

Overcoming Shopping Addiction

by Dr. Denise Wood, M. A., Psy. D.

Have you ever wondered if your teen might have a shopping addiction? Do you need advice for how you can help your teen overcome their shopping addiction? By looking at the psychology behind shopping addictions, Dr. Denise Wood M.A., Psy.D explains how we can understand the causes of shopping addictions and how you can help your teen overcome the addiction.

Does your teenager have a shopping addiction? What are the causes of shopping addictions in teens?

In the study of neuropsychology we learn that we all have dopamine receptors in our brain's reward center. There is a part of the limbic system that stimulates emotions and memories. The five senses in the limbic system are feeling, fleeing, fighting, sexual desire, and feeding. All of these are part of a dopamine rush or dopamine high.

These are all primitive emotions and we have evolved past that point. Today there are other senses, such as; shopping that may stimulate the dopamine hypothesis. So every time you shop your neurons and electrons are firing, and you experience a dopamine rush.

Over time your brain will crave this high--and a teen may lose control over their shopping behavior and crave the dopamine high so severely that they become a shopping addict. A shopping gene may also play a part in teenage shopping addiction. If a teen had an allele gene to certain dopamine receptors, they are more likely to identify with the shopping addiction than those who do not have this gene.

Let's also take a look at the atmosphere, which the teen shopping addict was raised. Was the teen rewarded with shopping when they felt down, depressed, hopeless and helpless? Was the teen rewarded for good grades or doing well in sports by shopping? Was shopping emphasized as a way to feel better due to poor self-esteem? Is there a history of addiction in the family? Has shopping become a competition among a group of friends? So now we have examined the genes as well as the environment as a precursor for the teen shopping addict.

What type of impact can a teen's shopping addiction have on their overall life? Teen shopping addicts may fail to fulfill major obligations at school, home, or work. They may start neglecting their schoolwork and their grades may start slipping. They may neglect or lie about their household chores so they can go shopping. They may call in sick to work at a part time job to spend time shopping with friends. They may develop legal problems such as stealing money from others to support their shopping addiction.

Some shopping addicts go as far as to shoplift if they can't afford the items and have decided they have to have them. Some teens may lie to their loved ones to get money for school activities when they are really spending the money on their shopping addiction.

Due to all or some of the above the shopping addict may create constant family arguments and family strife. In addition, the teen shopping addict may have a hard time keeping friends as they may alienate others through their lies or inconsistencies.

Teen shopping addicts often fall into a depression after the endorphin rush of shopping has dissipated. They may feel depressed and lonely knowing that it was only a temporary fix for their feelings of depression or inadequacy. The teen shopping addict

may experience mood swings due to the emotional roller coaster they have placed themselves on. If the shopping teen addict has credit cards they may go into debt or cause others to go into debt if they are using other's credit cards. Often a teen shopping addict will put themselves or others into a bankruptcy situation.

What can parents do to help their teen overcome a shopping addiction? The first step is to get your teenage shopping addict to admit that they have a problem. Make sure that you are ready for your shopping addict to deny they have a problem. Often parents are in denial with their teen about the shopping addiction because they do not want to deal with the problem either.

Often the parent(s) of a teenage shopping addict will punish the teen, thinking that this will make the problem go away. However, often punishment to the teen shopping addict means that they will become clever at concealing their shopping addiction. They will lie, sneak, and steal to avoid the no shopping consequences and keep shopping.

Instead of punishment, help is needed. Seek out a professional. Professional therapy can identify triggers and issues that are plaguing the addict. Find a support group for your teenage shopping addict. If you can't find this in a small town, search for help online. Psychological studies have shown that professional treatment followed by group therapy is the most effective way for a teenage shopping addict to overcome their addiction.

Above all parents, your most important contribution to your teen suffering from a shopping addiction is support and encouragement.

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