning Signs of Eating Disorders
- > School Violence
- > How Kids Perceive the News

From the Desk of the SRO

Teen Eating Disorders -March Trend of the Month

Doctors around the country have seen an increasing number of young victims of anorexia-some as young as 8 years old. While this may represent increased parental awareness of eating disorders, it also reinforces current research that suggests a strong genetic component to the development of an eating disorder rather than simply environmental pressures.

Most researchers now believe that eating disorders are the result of a complex combination of genes, brain chemistry, and environmental factors. Eating disorder in an older teen may be triggered by cultural pressure to be perfect and a desire to have control over one aspect of life, but anorexia in a very young child is less likely to be a result of such cultural pressure.

And anorexia in a young child is more dangerous than in an older teen or adult. Young children's bodies are growing and developing at a fast rate. Heart and bone growth as well as brain growth and development is affected very quickly when calories are severely restricted.

Young children don't respond the same way to treatment as older teens, either. Long hospital or treatment stays can be excessively traumatic, and these children may be too young for talk therapy to be effective. It's thought that young children benefit most when anorexia is treated as a life-threatening disease, such as cancer; the medicine used for treatment is food. Many successful eating disorder programs involve parents in monitoring food intake until the child can make healthy choices for herself.

Teens get info from technology

It's 8:00p.m., do you know where your children are-or who they are talking to? These days, you may not. Today's teens are far more technology savvy than most parents are, and they use technology such as computers and cell phones to obtain information and maintain a constant and varied social network of friends. Added to the changing structure of today's families, kids depend more upon peers for information and support than ever before. Many relatively innocuous teen trends, such as day-glo hair, body piercing and alternative music-arise from and are supported by kids' communication with other kids. But not all of the information and support that kids get from their peers is positive. Many websites that offer teens a sense of belonging and community promote dangerous behaviors.

Quote of the month:

The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack in will.

Vince Lombardi

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Warning Signs of Eating Disorders

- Major weight loss (weighs 85% of normal weight for height or less)
- Skips meals, always has an excuse for not eating (ill, just ate with a friend, stressed-out, not hungry). Refuses to eat in front of others
- Selects only low fat items with low nutrient levels, such as lettuce, tomatoes, and sprouts. Reads food labels religiously; worried about calories and fat grams in foods. Eats very small portions of foods
Becomes revolted by former favorite foods, such as desserts, red meats, potatoes
- May help with meal shopping and preparation, but doesn't eat with family
- Eats in ritualistic ways, such as cutting food into small pieces or pushing food around plate
- Lies about how much food was eaten
- Has fears about weight gain and obesity, obsesses about clothing size. Complains about being fat, when in truth it is not so
- Inspects image in mirror frequently, weighs self frequently
- May wear baggy clothing or many layers of clothing to hide weight loss and to stay warm
- May become moody and irritable or have trouble concentrating. Denies that anything is wrong
- May harm self with cutting or burning
- Evidence of discarded packaging for diet pills, laxatives, or diuretics (water pills)
- Stops menstruating
- May faint or feel dizzy frequently



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School Violence

As terrible and frightening as incidents of school violence are, they are rare. Although it may not seem that way, the rate of crime involving physical harm has been declining at U.S. schools since the early 1990s.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), fewer than 1% of all homicides among school-age children happen on school grounds or on the way to and from school. The vast majority of students will never experience violence at school or in college.

What Schools Are Doing

Many schools are taking extra precautions to keep students safe. Some have focused on keeping weapons out by conducting random locker and bag checks, limiting entry and exit points at the school, and keeping the entryways under teacher supervision. Other schools

Still, it's natural for kids and teens — no matter where they go to school — to worry about whether this type of incident may someday affect them. How can you help them deal with these fears? Talking with kids about these tragedies, and what they watch or hear about them, can put frightening information into context.

Talking to Your Kids

It's important for kids to feel like they can share their feelings, and know that their fears and anxieties are understandable. Rather than waiting for your child to approach you,

use metal detectors. Lessons on conflict resolution have been added to many schools' courses to help prevent troubled students from resorting to violence. Peer counseling and active peer programs help students become more aware of the signs that a fellow

consider starting the conversation. Ask kids what they understand about these incidents and how they feel about them. Share your own feelings too — during a tragedy, kids may look to adults for their reactions. It helps kids to know that they are not alone in their anxieties. Knowing that their parents have similar feelings will help kids legitimize their own. At the same time, kids often need parents to help them feel safe. It may help to discuss in concrete terms what you have done and what the school is doing to help protect its students.

student may be becoming more troubled or violent. Another thing that helps make schools safer is greater awareness of problems like bullying and discrimination.



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How Kids Perceive the News

Of course, you are not your child's only source of information about school shootings or other tragic events that receive media attention. Kids are likely to repeatedly encounter news stories or graphic images on television, radio, or the Internet, and such reports can teach them to view the world as a confusing, threatening, or unfriendly place.

Unlike movies or entertainment programs, news is real. But depending on a child's age or maturity level, he or she may not yet understand the distinctions between fact and fantasy. By the time kids reach 7 or 8, however, what they watch on TV can seem all too real.

For some youngsters, the vividness of a sensational news story can be internalized and transformed into something that might happen to them. A child watching a news story about a school shooting might worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" TV has the effect of shrinking the world and bringing it into our living rooms.

By concentrating on violent stories, TV news can also promote a "mean-

world" syndrome that can give kids a misrepresentation of what the world and society are actually like.

Tips for Parents

Keeping an eye on what TV news kids watch can go a long way toward monitoring the content of what they hear and see about events like school shootings.

Here are some additional tips:

- Recognize that news doesn't have to be driven by disturbing pictures. Public television programs, newspapers, or newsmagazines specifically designed for kids can be less sensational — and less upsetting — ways for them to get information.
- Discuss current events with your kids on a regular basis. It's important to help them think through stories they hear about. Ask questions: What do you think about these events? How do you think these things happen? Such questions can encourage conversation about non-news topics as well.
- Put news stories in proper context. Showing that certain events are isolat-

ed or explaining how one event relates to another helps kids make better sense of what they hear.

- Watch the news with your kids to filter stories together.
- Anticipate when guidance will be necessary and avoid shows that aren't appropriate for your child's age or level of development.
- If you're uncomfortable with the content of the news or it's inappropriate for your child's age, turn it off.