TALKING TO YOUR KID

A Parent's Guide to Spotting Struggles, Starting the Conversation, and Knowing Who to Call

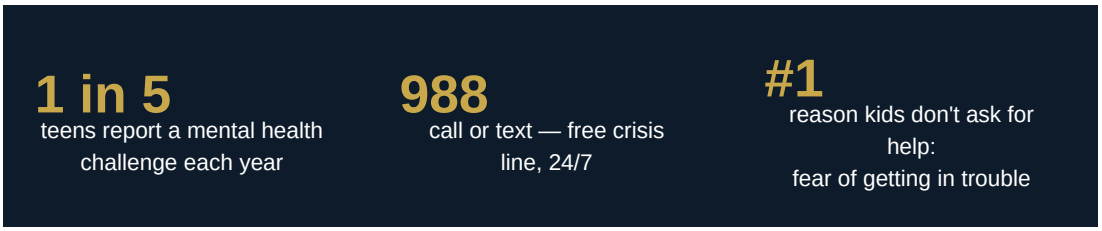
Behavioral warning signs · Spotting vaping & substance use · Scripts for hard conversations · Crisis lines & therapist resources · Videos to learn from

A free resource from the Bulletproof Grace Foundation
From Survival to Purpose

Why This Guide Exists

Every parent wants to know their kid is safe — physically, mentally, and emotionally. But kids don't always come out and say when something's wrong. Sometimes the first sign is a mood, a habit, a look, or a smell. This guide is built to help you notice those signs earlier, know how to open up a conversation without it turning into a fight, and know exactly who to call when it's bigger than you can handle alone.

This isn't about catching your kid doing something wrong. It's about staying close enough, and calm enough, that they come to you before things get worse.



A note on this guide: it's meant to support you, not replace a doctor, therapist, or counselor. If you're ever unsure whether something is an emergency, treat it like one — call 988 or 911.

1. Spotting Behavioral Changes

Teens change moods fast — that part is normal. What you're watching for isn't one bad day, it's a **pattern that doesn't go back to normal**, or a change that shows up alongside other signs.

Typical Teen Behavior	Worth a Closer Look
Wants more privacy, closes the door	Actively hides phone/screen, panics if you walk in unannounced
Sleeps in on weekends	Sleep pattern flips completely (up all night, unreachable all day)
Occasional attitude or sarcasm	Sudden, ongoing rage or complete emotional shutdown
Drop in one grade or one class	Grades falling across the board, skipping school
Wants space from family	Pulling away from *everyone*, including friends they used to love
Talks about how school stresses them out	Says things like "what's the point" or "it doesn't matter anymore"
New friend group	Sudden secrecy about who they're with or where they are

Trust the pattern over the moment. One bad grade, one slammed door, one bad mood — that's a teenager. Several of these at once, especially lasting more than 2 weeks, is your cue to lean in.

2. Signs Your Kid Might Be Vaping or Using Substances

Physical Signs

- Unexplained sweet or fruity smell on clothes, backpack, or breath (many vapes are scented)
- Dry mouth, unusual thirst, frequent nosebleeds, or a persistent cough
- Red or glazed eyes, dilated or pinpoint pupils
- Unexplained weight or appetite changes
- Small burns or unusual marks on fingers or clothing

Behavioral & Environmental Signs

- Unfamiliar devices that look like USB drives, pens, or highlighters (common vape disguises)
- Increased use of air freshener, cologne, gum, or mints — especially right after being alone
- Secretive phone use, deleting messages, or new online friend groups you don't recognize
- Missing money, or selling personal items for cash
- Sudden change in friend group paired with defensiveness about where they've been

If You Find Something

Stay calm first — your reaction in the first 60 seconds decides whether they shut down or stay talking

Ask, don't accuse — "I found this — can you help me understand?" opens more doors than "I know what this is"

Loop in support early — a pediatrician or counselor can help you figure out next steps without it becoming a punishment-only conversation

3. How to Start the Conversation

The goal in a hard conversation isn't to win — it's to keep the door open so they come back next time. Below are starting scripts for common situations. Adjust them to sound like *you*, not a script.

If you suspect vaping or substance use

"I'm not here to yell. I found something and I want to understand what's going on."

"You're not in trouble for talking to me honestly — you're in trouble if I find out and you didn't."

