

Parenting

the most important job in the world

13-18yrs

THE TEENAGE YEARS



THE FACTS OF LIFE ON TEENAGE
CONTRACEPTION

"BUT I'M TOO FAT..."
BUILDING A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE

DEPRESSION AND
SUICIDE PREVENTION
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SPOT THE SIGNS

KEEPING A PARTY A PARTY

TIPS ON
DISCIPLINE
DRUGS AND
PEER GROUP
PRESSURE



Families First In NSW

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

The Department of Community Services (DoCS)

DoCS provides services from a network of 84 Community Services Centres across NSW. You'll find their phone numbers in your local telephone directory under 'Community Services, Department of'.

Parent Line 13 20 55
Advice and information for
parents with kids up to 18 years

Family Support Services Association 02 9743 6565
Support services for families experiencing stress

Relationships Australia (NSW) 02 9418 8800 or
(freecall outside Sydney) 1300 364 277

Centacare Relationship Counselling 02 9283 4899

Lifeline 13 11 14 statewide

Salvo Care Line 02 9331 6000 statewide

Dial-a-Mum 02 9477 6777 statewide

Telephone counselling for anyone of any age

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800

Poisons Information 13 11 26

Children's Hospital Randwick 02 9382 1111

Children's Hospital Westmead 02 9845 0000

**After Hours Emergency Child Protection
and Family Crisis Service**
24 hours (freecall) 1800 066 777

Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463
1800 671 442 TTY

Centrelink

- Family and parenting payments 13 13 05
- Multilingual information 13 12 02

Find out about parenting courses by contacting your local Early Childhood Health Centre or Children's Hospital.

www.reachout.asn.au

The 'Reachout' website provides a comprehensive online database of services to prevent youth suicide.

'Growing up with young people' booklets: a parent's guide to understanding adolescents and young adults and encouraging their emotional and mental health.

Copies available from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
Tel: 1800 066 247 Fax: 1800 634 400
(English, Vietnamese, Chinese and in adapted form for indigenous communities)

also available at www.health.gov.au/hstd/mentalhe/ or www.afs.org.au/external/ysp/living



Visit our **Parenting Website** at
www.community.nsw.gov.au

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

Parenting: the most important job in the world

Caring for babies & toddlers (0 to 5 years)

Caring for children (6 to 12 years)

The teenage years (13 to 18 years)

FAMILY HELP KIT

The NSW Health Department has developed the Family Help Kit to assist families to better understand and recognise mental health problems in children, adolescents and young people. It also provides information and contact details on how and where to get help. Topics contained within the kit, include: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems, Challenging Behaviours, Grief and Loss, Fears and Anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress, Depression, Psychosis, Suicide Prevention, Body Image and Eating Disorders.

Copies of the Family Help Kit are available from the Better Health Centre
LMB 5003
Gladesville NSW 2111
Telephone 02 9816 0452
Fax 02 9816 0492

LIVING WITH TEENS PAGE 2

DISCIPLINE PAGE 5

PEER PRESSURE PAGE 6

TEENAGERS AND DRUGS PAGE 8

CONTENTS

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Stephanie, Louisa, Melissa,
Monique, Ben
and all the other children,
teenagers and adults appearing
in our magazine.

DEPRESSION PAGE 12

TEENAGE CONTRACEPTION PAGE 14

TEENAGE RUNAWAYS PAGE 16

BODY IMAGE
AND EATING PROBLEMS PAGE 18

SELF ESTEEM
AND YOUR TEENAGER PAGE 20

SUICIDE PREVENTION PAGE 21

TEENAGE PARTIES PAGE 24

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Living with **TEENS**



Adolescence can be a challenging time for young people and their families. Your teenager is going through rapid physical and emotional changes. Parents and adolescents must make changes in their relationships to adjust to this new stage. Adolescents go backwards and forwards between wanting freedom and at the same time still needing the security of their family. Parents want their child to grow to happy independence yet fear for their safety as they watch them try their wings. Parents also have to cope with the fact that the dreams they have had for their child may not be going to come true. Teenagers have their own dreams.

Good relationships with your teenager will help you and them weather the ups and downs, but the relationship will need more effort than in the past.

*It isn't easy to
find special time,
but it's worth it!*

Living with **TEENS**

What parents can do

Spend time with your teenager

This is often hard to arrange as young people will want to spend a lot of time with their friends. You may have to be very flexible yourself in order to make sure it happens. Here are some suggestions for special times.

