



Gouvernement du Québec  
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux  
**Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie**



**Teenagers and Parents:**

**Bringing Together  
Two Solitudes**

**CPLT**



**MAISON JEAN LAPOINTE**

## **Le Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie**

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The main mandate of the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie (CPLT) is to advise the Minister of Health and Social Services with respect to the major policies that should be retained in the fight against addiction and propose priority actions or preferable areas of intervention.

Aside from the brainstorming and exchanges conducted within its ranks or with its advisory committee, it relies on various resources in order to carry out its mandate: it commissions studies, collects the opinions of various stakeholders and experts in related fields, analyzes the data published on the development of the problem in Quebec (e.g.: health surveys).

With a view to contributing to the transfer of knowledge, it regularly publishes the results of studies it commissions, of consultations, and of its brainstorming.

## **Maison Jean Lapointe**

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The main mission of the Maison Jean Lapointe is treatment of alcoholism and other addictions. However, it must not only treat the problems, but also prevent them.

It sees the family as the ideal place where such prevention can be exercised. In addition to its program for families affected by alcoholism and other addictions, the Maison Jean Lapointe supports various initiatives primarily aimed at preventing addiction.

Legal Deposit

ISBN: 2-550-37565-3

National Library of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

# Introduction

This brochure<sup>1</sup> proposes capsules to help parents and teenagers overcome common adolescent difficulties.

The first capsule is specifically aimed at parents of teenagers. Despite the difficulty that parents may have in acting on all fronts, they must acknowledge the importance of their involvement and believe in the effectiveness of their actions. The following three capsules are aimed at teenagers. They deal with three concerns shared by many teens and propose concrete ways of facing them.

Of course, choosing to propose capsules to both teenagers and their parents in the same brochure is not by chance. In fact, we hope that there will be a little curiosity on both sides; we want the parents to read the capsules for the teens and the teens to read those for the parents. Perhaps this will allow for improving communication and thus reduce the generation gap.

Aside from their own merit, these capsules are part of an overall strategy for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse by youth. It is with this concern in mind that the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, in collaboration with the Maison Jean Lapointe, proposes these capsules in a format that is easy to consult and keep.

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this brochure is taken from a document entitled “La famille : un trésor à préserver”, published in 1999 by the CPLT and the Maison Jean Lapointe. This document is available from these organizations upon request.

## CAPSULE AIMED AT PARENTS

### Being the parent of a teenager



When your child was younger, you knew that some of your decisions were not what he or she wanted, but you succeeded in making your point of view understood and this decision was respected. But now, your decisions are contested. You don't have the last word anymore. Gradually, friends become more important than you. Welcome to the world of teenagers' parents!

### Achieving a new balance

Adolescence is a period in life where self-assertion and differentiation from other family members becomes important. This assertion is often perceived by parents as rejection on the part of their child. Parents hesitate to say what they think for fear of severing the relationship. They know that their teenager must make decisions, but they believe — with reason — that they still have their say.

Clearly present to the teenager the boundaries that you want to see respected (what you accept, what you don't accept), as well as the consequences that you foresee if these rules are broken. Give your point of view, the reason for these boundaries. Invite him or her to ask questions so that he or she understands the rules agreed upon. Listen to his or her point of view and take it into account. Through this exchange, your child will see that you care about him or her, but also that there are values that are important to you.

Being the parent of a teenager is like learning to live with a child all over again, whose transformation challenges family harmony.

# Getting the harmony back

- Be patient and develop ways to not let the pressure increase for you. Your teenager doesn't always listen when you would like him or her to? It's better to wait for the right moment than to launch a conversation that will lead straight to a major fight.
- Learn to include your teenager in decisions that concern him or her: this will teach him or her to see the pros and cons of choices that he or she may make.
- Sometimes teenagers use strong words with their parents. Try to read between the lines and address the feelings hidden behind a vocabulary that may be difficult to accept.
- Congratulate your teenager on his or her successes. Let him or her know that the time you spent together was enjoyable. If you don't recall the last time you did this, it's time to do it again. It feels good...for the teenager...and the parent.
- Let your teenager know that he or she can count on you if he or she needs help: this could make a great difference when he or she is having difficulties.
- Know how to be a model and set the right example, particularly regarding alcohol or drug consumption: your words and actions have a great influence on your family members (even if your teenager seems to ignore them).

