



Episode 2

Family value systems amid media portrayals of substance use

Overview

Recent studies indicate that American Families eat dinner together about 50% of the time. Another study found that families only ate dinner together three times per week.

Nevertheless, both research and families agree that eating family dinner with your teens at least five times a week can be a significant protective factor in reducing teen substance abuse.

However, countless families struggle to integrate this into extended schedules and the demands of school and work.

Topic

This episode featured extensive discussions on value systems, the impact of peers on value systems, the challenges associated with asking for help and the impact of media on student development.

Family System

Tonight's episode featured a family of five. Mom and dad were accompanied by their three daughters ages, 12, 13, and 16. Both parents are in professional careers, the girls are in 6th, 8th and 10th grade. The family describes family dinner as a regular occurrence and each parent describes an open relationship with their girls.

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Risk and Protective Factors

This episode features an in-depth look at several protective factors, as well as risk factors.

Protective Factors

Both parents were enthusiastic in participating in the episode, describing regular conversations around emotions and behaviors but also seeking guidance on developing further discussions. This specifically highlights that parents are open to both the conversation and education.

This family featured a positive relationship among the siblings evidenced by clear knowledge of one another's circumstance. The girls each described looking to their parents as well as each other for support and guidance.

There seemed to be a positive relationship with the school as both the parents and the girls specifically described utilizing the guidance counselor and a teacher for support in the recent past.

Father is well versed on the dangers and consequences of addiction having had his siblings pass away from the disease of addiction. While knowledge itself is not a protective factor, his willingness to share the knowledge and address early signs serves as a strong protective factor.

The family demonstrated healthy nurturing and attachment with their children, which research suggests is associated with better academic outcomes and adaptive behaviors, and good peer interactions in children.

The family also demonstrated strong family cohesion. There was an outward emotional connectedness that included emotional support, pride, encouragement, playfulness, and inside humor among each other.

Risk Factors

This family shared a genetic predisposition on paternal side.

Among the three daughters, the eldest appears to have an introverted temperament. This paired with what she described as a desire to "help people" may indicate a risk of establishing co-dependent relationships with peers. She also shared that her father has warned her against "collecting broken people." This warning could lead to her not seeking guidance in determining how or when to support another person who may be struggling.

The family's middle daughter appears very extroverted and outspoken. She appears to be willing to challenge her sisters and parents when she disagrees. This could be an indication of a fearless and risk taking approach to life. Should her interests or values steer in a negative or maladaptive pattern, she is at risk of taking negative risks.

The assumption that their children are sharing everything leads to a further assumption that as the children go through different experiences, they will always feel comfortable going to the parental system. This kind of all-or-nothing thinking can pose a devastating blow to parents when a situation arises where a child may withhold information. This can lead to a false sense of security and parents feeling unprepared to address behaviors effectively with firm, fair and consistent consequences.

Clinical Overview

This family system was a pleasure to work with. They were all actively engaged in the discussion and highly motivated to engage with one another. While mother shared less than dad, it was clear her temperament mirrored that of her eldest daughter and was somewhat reserved. The family structure was clear, with the parental dyad demonstrating a notable authoritative position of leadership in the home.

Each parent demonstrated an interest in a relationship with each of the girls which was reciprocated among each of the girls as they each shared private jokes with their father. The youngest shared that she secretly allows the family puppy to sleep in her bed which she tried to shield from her dad, who clearly heard and simply said, “honey I already know” and the two shared a smile across the table. There was evidence of this type of relationship among all three girls.

The family shared examples of concerning behavior among their peers as well as strategies where the girls and their parents worked together to find a solution and seek support from the school and fellow parents. This family demonstrates many protective factors that likely will outweigh risk factors as long as they continue this pattern of regular engagement. To further assess the family’s risk more conversations about the strength of the marital dyad, the nature of the family’s support system, and information regarding academic engagement in school.

Takeaways

Of particular note on this episode, the family was able to engage in a solid discussion about living by one’s own value system and the challenge of doing so amid peer pressure, ever changing attitudes of peer groups and the onslaught of provocative multimedia influences (music, movies, TV shows and social media).

Regular conversations about changing attitudes, perceptions of risks and the behaviors associated with “living according to your own value system” will help support continued commitment to healthy decision making. The family told a story of the youngest daughter sharing that she watched her peers exploit another parent. Since this family has daily family dinner, this story was shared around the meal which allowed for not only parents to reinforce the value of respecting the generosity of others but also the siblings to reinforce this value system.