Mealtimes - if the family eats together, even occasionally, you can share successes, ideas and interests.

In the car - drive your teenager somewhere in the car. Offering to be chauffeur gives you a good opportunity for time together. Teenagers often talk more easily when not looking at you face-to-face.

Bedtime - a visit to their bedroom for a short bedtime chat can be very relaxing.

Coffee time - use a few spare minutes to offer to take your teenager out for a coffee or milkshake (probably at a shop where their friends don't usually go. Teenagers are often embarrassed if their friends see they are out with a parent).

Take an interest in their interests - and share yours

- Try really listening to some of their music and then talk about the songs you like best.
- Go to watch their sport or activities.
- Watch their favourite TV shows with them now and then (without being too critical).
- Try sharing something about your work or your interests as you would with an adult friend.
- Share something about your own adolescence (without preaching!)
- Take them to a movie that you'd both like (or go to one of theirs and talk about it).

Listen to them

When young people talk to parents they often get advice, reassurance or a sermon before they have had a chance to really say how they feel. This not only stops communication, it also discourages teenagers from finding their own ways to deal with problems. The most helpful responses from parents are ones that show interest and open the way for their adolescent to talk on, such as:

- ▼ 'How come?'
- ▼ 'You must have felt ...'
- ▼ 'Wow'
- ▼ 'That sounds exciting.'

Respect their privacy

- ◆ Give them some space of their own. Don't enter their room without permission.
- ◆ Don't go through their diary or drawers in their absence.
- ◆ Don't pry for information except where it is important for you to know to make sure they are safe. For example, it's okay to ask your young teenager to let you know where they will be when they are not at home.

Show your love for them

Love needs to be continually shown in order to be felt.

- Tell your teenager often that you love them.
- Put little treats in their lunch box sometimes.
- Buy something on a shopping trip that says 'I was thinking about you'.
- Go out of your way to help them with special projects.
- Pick them up from outings on the other side of town.

Make special memories

Doing special things together can have lasting effects.

- ✦ Let your teenager bring a friend when you go on a holiday.
- ✦ Take the family to a special show you would not usually go to.
- ✦ Explore a special place with your teenager.
- ✦ Create traditions that are special to your family. For example, your family might have a special way of celebrating birthdays.
- ✦ Make sure your teenager feels part of the wider family, for example by sharing family occasions. (Many teenagers groan about these for a while, but they are also part of their security).
- ✦ Make a collection of photographs of family and friends, over their childhood and growing up years, and hang them on a wall.

Have faith in them

- ✗ Let your teenager know they are special.
- ✗ Ask their advice about something they know a lot about (for example, how to program the video).
- ✗ Display their photographs and crafts.
- ✗ Keep a scrapbook of their special achievements.
- ✗ If they make mistakes have faith that they will do better next time.

REMINDERS

- All of the above take time (which is often hard to find!) but putting in time will pay back in your teenager's behaviour, self esteem and relationship with you.
- However much they ignore or make fun of your efforts, your adolescent needs to know more than ever that you love them and believe in them.
- They need ongoing attention.
- Take some time out from being a parent in order to be a friend!
- Remember to keep your teenager's confidences (even if they don't always keep yours!).
- Take some time out for yourself. Start thinking about the dreams you have for yourself when your child grows up.
- Remember, no parent is perfect and perfect parents would be very hard to live up to!

discipline

By Dr Nick Kowalenko

and your teenager

Discipline is not just about punishment. Discipline is about shaping young people's behaviour so that they can eventually fit in with expectations and rules of their family and society.

Of course there are many different beliefs about what is good behaviour and the right way to bring up children. This varies between cultural groups, between generations and even between parents.

The most effective way to reduce bad behaviour is to pay close attention to good behaviour and really praise it when you see it. Remember to tell them exactly what was good about their behaviour.

Some difficulties can be avoided by planning ahead. Depending on their age, listening to your children when you are making rules can help you set them. With teenagers you can negotiate before making a final decision. Don't wait to make a rule in the heat of the moment.

It helps if the way parents respond to bad behaviour makes sense to the young person and is not so strict that they can't feel their parents' love and good intentions. This is particularly so for teenagers, where emotions can really flare up.

With teenagers, remember to tell them off in private. In front of friends or other family members they'll be too sensitive and can become terribly embarrassed. Teenagers need more privacy and time alone.