## A few suggestions

- Talk about things that concern you (drugs, alcohol, sexuality) before they come up. Broach these subjects in an interesting manner, for example, during a television program where an actor is drinking alcohol. Take advantage of the situation to ask your teenager what effect alcohol seems to be having on the actor or if what is shown seems realistic.
- Know where your teen is and who he or she is with. Teach him or her to provide you with this information: you must be able to reach him or her. In this way, you are exercising your role of “parental supervision” and you show your child that you are interested in what he or she is doing. Set the example yourself by indicating to your child your comings and goings.
- Be clear when expressing your disagreement. Express it in a way that shows your concern for the well-being and safety of your child. For example: “When you come home late without calling, I think you’re in trouble and I worry”.
- Teach your youth the three steps described later in this brochure to help him or her make decisions. Help him or her make decisions by asking the questions that correspond to the three steps and by using the three decision-making steps yourself.
- Finally, talk about what you are going through with other parents of teenagers whom you trust. You will see that you are not alone in dealing with these emotions and it will make you feel better. In addition, you will probably receive good advice that may be useful during the next “confrontation”.

# Food for thought

When pre-teens aged 9 to 11 are asked if their parents know who they are with when not at home, 61% of them answer that their parents always know who they are with. When teenagers aged 13 to 15 are asked this question, only 35% of them still give this information to their parents, one-third of all teenagers.

However, if mothers of pre-teens are asked the same question, 85% of them say they always know who their child is with, while 67% of mothers of teenagers are convinced they know who their child is with.

Numerous studies have shown the link between parental supervision and behavioural problems in youth. In fact, the probability of consuming psychotropic drugs is very high in youth whose parents do not clearly express the boundaries they impose upon their child, whose punishment is abusive or whose parents do not know their child's friends and where he or she goes.

## CAPSULES AIMED AT TEENAGERS

### Resolving problems in adolescence



Every day, you have to make decisions. In some cases, you do it without thinking: what music to listen to while studying or what film to see next. Other decisions require more time and thought: will you accept a job offer; do you want to go out with this boy or girl you don't really know; study or go see your friends? Usually when making a decision, you must follow three steps: clarification, consideration, choice. These steps are referred to as "the three Cs."

### Three steps to making a good decision:

1 → Clarify the problem to be resolved and the decision to be made. First, ask yourself: "What exactly is the nature of the problem and what information do I need in order to make my decision?"

2 → Consider the different options and each of their consequences. Make a list of possible solutions and think of what would happen if you chose them. What are the pros and cons of each solution?

3 → Select the solution that appears to be the best and implement it.

Follow these three steps. You will obviously need a little time and reflection before acting, but it will enable you to be more certain of your decisions. If someone disagrees with your decision, it will be easier for you to explain your decision. You will therefore be more confident.

# Influence of others in adolescence




“I’m not influenced at all by others. I decide what I want to do and when”.

This is what most teenagers answer when asked the following question: Are you influenced by anyone in your decisions? But is this a true reflection of what goes on every day? Is it not important, in many situations, to do like your friends? Is it reasonable to think that you were never influenced by advertising, your parents, one of your teachers or by your friends? The influence of others is not bad in itself and all of us — adults, children and adolescents — are influenced in our daily decisions. The important thing is to preserve your ability to choose how and by whom you accept to be influenced.

## Can you be influenced?


There are several ways of influencing your decision. Here are a few.



**Compliments:** Someone congratulates you, says nice things to you before asking for something.

**Demonstration:** Someone explains the logic of the benefits of making such or such decision.

**Authority:** Someone shows you that people in authority act a certain way and makes you adopt a certain behaviour or do certain things.



The promise of popularity: Someone promises that people will approve if you make that decision.

The promise of a gift or treat.

The threat of punishment.

Insistence or harassment: Someone asks you again and again until you accept.

Guilt: Someone makes you feel uncomfortable for not accepting.

So? Can you identify the tactics that your friends use most often with you? Be observant! It will take some time for you to recognize them. Have you noticed some tactics used by your parents? Your teachers? Talk with them about it: they will surely point out the ones you use most often with them.

## How to resist?

It's important that you be able to assert yourself and express what you really want, but it is not easy to say NO. Here are a few concrete ways of doing so.

