

MUSIC *and* TEENS

contributed by Connie George, RN

Music is an integral part of an adolescent's turbulent passage into adulthood. Remember your teens? Was it the Rolling Stones, the Grateful Dead or the Beatles that you played loud enough to cave in your suburban walls? Today's teens are no different.

Profanity had once been considered unacceptable, now, musical lyrics use profanities and make graphic reference to violence, racism, sexism and hate. When does music actually become harmful? Well let's take a look...

It is reported the average adolescent listens to approximately 40 hours of music each week. For those with a healthy self-esteem and outside interests, these lyrics likely have little influence. But for those who struggle with self-esteem issues, this music is attractive and can often times contribute to other problematic behaviors.

Music is clearly a teen-barometer! Get interested in what they are listening to! How to read your teen is a mystery but keep an open dialogue. As you taxi your teen from activity to activity, utilize this time in the car to talk but most importantly, if they talk – you listen. Watch your teen's response while they are listening to their music. Are they singing along and enjoying the beat? Is the song popular among their peers? If so, then they are probably not being adversely affected. If they appear unusually emotional or isolate themselves and listen to the same song over and over, this may indicate an underlying problem.

Teens with little self-esteem may feel a connection to music that expresses anger, hostility or dark despair. If at anytime you notice increasing isolation, sudden acts of violence toward self or others, extended periods of profound sadness, it may be time to contact a behavioral health specialist who is familiar with the behavior of adolescents as they make this transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Teens tell us that if you want to talk to them successfully...

- Do your homework...be observant; see what songs your teen likes. Listen to them yourself before talking with your teen.
- Look for a time when your teen seems relaxed and open to talking with you.
- Use a "nonchalant" approach; try asking, "What do you think about what was just said in the song? *Do not judge their opinion!* And when you offer your thoughts, do so in a non-judgmental way. For example, if the message is sexist, you might say, "It made me uncomfortable because I think there's a lot more to a person than how they look, don't you think?"
- Compromise. Many radio stations play music teens enjoy while omitting those that are offensive. Make a list of them and preset them in your car.
- Finally, if you expect respect, then offer respect in return. Don't judge your teen's choices; talk *with* them, not *at* them; discuss the issues their music raises.

Music is a powerful tool, use it to engage your teen!
But if you find yourself concerned with the choices your teen is making and their behavior, please give us a call at Elliot Behavioral Services at 668-4079, we can help.

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