In planning ahead remember:

- ▲ make clear rules
- ▲ make sure there are clear and immediate consequences for unwanted behaviours
- ▲ be consistent
- ▲ handle rule breaking calmly.

It's hard work to change unwanted behaviours. It takes time for young people to learn self-control. It can also take a lot of parents' energy to stick with their rules. If there is a chance of you giving in, this encourages your children to challenge the rules.

Long standing difficulties can lead to your relationship with your kids becoming strained. Good times together can drop away, with bad feelings on both sides. To turn things around its important to set up good times together, as well as being consistent with your rules.

Talking things over with friends can help, as well as with teachers and your local doctor.



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Peer Pressure

Peer groups are groups of friends about the same age. Having a group of friends is one of the most important parts of being an adolescent. It is how adolescents learn to get on in the world of their own age group and to gradually become independent. It is important for parents to understand the value of peer groups for young people. Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life. They can also be a challenge for parents!

REMINDERS

- Make friends with your teenager's friends. Get to know them for yourself.
- Remember that any criticism you make, however right you are, will be seen by your teenager as judgmental.
- Keep the gates of communication open. Listen to your teenagers' points of view and ask them to listen to yours.
- Let them know that if things go wrong you will be there for them.
- Remember that we are all in peer groups. It would be difficult even for adults, who have much more confidence than teenagers, to go against their peer group.

What peer groups can do for your teenagers

Peer groups provide:

- ◆ a sense of belonging and feeling valued
- ◆ somewhere to fit in when they feel neither child nor adult
- ◆ increased self confidence because they are accepted by the group
- ◆ a sense of security and of being understood by others who are going through the same experiences
- ◆ a safe place to test values and ideas
- ◆ help in the move towards becoming independent
- ◆ practice in getting along with the opposite sex
- ◆ ways to meet new people
- ◆ friendships
- ◆ practice in learning to give and take
- ◆ influence on making decisions about their life.



Peer groups and parents

Problems that peer groups may present to parents:

- ▼ Long hours on the telephone, even though they have just seen each other all day at school. Teenagers need to spend lots of time together. If they are on the telephone they are not on the streets!
- ▼ Your house can seem to be overrun with young people. If they are at your house it says that they feel comfortable with you and you can keep an eye on them.
- ▼ Some of their friends may do things that are outside your house rules. They may:
 - smoke, swear or play loud music
 - devour food in the fridge or biscuit tin
 - exert pressure to drink parents' alcohol
 - want to watch banned videos
 - want to have sexual activities in your home.

What parents can do

- Some parents limit the time of day that their young people can have long phone calls. Others may get 'call waiting' on their phone, so that if a call for them comes in it can be taken.
- There are advantages when your teenagers' friends hang around at your house, but you need to set some house rules. Being humorous about it can take the sting out of your rules, for example having smoking and non-smoking zones.
- Sometimes you can change the use of your rooms so that there is one space for adolescents and another for parents and any younger children in the family. This gives the adolescents some privacy that they will be grateful for and protects your sanity.
- Keep plenty of low cost food, such as bread and fruit in season, available. If necessary label what is to be kept for family meals and what is available for snacks.
- Be clear about what videos are allowed to be watched at your home and why. Teenagers get a thrill out of watching 'scary' videos in a group, so allow some flexibility.
- If there is pressure on your teenagers to raid your alcohol, make the rules clear. If necessary lock it away.
- Talk with your teenagers and your partner about your values about sexual activities and *what you are willing to allow in your home*. There are many things that you might want to take into account, for example the age of your teenagers, the nature of the relationship, where else they would go if they were not at home and of course your own values.