Simply say NO, and if someone insists, repeat it in other ways "No thank you. I'm not interested, etc." If they still insist, leave. This way, you will get a stronger sense of control over your life.

Say things as they are: "I don't feel like it".

This way of doing things can sometimes be useful when you are afraid of hurting the person to whom you are saying NO.

Give an excuse: "Unfortunately, I already chose something else".

Try stalling: "Not now... Maybe some other time".

Change the subject; start talking about something else.

Ignore the person who is speaking to you; show indifference.

Avoid the situation, especially if you know that it could happen again with this person. You know your own ability to resist the influence of certain friends. Remember how you felt used after doing something against your will with these friends.

Observe your group of friends closely and ask yourself which ones try less often to insist in persuading you. Don't you feel more comfortable in their company? Why don't you try to get to know them better?

Try the ways that work best for you. Perhaps you will see that some are easier than others. It's your choice!



# Teenagers and Communication



If only it could always be easy to chat with friends or certain adults! No arguments, no misunderstandings: everything would always be clear and we would get along with each other perfectly. But that is not always the case. Often, communication becomes confused between friends, boys and girls or even between adults. Then we feel very unfortunate and hope to be able to regain better relations. How can we avoid these situations and develop better communication skills? Knowing how to communicate not only makes it possible to have a good relationship with friends, parents and teachers, but also makes us more interesting to others.

## Expressing yourself and being understood

Communicating well with another person rests on two assumptions: the person transmitting the message does so clearly and the person receiving it is capable of listening and correctly interpreting what was transmitted to him or her. In this way there is a “transmitter” (the person speaking) and a “receiver” (the person listening).

When you are the “transmitter” your messages may not be well understood by your “receivers” (friends, parents, etc.). Anger or embarrassment could prevent you from being clear. Emotions (anger, embarrassment, etc.) or even feeling intimidated can prevent you from expressing how you feel properly. It then becomes difficult for the person who is listening to understand what you want to express.

It’s at this point that misunderstandings occur. A misunderstanding is a communication failure: what you say is misunderstood by your “receiver” or what you are expressing to him or her is not the reflection of what you truly want to say to him or her.

Starting a conversation with a person we don't know (but in whom we are interested), giving or receiving compliments — these are communication situations that may turn to misunderstanding.

Here are relatively simple suggestions to get you out of these delicate situations. Most examples refer to situations with friends. However, these measures may also be useful with your parents, teachers or even your employer.

## A few suggestions

To avoid misunderstandings you must be clear and precise. For example, instead of saying to your friend "I'll come by", tell him or her: "I will be at your house at 7 o'clock".

Does your body language express the same thing as your words? For example, when you say to a friend: "It really doesn't bother me", but you are very nervous or can't look them in the eye, what do you think this friend understands? Your words or your body language???

It's better to give your opinion clearly, even if your friend doesn't like it: "I don't want to go there," rather than: "I don't know if I feel like it". It's clear and doesn't lead to misunderstandings.

Ask questions when you don't understand what your friends are trying to say or even to check if you understood: "Do you mean...?", "If I understand..." If you don't, you risk getting false impressions that could harm your friendships or love relationships.

When you see by your friend's reactions that what you said to him or her was very disturbing, see what he or she understood. "What do you understand when I say this to you?" If you do it right away, you will prevent the uneasiness you saw from getting worse and worse.

If you were misunderstood, try repeating what you wanted to say in other words. This way, you have a greater chance of being understood.

When we like someone a lot, it's sometimes difficult to express our disagreement. You can do it by talking from your point of view: "When you ask me to do this, I feel obligated to do it even if I don't feel like it and don't like it". It's a way of saying that you don't agree without attacking the other person.

# Teenagers and Parents: Bringing Together Two Solitudes

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is published by the Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie and the Maison Jean Lapointe.

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If you believe that your family is affected by alcoholism, drug addiction or other types of problems, you are not alone — ask for help.

Professional resources are available in all regions of Quebec. Contact your local community service centre (CLSC), the Maison Jean Lapointe or call the Drugs: Help and Referral line toll free from anywhere in Quebec.

Montreal and surrounding area:

**(514) 527-2626**

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**1-800-265-2626**

The english translation is a courtesy of the RCMP Drug Awareness Service — Quebec

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