Research has shown that in many families, for a large portion of adolescence, siblings engage in 'social learning' in which they adopt many of the same values, friendship-types, and hobbies as their siblings. Research has shown that even as siblings spend less time with each other as they mature, younger children frequently adopt many of the tendencies of their older siblings.¹

However, in many families children tend to spend less time with each other and their parents in adolescence, as non-familial peers offer them greater feelings of social belonging than sibling relationships.² Research has revealed that there are steps that allow parents to continue to encourage adolescent familial closeness. There is a vast amount of research that demonstrates that parenting style that is constantly firm, demanding, and involved is strongly associated with teen and adolescent willingness to be consistently socialized by parents and siblings.³

The unerring demand for consistent 'family time' in the home is also highly correlated with maintained familial attachment and involvement, and decreased instances of substance abuse.⁴ Adhering to this family system can allow parents to not only positively influence their children, but encourage a dynamic that allows each child to have a strong influence on the others.

A particular topic that came up was the revelation that the eldest daughter was watching the controversial show which features high school students engaged in sexual activity, porn distribution, drug use, drug sales, domestic violence and sexual exploitation of minors.

In this case the discussion included a look at how parents can stay aware of pop culture trends and prepare should their children engage in behaviors they do not support. The conversation included supporting parents as they utilize this defiance as an opportunity to have a conversation around their daughter's moral value system and how she perceives risky behaviors among peers.

A substantial amount of research indicates that mass media portrayals of drug use has a significant influence on teens in social, cognitive, and physiological pathways. Multiple meta-analysis have demonstrated that increased exposure to smoking and vaping portrayals leads to earlier initiating to smoking.⁵

¹<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-01206-005>

²<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190124>

³<https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/impact-of-parental-discipline-methods-on-the-childs-internalizati>

⁴<https://prsg.education.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Brown-2004-Adol-relations-w-peers.pdf>

⁵<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10810730.2011.585697>

Additional investigation revealed that within school populations, students who tried drugs reported watching more videos, tv shows, and movies related to and involving drugs use.⁶ Of students who self-report drug use, social media portrayals are consistently referred to as justification for substance abuse.⁷ Other studies have revealed that time spent on social media in adolescence is positively correlated risky and deviant behaviors.⁸

Researchers refer to the effect of media portrayals as 'cultivation theory,' in which media and cultural portrayals gradually influence the perception of ambivalent students, and plays a vital role in adolescents cultivating a case for drugs as reasonable and socially normative.⁹

Particularly concerning is that research has found a massive and steady increase in media portrayals in vaping. Longitudinal analysis over the course of two years revealed a steady increase in vaping content on both YouTube and Tiktok, and also revealed that attempts to monitor and filter out such videos are largely unsuccessful.¹⁰ Another study found that there has been a rapid increase in vaping content in music videos and tv shows in the past two years.¹¹

Macro Level Considerations

This conversation allows for an opportunity to explore the media's portrayal of minors in a sexualized manner as well as minimizing and dramatizing substance use in entertainment and pop culture. It also allows for a look at the US culture's ambivalence and acceptance of such portrayals.

There is also an opportunity to explore how parent-teacher organizations can work together to stay abreast of pop culture trends that influence students and strategize how to use them as opportunities to identify shifts in student values. Early signs of shifting values allows for successful early detection of substance use.

In an ever changing world where parental influence over student value systems diminishes over time, parents, educators and policy makers must consider the influence communities and media have in molding cultural values. However, it is also important to recognize the responsibility of parents to monitor and mold these values with consequences paired with firm, fair and consistent parenting.

⁶ <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v3i11/TONUMTQxNTYw.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8199904/#B24-ijerph-18-06000>

⁸ <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v3i11/TONUMTQxNTYw.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8199904/#B24-ijerph-18-06000>

¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35162846/>

¹¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33367917/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35800212/>

Could there be a shortage of media influences that promote parent/child conversations and normalize the use of firm, fair and consistent interventions? While families may demonstrate openness and cohesion with their children and their experiences, it is likely that at some point during puberty teens are unlikely to share “everything” they are exposed or introduced to with their parents or trusted adults. This gap can be where risk factors can seed and grow and occur in any family.

As the teens go through their stages of development, some may reorganize family relationships, and emotional distancing can be a shock to what were once communicative and cohesive family systems. The reorganization may include the following:

- Teen rebellion.
- Testing one's value system.
- Realizing that parents and authority figures may not have all the answers or solutions to the ensuing problems.

Executive Producer



Dr. Suzanne Spencer
CEO

Moderator



Teresa Bairos LMFT
Program Director

Research Assistant



Danny Z
Prevention Speaker