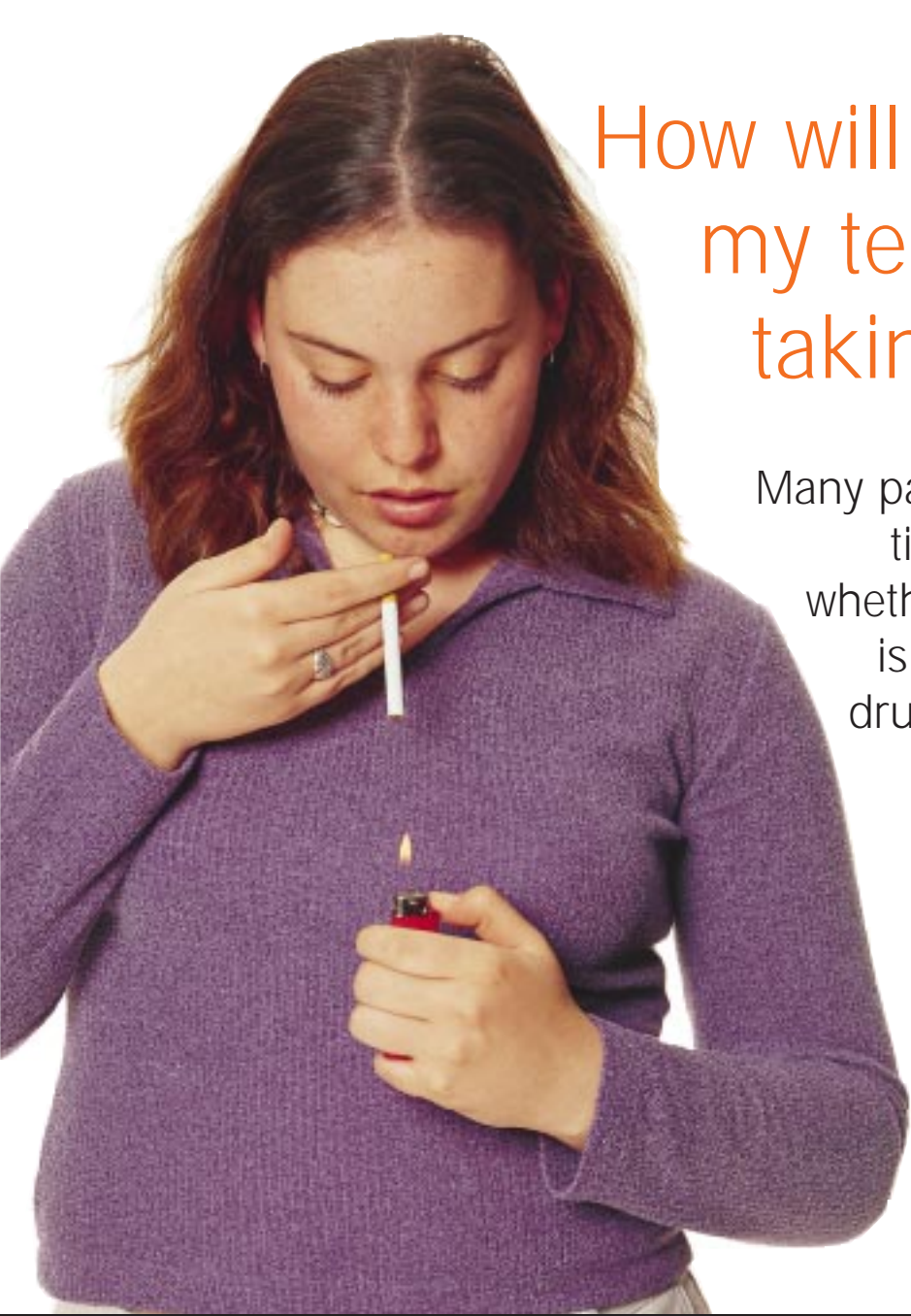
Other peer group problems

You may not be comfortable about your son's or daughter's choice of peer group. This may be because of their behaviour or because of some more serious risk, for example the peer group use alcohol or other drugs, skip school, shoplift or vandalise property.

What parents can do

Remember that teenagers are often sensitive and a bit 'prickly' about their choice of friends. To criticise their friends is almost certain to lose some of your influence. Rather than put them off the friends it may have the opposite effect. *Criticising their choice of friends is like attacking them personally.*

- ✕ Keep the communication open. Be willing to listen. Find out why those friends are important to your teenager.
- ✕ Check whether your concerns about their friends are real and important. While you might feel very uneasy about them, sometimes it is better not to spend energy worrying about such things as hairstyle, clothing, where they wear earrings and what music they enjoy.
- ✕ If you believe that your concerns are serious, talk to your teenager about the behaviour *not* the friends.
- ✕ Encourage your teenagers to trust their own sense of what is right. Discuss with them ways of saying "no".
- ✕ You have the right to let your teenagers know what your concerns are and to ask them how they will cope if they are pressured to make risky choices.
- ✕ Talk with your teenagers about the consequences of whatever behaviour is worrying you. Look at both the immediate consequences and how this will affect their future, for example getting a criminal conviction.
- ✕ If you can, encourage opportunities for them to mix with other young people, for example through sporting or other group activities. But don't be disappointed if they are not interested.
- ✕ Support your teenagers' self esteem. Talk with them about the exciting and promising possibilities for the future.
- ✕ Sometimes a young person who seems unsuitable will choose your children for a friend because your home gives a feeling of being safe and secure. This is, of course, a compliment to you and your teenagers and perhaps an opportunity to really help someone. You may be able to offer friendship and support. If you are really uncomfortable about the friend's behaviour you need to talk to your teenagers about it. You are unlikely to be able to break up the friendship if it is strong.
- ✕ **Show your teenagers that you trust them. If they break your trust ask them to suggest ways to earn it again. Mistakes are to learn from.**