Why it works: Leads with curiosity instead of accusation, and removes the fear that honesty = punishment.

If they've been withdrawn or in a low mood

"I've noticed you've seemed really far away lately. You don't have to explain it — I just want you to know I see it."

"You don't have to be okay right now. I just want to know I'm someone you can be not-okay in front of."

Why it works: Removes pressure to perform 'fine,' which is often what keeps kids quiet the longest.

If you suspect bullying

"Has anyone been treating you in a way that doesn't feel right — online or in person?"

"You didn't cause this, and we're going to figure it out together, not just react tonight."

Why it works: Names the behavior as the problem, not the kid's response to it.

General framework for any hard topic

"I noticed [specific thing]. Help me understand what's going on."

"I'm not trying to catch you — I'm trying to help you."

"What do you need from me right now: to just listen, or to help fix something?"

Why it works: "I noticed" statements are non-accusatory. Asking what they need respects that not every hard conversation needs a solution in the moment.

4. When It's Time to Call a Professional

Call for help right away — same day, not "we'll see" — if your kid:

- Talks about wanting to die, disappear, or not exist, even if it sounds like a joke
- Gives away belongings, says goodbye in a way that feels final, or talks about not being a burden anymore
- Shows signs of self-harm (unexplained cuts, burns, or covering up skin even in warm weather)
- Has a substance use pattern that's affecting school, safety, or health
- Describes feeling hopeless, trapped, or like nothing will get better

If It's an Emergency Right Now

Call or text 988 — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — free, 24/7, trained counselors, talks with kids and teens too

Text HOME to 741741 — Crisis Text Line — for when talking out loud is too hard

Call 911 or go to the ER — if there is immediate danger to your child's life

You are not overreacting by calling. These lines exist exactly for moments like this, and reaching out early is never the wrong call.

5. Resources for Parents — Who to Call

Crisis & Immediate Support

New Mexico & National Crisis Lines

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988, free, 24/7

Crisis Text Line — text HOME to 741741

NM Crisis & Access Line — 1-855-662-7474, 24/7 free crisis counseling for any age

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline — 1-800-422-4453, free, 24/7

Finding a Therapist or Counselor

- Manzanita Counseling Center (UNM) — fully free counseling clinic in Albuquerque for kids, teens & families
- Psychology Today's therapist finder (psychologytoday.com) — filter by "children/adolescents" and your insurance
- Your pediatrician — can refer to a child psychiatrist or therapist and rule out physical causes first
- NM Human Services Dept. Behavioral Health line — 1-855-662-7474 — can point you to local providers who take Medicaid or are sliding-scale

For Substance Use Specifically

- SAMHSA National Helpline — 1-800-662-4357, free, confidential, 24/7, treatment referral for families
- Nar-Anon / Al-Anon Family Groups — free peer support specifically for family members of someone using substances
- NM Corrections Reentry Division & NM Reentry Center — if your teen is involved in the justice system, these connect to family-inclusive recovery support

For You, the Parent

Supporting a struggling kid is heavy. NAMI New Mexico (National Alliance on Mental Illness) runs free family support groups so you're not carrying this without backup. You can't pour from an empty cup — getting your own support isn't optional, it's part of the plan.

6. Videos & Channels to Learn From

These are creators and channels known for practical, non-judgmental content on talking to kids. Search their names directly on YouTube — search terms are given since exact video links change over time.

- **Dr. Becky Kennedy / Good Inside** — search "Good Inside Dr. Becky" for short, practical scripts for hard parenting moments
- **Child Mind Institute** — search "Child Mind Institute YouTube" for expert videos on anxiety, mood changes, and when to seek help
- **HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics)** — search "HealthyChildren AAP" for pediatrician-reviewed videos on teen behavior and substance use
- **Partnership to End Addiction** — search "Partnership to End Addiction talking to your kid" for scripts specifically about vaping and substance use conversations
- **The Jed Foundation** — search "Jed Foundation" for youth mental health and suicide-prevention content aimed at parents and teens

Search terms are given instead of direct links because video availability changes — search the creator name directly on YouTube to find their current library.

My Notes

Use this page to jot down what you're noticing, dates, and follow-up calls to make.

A Note From BGF

We are the shield that stands between you and the obstacles. If your family needs more than this guide — housing, legal help, or someone to just talk to — reach out. This is what we're here for.

Contact Bulletproof Grace Foundation

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