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Official Statement

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Department offers tools to understand, support teens

Alaskans encouraged to reach out to young people in their lives

(Anchorage) — Between 1996 and 2006, the most recent year of state data, 501 Alaska teens died due to accidental or self-inflicted injury. While teens can be smart and capable, they are still developing their understanding that risky behaviors can have permanent consequences. Teens are also still developing appropriate coping skills, and may take unnecessary risks that threaten their health and well-being if they are struggling with something in their lives such as emotional stress due to school, peer relationships or situations at home.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services encourages parents and other caring adults to reach out to the young people they know and start conversations. Along with safety precautions such as limiting access to medications and guns, this is another important way to support and protect our teens. Maintaining a caring relationship helps young people feel comfortable sharing what's going on in their lives and anything that's on their minds.

"Puberty and major changes occurring in the adolescent brain motivate teens to seek new experiences and excitement, but they may not realize or consider the potential consequences of the risks they are taking," said Linda Chamberlain, a state public health specialist in the area of adolescent brain development. "Adults need to also consider that teens are much more likely to take risks in the presence of other teens. Teens need adults in their lives to help them make good choices and maximize their brain potential during this critical period of development."

"Every teen represents the potential of a wonderful life, full of promise and possibility," said department Commissioner Bill Hogan. "There is nothing sadder than the loss of a young person, and our sympathies go out to everyone touched by such a tragedy. I encourage every parent and adult who works with teens to review this material. Being open and having the right response at the right time can make an important difference in the decisions a teenager makes."

Here are resources to help parents and adults establish open relationships, broach difficult topics and better understand why some teens engage in risky behaviors.

- **Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style:** A book on helping kids succeed and avoid risky behaviors. Page 152 is "Top Ten Things Teens Want Parents to Know," created by Chugiak High School students. Available through schools, or Alaska ICE (Initiative for Community Engagement): <http://www.alaskaice.org/store.php>

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- **The Amazing Adolescent Brain: What every Parent and Caregiver Needs to Know:** This article by Linda Chamberlain, Ph.D., of DHSS, is on the [Institute for Safe Families](#) Web site. [Click here](#) for a pdf.
- **“Kids These Days!”:** Alaska Public Radio Talk of Alaska shows about helping teens develop healthy relationships and how parents can prevent and deal with alcohol and drug experimentation. <http://www.alaskaice.org/radio.php>
- **Talk With Your Kids About Tough Issues:** These booklets by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now give parents and guardians reasons to talk to kids 8-12 about sex, HIV/AIDS, violence, drugs and alcohol, and examples of kid questions and parent answers. <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/booklet.html>
- **Information on risky behaviors:** This U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site has information on a number of risky behaviors that teens can become involved in, including reckless driving, dangerous stunts, alcohol or drug abuse, ‘the choking game,’ and more. Go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/> and search for topics of interest.
- **Inside the Teenage Brain:** Science on what’s going on in the teenage brain: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/>
- **Navigating the Teen Years:** Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. <http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/productDetails.aspx?ProductID=17401>

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