How will I know if my teenager is taking drugs?

Many parents worry from time to time about whether their teenager is taking any illegal drugs, how they can tell, and what to do about it.

Teenagers and **DRUGS**

With all the horror stories about drugs in the press and on TV, many parents wonder why young people would even think of trying drugs. The fact is that many young people don't try them. When they do, it is usually for very ordinary reasons such as having fun or doing something different. Often people think that teenagers try drugs because they are depressed or stressed. Of the young people who are having problems in their lives only a small proportion turn to drugs.

How will I know if my teenager is taking drugs?

This is the most common question that parents ask. The answer is that there is no easy, sure way to tell. This is because the effect of the drug might have worn off before you see your teenager or because the effect of the drug is not something that is easy to see. Even when there is a major change in behaviour, it could be caused by something else, such as illness.

Parents who know their own children well will notice any sudden change in behaviour that might be a sign that something is wrong. These changes include:

- ▲ silence and sulking
- ▲ anger towards others
- ▲ changes in mood
- ▲ more than usual lack of cooperation and rudeness
- ▲ drop in school work, or truancy
- ▲ change of friends or a sudden change to a new group of friends
- ▲ change in physical appearance.

While there is a lot of concern about illegal drugs, the most harm and the greatest risk to young people comes from using legal drugs such as alcohol, cigarettes and medicines. However, young people want to experiment with new things and test limits, so it is not surprising that many of them try illegal drugs. Fortunately, out of those who try, not all go on using drugs regularly and only a few will develop serious problems.

Don't jump to conclusions!

Remember that there are many reasons other than drugs that might be the cause of these changes. Think about all the possible reasons for a change in behaviour. Is it due to a sudden growth spurt, or changes due to puberty? Are there problems at school or with friends? Are there things going on within your family that could be affecting your teenager?

For these reasons, it is a good idea to react to the situation in the same way you would to anything that makes you feel worried about your teenager's wellbeing. In this way, you won't make a tragic mistake by jumping to the wrong conclusion.

Bringing up the subject

Try to find out by communication, not detection!

Detection won't give you the answers. Even if you find drugs in your teenager's room, they could belong to someone else. Don't go on searches for drugs. The loss of trust this will cause will be greater than the benefit of anything you might find out.

Make it easy for your teenager to talk to you.

Try talking about someone else you know, so that your teenager sees that you are open to listening. You might say, for example, 'I was talking to a friend about her daughter smoking marijuana. She was very worried. What do you think about it?'. (Sometimes teenagers test out their parents by talking about a friend when they really mean themselves. Be careful how you respond!).

Find out about drugs for yourself first

So you know what you are talking about. The Alcohol and Drug Information Service's telephone number is listed at the end of this article.

Try to discuss it at a time when you are both feeling relaxed.

Make some private time. You could take them to a movie or out for a coffee.

Say something that opens up the subject in an easy way

Such as, 'I've noticed that you haven't been yourself lately. Can you tell me how you've been feeling?'. Most young people will let you know what is happening if you ask at the right time, if they are not afraid of punishment, and if they see you as a caring friend.

If you suspect or find out your teenager is taking drugs

Don't react immediately!

