

Hello Crocker Families!

I thought I would start off by introducing myself and my background. My name is Bonnie Slater and I am the new counselor at Crocker. I have been in education for over 12 years. I have taught grades First through Eighth. I have been a K-8 counselor. I have taught in Los Angeles, Boston, and Japan. Educating our youth is a passion of mine. I have three small children; twin boys that are four and a daughter that is two. I am extremely excited to be a part of the Crocker team!

Here is my philosophy about counseling at the middle school level. My main role as Crocker's counselor is to be an advocate for every child. This means that I need to make sure that every child is getting the education they deserve. I believe in having a comprehensive school guidance plan. This is the notion of implementing programs that are necessary for Crocker based on statistical data. Part of my obligations as a school counselor is to make programs that are preventions as well as interventions. This year I will be creating programs that are preventative in nature and can reduce conflict before it occurs. I will also run programs that are interventions which help deal with problems that are already occurring. I will be running small groups during lunch because it is an effective way to reach many children at one time. My own philosophy is that brief solution focused therapy works best within the school setting. It is my goal as the school counselor to give my clients the tools they need in order to solve their own problems.

For my first newsletter I thought I would focus on some helpful tips to support your child in middle school.

Tips for Parenting During the Teen Years

Educate Yourself

Read books about teenagers. Think back on your own teen years. Remember your struggles with acne or your embarrassment at developing early — or late. Expect some mood changes in your typically sunny child, and be prepared for more conflict as he or she matures as an individual. Parents who know what's coming can cope with it better. And the more you know, the better you can prepare.

Put Yourself in Your Child's Place

Practice empathy by helping your child understand that it's normal to be a bit concerned or self-conscious, and that it's OK to feel grown-up one minute and like a kid the next.

Pick Your Battles

If teenagers want to dye their hair, paint their fingernails black, or wear funky clothes, think twice before you object. Teens want to shock their parents and it's a lot better to let them do something temporary and harmless; leave the objections to things that really matter, like tobacco, drugs and alcohol, or permanent changes to their appearance.

Ask why your teen wants to dress or look a certain way and try to understand how your teen is feeling. You might also want to discuss how others might perceive them if they look different — help your teen understand how he or she might be viewed.

Set Expectations

Teens will likely act unhappy with expectations their parents place on them. However, they usually understand and need to know that their parents care enough about them to expect certain things such as good grades, acceptable behavior, and adherence to the rules of the house. If parents have appropriate expectations, teens will likely try to meet them. Without reasonable expectations, your teen may feel you don't care about him or her.

Inform Your Teen - and Stay Informed Yourself

The teen years often are a time of experimentation, and sometimes that experimentation includes risky behaviors. Don't avoid the subjects of sex, or drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; discussing these things openly with kids **before** they're exposed to them increases the chance that they'll act responsibly when the time comes. Share your family values with your teen and talk about what you believe is right and wrong.

Know your child's friends — and know their friends' parents. Regular communication between parents can go a long way toward creating a safe environment for all teens in a peer group. Parents can help each other keep track of the kids' activities without making the kids feel that they're being watched.

Know the Warning Signs

A certain amount of change may be normal during the teen years, but too drastic or long-lasting a switch in personality or behavior may signal real trouble — the kind that needs professional help. Watch for one or more of these warning signs:

- extreme weight gain or loss
- sleep problems
- rapid, drastic changes in personality
- sudden change in friends
- skipping school continually
- falling grades
- talk or even jokes about suicide
- signs of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use
- run-ins with the law

Any other inappropriate behavior that lasts for more than 6 weeks can be a sign of underlying trouble, too. You may expect a glitch or two in your teen's behavior or grades during this time, but your A/B student shouldn't suddenly be failing, and your normally outgoing kid shouldn't suddenly become constantly withdrawn. Your doctor or a local counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist can help you find proper counseling.

Respect Kids' Privacy

Some parents, understandably, have a very hard time with this one. They may feel that anything their kids do is their business. But to help your teen become a young adult, you'll need to grant some privacy. If you notice warning signs of trouble, then you can invade your child's privacy until you get to the heart of the problem. But otherwise, it's a good idea to back off.

Start with trust. Let your teen know that you trust him or her. But, if the trust gets broken he or she may enjoy fewer freedoms until the trust is rebuilt.

Monitor What Kids See and Read

TV shows, magazines and books, the Internet — kids have access to tons of information. Be aware of what yours watch and read. Don't be afraid to set limits on the amount of time spent in front of the computer or the TV. Know what they're learning from the media and who they may be communicating with online.

Make Appropriate Rules

Bedtime for a teenager should be age appropriate, just as it was when your child was a baby. Teens still need about 8-9 hours of sleep. Reward your teen for being trustworthy. Does your child keep to a 10 PM curfew on weekends? Move it to 10:30 PM. And does a teen always have to go along on family outings? Encourage a reasonable amount of family time together.

Decide what your expectations are, and don't be insulted when your growing child doesn't always want to be with you. Think back: You probably felt the same way about *your* mom and dad. Reviewed by: [Heidi M. Sallee, MD](#) Date reviewed: January 2011

I look forward to meeting all of you and making your child's year the best it can be. Please do not hesitate to call or email if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Slater

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