

RISK-AVERT
parents

Parents Handbook 2020/21



Introduction

Parenting teenagers is tough, for many parents this will be the most difficult period in their parenting journey.

How many of us would have imagined that at 3am with a screaming baby!

But parenting a teenager is just as alien an experience as parenting a baby.

Unfortunately for many families there is far less information and support available during this time. It's almost as because we have parented a 'child' for 13 years that we will automatically be able to then parent this child as they journey into adolescence and into young adulthood.

We don't believe that this is true for all families and Risk-Avert aims to offer support to parents like you who may be finding your relationship with your teenage child difficult.

Key Points

- **All parents find the transition to adolescence challenging**
- **Many parents have difficulties parenting teenage children**
- **Asking for help is a strength not a weakness**
- **Your children need your support now more than ever**
- **Just because teenagers look like adults it doesn't mean they are**

Adolescence

Adolescence is a time of immense change for children, as they mature they are exposed to different experiences, opportunities and challenges.

Social, emotional and physical changes happen at this time along with changes in relationships, priorities and pressures.

The relationship with your child will change during this period and your influence will not be the only one, which your child experiences, but it remains an important and crucial one.

During this time, our brains change significantly and this is an important element of healthy human development, this is why adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, get into accidents and misinterpret social cues and emotions.

It can be very useful to think back to your own adolescent years, did you act, as you do know?

Did you always make sensible adult decisions?

Did you take more risks?

Key Points

- **Changes in adolescents are not an excuse for behavior, teenagers can still know right from wrong**
- **Even with these changes in the brain, teenagers can still make good decisions**
- **By understanding these changes parents can help understand and help their teenage children**
- **When you ask 'What were you thinking?' maybe they weren't?**
- **Due to the changes in adolescence, arguments and disagreements can be common**
- **Focusing on big issues rather than smaller ones can be more effective (more on this later)**

Managing Teenage Behaviour

Managing the behaviour of teenagers is very different to managing the behaviour of younger children.

Different approaches can be more effective with teenagers; this is partly due to the changes in development highlighted in the previous section.



Rules and boundaries are just as important now as they are at any stage in your child's life, it is the way we need to approach them that is different. Unlike younger children you cannot tell teenagers what to do in the same way, it doesn't work.

Rules need to be clearly explained and the reasons behind them. Rules are more likely to be kept if they take into account the feelings and thoughts of your teenager. The rules need to validate the teenager's feelings but make it clear that ultimately the adults are in charge.

Rewards for good behaviour can be more effective than punishment for bad behaviour. Any punishment should be fair and realistic and if possible decided together.

It is worth investing time in preventing problems before they happen.

Key Points

- **Rules should be made taking into account of feelings**
- **Rules need to be clearly explained and the reasons for them**
- **Praise for good behaviour**
- **Be clear about the consequences of breaking rules**
- **Consequences should be fair, realistic and decided together**

Conflict

Conflict happens in every family. It is how we deal with it that can make all the difference to the outcome.

Be clear, confident and think about what you want to say. Angry teenagers can be intimidating, even if they don't mean to be. Your teenager may also feel intimidated by your behaviour.

We all get angry from time to time but it's possible to express this without aggression.

If an argument is about to start, stay calm and try not to get drawn into it.



Tell them that you care and want to help. Remember, it is almost impossible to win an argument with a teenager.

There are people who can help: - family, friends, health visitors, G.Ps, support organisations and groups. Professional help can provide much needed support.

Key Points

- **Ignore small or trivial issues and concentrate on resolving the more important ones**
- **After an argument, think about what started it. Was it a one-off or are there issues that are being raised often? What would you do differently if it happens again?**
- **Pick a good time to talk – when everyone is able to listen. Be consistent with your decisions**
- **Don't try to talk to your teenager if they have been drinking or return home late, it can wait until the morning**
- **If you have a two-parent household, present a united front. You can disagree later**

Communication



Good communication with your teenager is crucial to you developing and maintaining a good healthy relationship. Really listening to your teenager will encourage them to open up and discuss the issues they face growing up.

It has often been said that there is a difference between listening to someone and actually hearing them, try and listen to your teen's concerns as much as possible.

Many teenagers seem as though they have forgotten how to communicate, unless it is using their mobile phone or a computer! Most teenagers however value the opportunity to talk to their parents about their life, concerns and worries. It is often easier to talk if you are not sitting opposite each other. Try talking whilst driving or at the dinner table.

Teenagers learn how to express emotions such as anger and love by your example. Remember, we can influence our teenager's behaviour positively or negatively.