- Give yourself time to calm down and think through what is happening if you are upset. Strong reactions due to fear are common, but they don't help. There is a danger that a big argument about it might 'back you both into a corner' and harm your relationship with your teenager.
- Give your teenager a chance to tell you what happened. For example, you could say 'We'd like you to give us an idea what was going on and how you got there.'
- Try to separate the behaviour from the person. You may not approve of what your teenager is doing but you still need to show you love and care for them.
- You have the right to tell your teenager what your values are and what you will allow in your house. This can be a tricky issue and will depend on how old your teenager is. With older teenagers you may have to come to terms with the fact that they are making their own life choices. However if they won't give up the drug, you still have the right to say that they are not to use it at home. Some parents tell their teenager to give it up or they will have to leave home. If you say this, you need to be sure that it is what you mean and want. It is important to be sure that your teenager is not pushed into more risky living situations.
- Find out what kinds of drugs are being used and how they are being used. The best way to find out is to ask your teenager. Using drugs is **not** the same as being addicted to drugs.
- Discuss with your teenager the fact that your trust has been broken. Ask them what they think should happen and what they will do to prove that you can trust them again.

It is important that your teenager is clearly aware of what is likely to happen if they use drugs, such as the effect on:

- family relationships
- their health, both physical and psychological
- their education
- future chances of getting work.

Try to discuss it at
a time when you are
both feeling relaxed

Some tips on good parenting

Good parenting is important to all children and teenagers and should help young people to be healthy in all parts of their lives, including when there are problems with drugs. However, good parenting will not prevent teenagers from trying drugs. They are at an age when they make their own choices about drug use as well as many other things. If you find that your adolescent has used or is using illegal drugs, you should not blame yourself.

Encourage a range of interests

Start before your child is in their teens and plan interesting activities that include them. It is hard to change your weekend activities if you are a couch potato or a workaholic, but once you start you'll find it can be really worthwhile.

As your child enters their teens, think about what you can do to make their lives interesting. Think about your weekends. If you spend the weekend sitting around drinking, you are modelling to your teenager that this is the way to spend your spare time! If your weekends offer some interesting activities to look forward to, your teenager is more likely to think of weekends as a time for interesting activities.

Teenagers who have other interests may be less likely to take up drugs (although some sports encourage it, such as after-match drinking). Support their sport, take an interest in their hobbies, help them get to different activity groups that they are interested in.

Respect, support and show you care

- ▲ Support your child's self esteem. Tell them and show them you care about and value them. Let them see that you notice the good things they do.
- ▲ Keep the communication open and ongoing. Listen to their ideas and opinions. Make regular time to spend with them.
- ▲ As teenagers get older they will be making their own choices about friends and activities and groups.

Your support in making their friends welcome, being interested in their hobbies and helping them get to activities will still be very important to them.

Teach rights and responsibilities

Teach responsible behaviour. Give them practice at making choices and approval for responsible choices. Gradually give your teenager responsibility for making their own decisions.

Give rewards for responsible behaviour. For example, allow them to stay out a bit later or have an extra night out.

Talk with your teenager about rights and responsibilities, so they understand that responsibilities come with rights. Teach the balance of rights and responsibilities. For example, make sure your teenager lets you know where they are going when they are out, but allow them to have some say about when they come in.

Make sure that you have safe arrangements for your teenager to get home. Have an emergency plan for situations where they lose their money, drink too much or get into a difficult situation. These might include having a mobile phone to call you or permission to take a taxi which you will pay for. (But if it happens often, think about what else is happening for your child).

If young people are not going to school, if they are bored, unemployed and without hobbies and interests, they are more vulnerable to drug use.

Peer group issues

Peer group pressure is often overstated and most young people make a decision to take drugs without being forced or tricked.

Young people need to see good reasons to change their peer group. The best you may be able to do is encourage them not to entirely lose touch with old friends, so that they have other friends to fall back on. Keeping a leg in with another peer group which doesn't use drugs is an important way to help keep drug use at bay.

If your teenager is involved with more than one group of young people, they have more resources to fall back on if one of the groups is using drugs. Support their friendships with different groups. Make their friends welcome.

If you feel your teenager is heavily involved in drugs and you are powerless to change the situation, it is important to talk to someone skilled in the area.

REMINDERS

- Remember, the years between 14 and 18 are a time of vast and rapid change. Arrangements made when your teenager is 15^{1/2} might be out of date by the time they are 16.
- Parents who do well are those who communicate and listen well and who give choices, not orders.
- Make sure you know what you are talking about when you talk with your teenager about drugs. Find out the facts.
- Choose a good time. Don't react on the spur of the moment or when you or your teenager are not at your best.
- Anger, judging and criticising don't work. They make things worse.
- Be willing to talk honestly about the drugs *you* use (such as alcohol and medicines) when talking with your teenager.
- Don't overreact to situations, you might jump to the wrong conclusions.
- Let your child see you as a caring friend, not the drug police.
- We should not allow fear about illegal drugs to make us blind to the dangers of alcohol, which causes a high number of deaths in young people.
- Remember, drugs may not be the core of the real problem. But if things are going wrong in your teenager's life, they need your help and support.

