



Nineline **1-800-999-9999** it's free!

## family

Are you concerned about a child or teen faced with a family conflict like separation, divorce, drug addiction, abused or abusive parents?

### what kind of family issues are young people facing today?

Teens and families face many complex issues today. If you are concerned about a child or teen faced with a family conflict like **separation, divorce, drug addiction, abused or abusive parents** this is the place to talk to someone who can help at the Nineline.

Living in a difficult or conflicted family environment can affect a youth's ability to focus and enjoy regular daily activities such as school and friends. In general, problems can arise or aid to the feeling of a lack of solvable solutions, generational differences, poor communication, changing expectations or lack of trust among family members.

**Separation** is often a couple's first step towards trying to improve their marriage although it can also be the first step towards divorce. It is important the child you care about understand that they are not to blame for their parents' separation. They are adults and are trying to work out problems between themselves the best way they know how. Encourage the child to ask their parents what they hope to achieve by separating and how they can help their parents during this difficult time.

**Divorce** of ones parents may leave one feeling anxious, withdrawn or depressed. These intense feelings may express themselves as shame, anger, grief, rebellion or poor performance in school. Some children describe their parents' divorce as the most painful experience of their childhood. Support the child, and allow them to feel the pain but encourage them not to necessarily act out because of it. If they can't tell their parents how they feel they will need someone they can trust. They may find trust in you or a friend or teacher. They can also contact Nineline for additional assistance. The more effectively they deal with their feelings now the less likely their parents' divorce is to have a bad effect on their relationships or marriage in the future.

**A drug or alcohol addicted parent** is difficult to cope with. If a child you are concerned about has a parent who is struggling with an addiction, it's likely that they are not able to care for the child or give them the attention they need. This is very hard for a teenager to deal with. Remember to make sure the child completely understands that it is not their fault – don't let their parents blame them for their illness. The best way for them to cope is to talk to someone they can trust who may be able to convince their parent(s) to get help. Enable them to take care of themselves as well. Help them get the help they need. It may be appropriate for them to stay somewhere else temporarily. Call Nineline for assistance if you do not feel comfortable contacting the proper authorities.

**An abused parent's** low self-esteem may keep them from seeking help to escape their abusive relationship. They may be anxious and depressed and may even act out by abusing the child or teen you are concerned about. Again, be available for them to talk to and trust. Help them talk to someone who may be willing to talk to their parent(s) and get them the help they need before the situation worsens. They may find it helpful to speak to a counselor at school, who can offer a particular perspective on the problem and possibly help with finding resources.



**An abusive parent** is an emergency situation and the child needs immediate help. Child abuse is against the law. This includes abuse of minors of any age. No parent, stepparent, relative or friend of the family has the right to abuse a child -- either physically or sexually -- not even emotionally. Make sure the child you are concerned about does not feel bad about protecting him or herself. They need to tell someone right away - an adult they trust. If that is you, you need to contact the authorities or Nineline or someone that can help the child out of their current situation. Be sure to continue seeking help until the child is out of the dangerous situation. Remind them that they are not to blame. Their parent's behavior is wrong, and not related to anything they did.

**Parents who nag or criticize** want to know their children are listening. Explain to the child how to show they are listening and understanding their parent's criticism by repeating what they say in a respectful way. Encourage the teen to get their parent to talk about what they did as teenagers - this may remind them of what the child or teen is going through. This may also be the beginning of important dialogue, bonding or repairing ties necessary for the parent-child relationship.

**Parents who are overprotective** usually make rules because they love their child or teen and don't want them to get hurt. Encourage the teen to keep their parents up-to-date on the important things going on in their life and introduce their parents to their friends. Help the teen understand that their parent needs to feel that they understand their fears, but that the teen should also address their point of view. If the teen does not feel comfortable or feels they will get too upset, advise them to write their parents a letter. "I understand you think it's not safe for me to go out late on Saturday night but I promise to tell you where I'm going and who I'm going with." Discuss with the teen that it is a mature decision on their part to dialogue everyone's concerns and that their parents will appreciate the gesture and quite possibly have more trust in them.

**Parents who fight** sometimes forget that their fighting affects everyone in their household. Encourage the teen to let their parents know that their fighting bothers them at an appropriate time (not during a fight). Try to understand each one's point of view, but don't take sides. If the parents are insensitive to the child's feelings -- let the child or teen know that it is ok to go for a walk, phone a friend or do something else to avoid watching them fight. They do not have to be apart of it. If their fights are physical, the child or teen really needs to talk to someone; you, a relative, a counselor, a family friend before it gets out of control -- especially if there is a danger that the child or their siblings will get hurt. **If a physical fight breaks out, the child/teen should be instructed to call 911. If you know of a physical fight between parents or caregivers, you should call 911 and Children's Protective Services afterwards.**

**A parent's remarriage** can be extremely difficult on a child. To strength a bond between the child and the adults in the situation, suggest they do something nice for their stepparent. This is also a great icebreaker. Encourage the child or teen to try to understand and also to let their parents know they understand that they are in love and need time alone. Both will be grateful - and warmer as a result. If the child or teen feels left out, urge them to talk to their parent and find an appropriate compromise.



## what are the warning signs?

If you are a direct caregiver or parent, put yourself in your child's position and see if you can remember what it was like to be their age. Open up a dialogue with them and explain to them the reason for what is going on in your life and what you need from them to help you out. Then ask them what they need from you to help them out.

If you answer yes to two or more of the questions below, you may find it beneficial to seek family counseling.

If you are a concerned adult in a child's life and are wondering if the child is having problems at home, use this questionnaire as a starting point to open up a dialogue with the child. Talk to them and ask them questions. Find out if going home after school is a positive or negative experience. Maybe you can speak to their caregiver to open the floor up for dialogue between the two.

*(Note: This quiz is not meant to replace a clinical diagnosis by a licensed physician. It is only meant to give an indication of a possible problem.)*

1. Are you, the parent or caregiver, too demanding?
2. Do you put too many limitations on your child?
3. Does your child get on your nerves or irritate you?
4. Do you lack trust in your child?
5. Do you argue regularly with your spouse in front of your child?
6. Do you find it impossible to have an open relationship with your child in which you both discuss your emotional and physical needs?
7. Do you use alcohol or drugs to excess? Do you use in front of your child?
8. Are you a victim of verbal or physical abuse? Is your child?
9. Do you verbally or physically abuse your child?
10. Are you constantly angry towards your child?
11. Do you feel violent towards your child?



## what can I say or do to help the child or teen I care about?

**Nineline** can help talk you through the proper channels to help the youth you are concerned with out of their current situation.

When you're ready, we will help you figure out what to do to solve your teens' relationship-related problems and or conflicts. Just call the **Covenant House Nineline** at **1-800-999-9999**; TTY: 1-800-999-9915 or follow this link to the **Nineline forum on family**. The Nineline staff is ready to talk with you *any time* of day. You talk. We'll listen.

### **Other resources we recommend include:**

**Child Help USA**, 1-800-422-4453, provides crisis counseling, referrals and help in reporting child abuse.