

TOXIC BONDS

HOW RELATIONSHIPS CAN CHANGE TEENS

High school: a time of discovering yourself as the people around you do the same. As students develop into the adults they want to become, personalities can clash and issues can arise. Relationships are the foundation of most people's lives, a major resource for teens to fall back on in times of crisis. However, it's easy for these relationships to slip into something more dangerous, where instead of giving support, it is ripped away. Toxicity can show up in any relationship, whether it be with family, friends, or even with romantic relationships. All three can change the student, for better or for worse, and leave a lasting impact that they carry with them for the rest of their life.

Parents' relationships with their children are major factors in making a teen who they are. They not only mold the way their children will interact with other people, but also shift the perspective they might have on those relationships. Since parents are a part of everyday life, when tension exists in the filial connection, the toll of this tension breaks down into a much more toxic and unhealthy relationship. Kimmy Hill* '20 said, "Toxicity definitely lies in the communication and the different environments that [my parents] grew up in."

Without a stable connection to be able to convey certain topics and issues, the strain only increases. Because most parents control every aspect of their child's life, the influence they have puts them in a position to severely affect the way their child will perceive the relationship they have with their parents and the ones they will create with others. Aden McMahan '22 states, "Parents can be toxic due to the lack of care and love in the home."

That absence of compassion in a relationship makes the household that much more difficult, and that pain can be translated from home into other aspects of the teen's life. "I think that the biggest aspect that makes our relationship toxic is the fake relationship that we show the world compared to the actual relationships that we have with each other," stated Hill.

Parents have access to the personal lives of their children, so every argument or toxic occurrence that happens within the confines of the relationship's environment would devastate the teens mentality. The toxicity of a parent-child relationship, whether it be verbal, emotional, or physical, would never be seen beyond the home, making it impossible for the teen to seek help. Since parent interactions mostly occur at the beginning and end of each day, teens who face difficult and toxic households learn to distance themselves and dread any kind of communication.

Sibling relationships are also a major influencer on teens. Siblings are a part of every aspect of a student's life; They're at home, at school, and a part of every facet of life. According to Rowan Ehn '22, "They know everything that happens at home." Since most siblings grow up side by side, they have a massive influence on an individual's personality. Siblings are in a unique position in relation to each other, as they are more permanent than most friendships. Since they typically share so much time together, it offers a unique opportunity for them to grow very close together, much closer than most friendships and even romantic relationships.

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Since siblings are often the most foundational relationships for teenagers, it can cause serious damage when sibling relationships fall through or become toxic. Because most siblings encounter each other on a daily basis, having to struggle through interactions with each other several times a day can decimate the mental health of a teenager. Standley Lake High School counselor Angie Green stated, “the most telltale sign of a toxic relationship is when normal everyday interactions become dreaded.”

Friends are important to every person, but they can also become the most toxic for students. Green stated, “I see a lot of students involved in friendships that are toxic.”

Since students are constantly surrounded by their friends, it can be hard to break away or confront that person. “They cause so much hurt and drama, but then refuse to break away or give some breathing room for the other party to realize what they’re doing,” said Green.

Many things can cause destructive friendships. “Even though I have good friends that I love, we have some differing viewpoints on things whereas I generally don’t have different viewpoints than my family,” said Ehn.

Although friendships can cause many issues in a student’s life, they also hold the potential to leave a positive impact on young people. “My friends’ relationships are what I truly do rely on. They are the only support and base in my life.” said McMahan.

Choosing nontoxic friends can be difficult, especially when students don’t know the signs of toxic relationships. “If one person feels unhappy, [that they are constantly] being watched, keeping scorecards, feeling always at fault, too much drama, that is not a healthy relationship.” said Green. Spotting toxicity from the beginning can also be difficult. Green says, “Pick friends who put in as much effort to relationships as you do. Hang out with friends that reflect and share your personal morals and values. Give your energy and time to friends who deserve and appreciate what you have to give.”

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Another big relationship type is romance. High school is often the first place that students engage in their first serious romantic relationships, utilizing high school as a time for exploring what each teen wants from a significant other. However, since most teens lack relationship experience or an understanding of the basic ideas of a healthy relationship, teenage romance can easily slip into toxicity. Since pop culture places romance in the limelight, it’s difficult to escape, and the pressure to be in a romantic relationship leads to an even higher chance of teens becoming trapped in a bad situation. Green says, “Move slowly to make sure that you are remaining true to yourself as you navigate all relationships.”

The relationships that teens make are a reflection of who they are, and in turn shape the individuals they will eventually become. Growing up, the teens of today face toxicity with their family, friends, and romantic partners; it follows them from home, to school, and into the depths of their mental state.

Though the situation seems bleak, there is hope. Stable communication, surrounding yourself with supportive friends, and knowing your own value all leads towards the building of the foundation of a healthy relationship. McMahan states that, “Good relationships get you through your life because you have someone else to depend on. And when you have someone else to depend on, when you go through tough times, they won’t just vanish on you.” Even though the toxic relationships teens endure leave a deep mark, the prospect of brighter and healthier connections make the wait worthwhile.

*Name has been changed for anonymity.

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RELATIONSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS

83% of adults state they’ve held onto friendships longer than healthy to avoid confrontation.



79% of people report having had a toxic friend at some point in their life.

1.5 million high school students in the U.S. admit to being intentionally hit or physically harmed in the last year by someone they were romantically involved with.



One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner.

Over 1 in 4 people are dissatisfied with their family relationships, with 28% wanting a closer relationship with a relative.