For further information, contact:

Alcohol and Drug Information Service 02 9361 2111 or
1800 422 599
(freecall outside Sydney)

24 hour advice, information and referral

What is the issue?

Depression has been predicted as one of the major health problems of the 21st century. More adolescents and young people are experiencing depression.

This is known to increase their risk for other mental health problems such as hazardous use of alcohol and other drugs and suicide.

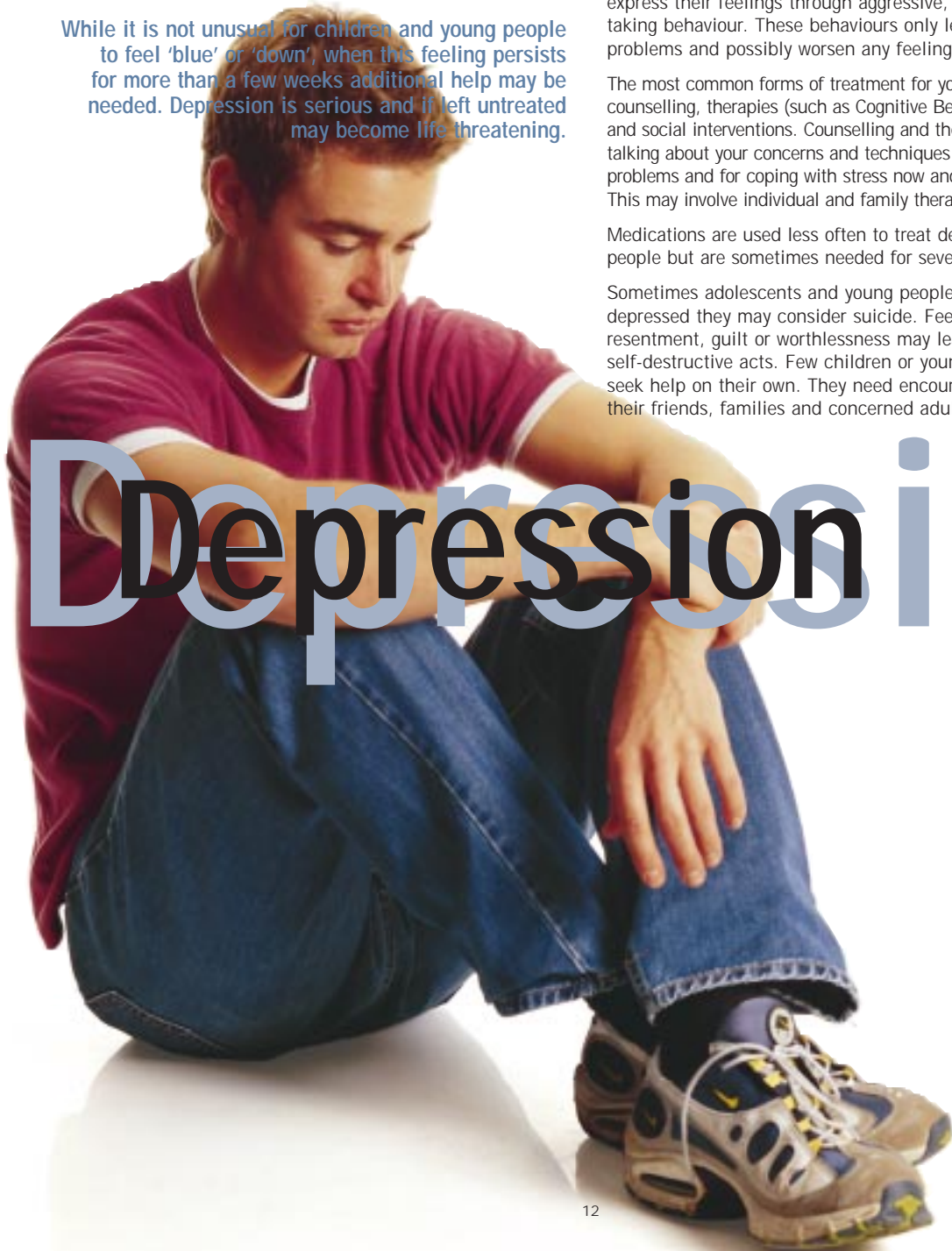
While it is not unusual for children and young people to feel 'blue' or 'down', when this feeling persists for more than a few weeks additional help may be needed. Depression is serious and if left untreated may become life threatening.