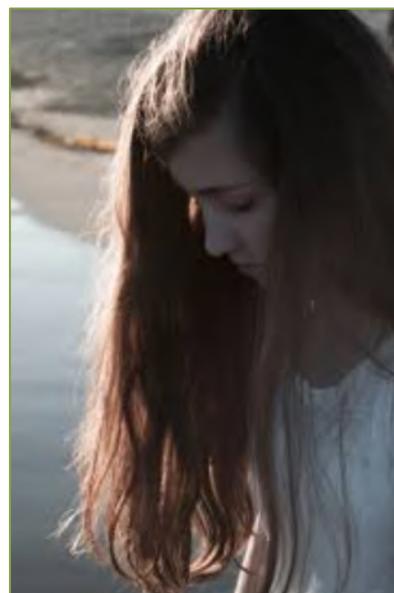
Key Points

- **Good communication builds good relationships**
- **Keep communication open at all times**
- **Listen to your teenager and try not to interrupt**
- **Remember we all communicate through body language; a smile can go a long way**
- **Keep calm – when things get heated the message does not get through**
- **Talking is good for everyone**

Teenage Worries

During our teenage years we all experience many changes. This almost constant change can lead to feelings of uncertainty around our entire lives, from their appearance to *whom* they are going to meet and whether their friends and peers like and respect them.

Some of these worries may seem trivial to us as adults, but remember for your teenager they are a big deal, so it is very important that we take them seriously.



Teenage romantic relationships are a good example, for many these can be short lived, highly intense and represent true loss. Often adults trivialise these experiences, this can be very unhelpful and potentially damaging.

Remembering the feelings and emotions you had at this age may help you to understand your teenager's concerns.

Building self-esteem, self respect and a positive view of themselves is key to helping them deal with day-to-day life. Self-esteem is about being comfortable with you. Teenagers need to know that they matter and that other people matter too.

Key Points

- **Avoid making jokes at your teenager's expense, even if it's meant in a light-hearted way and joking way, teenagers can be very thin skinned**
- **Help your teenager to feel good about him or herself**
- **Show them that they are special and important**
- **Recognise that it is normal for your teenager to want acceptance from friends and peers**
- **If you know or think your teenager is worried, spend time with him or her, try to find out what the problems are and try to work on solutions together**

Risky Behaviours

Risk taking behaviour takes many forms for children and young people, from driving cars too fast to drug taking, heavy drinking, staying out late, inappropriate sexual behaviour and anti-social behavior.

A key point to remember about risk taking behavior in adolescence is that it's a normal part of teenage development, which can in part be explained by changes in the brain.



These changes mean that young people are more inclined to seek immediate rewards without always fully considering the consequences.

When teenagers take risks it may be in response to something that has happened in their lives or an attempt to assert control over their circumstances. The good news is that for most young people risk-taking behaviour is relatively short lived but in some circumstances it can lead to more serious problems.

Key Points

- **Talk with your child about what types of behavior are acceptable – be clear and consistent**
- **Try to talk about the dangers of various risk taking behaviours with your teenager, try not to lecture them**
- **Help your teenager to face up to and be responsible for their actions**
- **Think about your own teenage years, did you take more risks?**
- **This is a new experience for your child, their frame of reference around what is risky is not fully developed, it may be frustrating if they don't listen to your advice, especially if you have first hand experience but sometimes people need to learn from experience**
- **Make it clear that you are there for them**
- **Make time to discuss various issues with your child, encourage them to talk about what they are doing and why**
- **Why someone is doing something is sometimes more important than what they are doing**
- **If they don't want to talk to you – try to get them to talk to someone else, maybe a sexual health or drug worker (details at the end of this handbook)**
- **No matter how tough, support your teenager and keep talking**

Finding Positives

When we are experiencing difficulties with any of our relationships it can become increasingly difficult to find positives in other people.

Focusing on positives instead of just negatives is extremely important. These positive traits may well seem to be in the past but by focusing on them you will find your current view of your child may be improved.



Much of your child's current behaviour may be negative but there may still be positive aspects, they may just not always be focused on you.

By focusing on positives we also support the solution-focused approach we highlighted earlier.

Key Points

- Focus on qualities (nice to siblings, helps friends etc) rather than achievements (winning trophies) or looks
- Focus on strengths rather than weaknesses
- What's positive about your relationship?
- What was positive in the past?
- What would you like the future to be like?

Planning for the Future

As discussed in the solutions not problems section above, it is extremely important to think about what the future will look like when these current problems are not present.

This future planning is crucial; if we can imagine a time when these problems don't exist we are on the road to making this happen.

Teenagers are not teenagers forever, for many adolescents their personalities, beliefs and morals will change again as they move into adulthood.



It can be very useful to ask yourself, are you the same as when you were a teenager?

These issues will not last forever. Be positive!

Key Points

- **Thinking about a problem free future is a useful approach**
- **Ask yourself, what do I want in the future for my child?**
- **Ask yourself, what do I want in the future for me?**
- **Ask yourself, what do I want in the future for my family?**

**For any further information or advice please
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