When young people's moods disrupt their ability to manage usual activities, it may indicate a serious mental health problem. It can be difficult to know when children and young people are feeling depressed because adults expect them to be moody. Adolescents and young people do not always understand or express their feelings very well. When asked they may deny that anything is wrong. They may also express their feelings through aggressive, hostile and risk taking behaviour. These behaviours only lead to more problems and possibly worsen any feelings of depression.

The most common forms of treatment for young people are counselling, therapies (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and social interventions. Counselling and therapy involve talking about your concerns and techniques for solving problems and for coping with stress now and in the future. This may involve individual and family therapy and group work.

Medications are used less often to treat depression in young people but are sometimes needed for severe depression.

Sometimes adolescents and young people may feel so depressed they may consider suicide. Feelings of anger, resentment, guilt or worthlessness may lead to impulsive, self-destructive acts. Few children or young people will seek help on their own. They need encouragement from their friends, families and concerned adults.



What are the signs of depression?

Most forms of depression involve both physical and psychological symptoms.

The following signs may indicate depression, particularly when they persist for more than a few weeks:

- Sadness or irritability.
- Difficulty concentrating, deterioration in school performance.
- Lack of energy, enthusiasm or motivation, feeling slowed down.
- Restlessness or agitation.
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness.
- Withdrawal from friends, family and previously enjoyed activities.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.

Some people experience periods of excitement and overactivity as well as feeling down. This is a bipolar disorder (sometimes called manic-depression).

Recent surveys suggest up to 1 in 5 young people experience depression at some time. Adolescence is a challenging time involving many changes. These changes occur emotionally, physically and socially. Young people are also exposed to varying messages from parents, schools and the media including the Internet.

Helping young people with depression

When adolescents and young people are feeling down there are a number of things families can do to help them. Offer help and listen. Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Acceptance and belonging are very important to adolescents so encourage them to:

- × Talk to someone they trust.
- × Ask for help when they need it.

Some other things that may be helpful include encouraging them to:

- × Spend time with friends.
- × Participate in sports, school activities or hobbies with a focus on positive activities and achievements.
- × Be involved in organisations that provide support for young people and help them develop additional interests.

If a young person is severely depressed they may not be able to participate in usual activities.

Young people should be encouraged to talk to someone they trust.

Where to get help

In an emergency contact your general practitioner or local hospital Emergency Department

24 hour telephone services are:

Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
Lifeline	13 11 14
Youthline (youth counselling)	02 9951 5522 (Sydney) OR 02 9633 3666 (Parramatta)

For other help, the first point of contact can be:

Your local Area Health Service (during business hours) including community health centres or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists may also be able to provide help.

If you would like more information about mental health and services contact:

**NSW Association for Mental Health,
Mental Health Information Service**

Monday to Friday, 12.30pm - 4.30pm

02 9816 5688 or 1800 674 200 (freecall outside Sydney)

When adolescents and young people recognise they have a problem it is the first step towards getting better. However, few adolescents will seek help on their own. They need support and encouragement from concerned adults and their friends. If a situation seems like it is serious seek help promptly. Sometimes this may mean breaking a confidence but it may be necessary to save a young person's life.

Reproduced from the **NSW HEALTH** Family Help Kit

Many parents are worried about their teenager's sexual well being and want to protect them from harm and unnecessary suffering. As children grow we teach them how to protect themselves and tell them what our values are and why we think the way we do. At some point we have to trust in their ability to care for themselves.

They will be in situations at some time when they need to make decisions and act for themselves. As a parent of a teenager, there are still some useful things that you can do to support your teenager's sexual safety. The most important of these is to be open and available to talk with them.

teenage CONTRACEPTION *contraception*



Some parents find it hard to talk about sex. It is easier if you start when children are young so that the groundwork is already done before they reach adolescence, but it is never too late to talk with your teenager.

Giving information does not encourage sexual activity. It gives young people knowledge about how to stay safe.

Give accurate information about sex and contraception to both boys and girls

It is helpful for teenagers to have both their father and mother talk to them about sex (where possible). If fathers are not interested or involved, teenagers may learn that contraception and sexual safety are not a male responsibility.

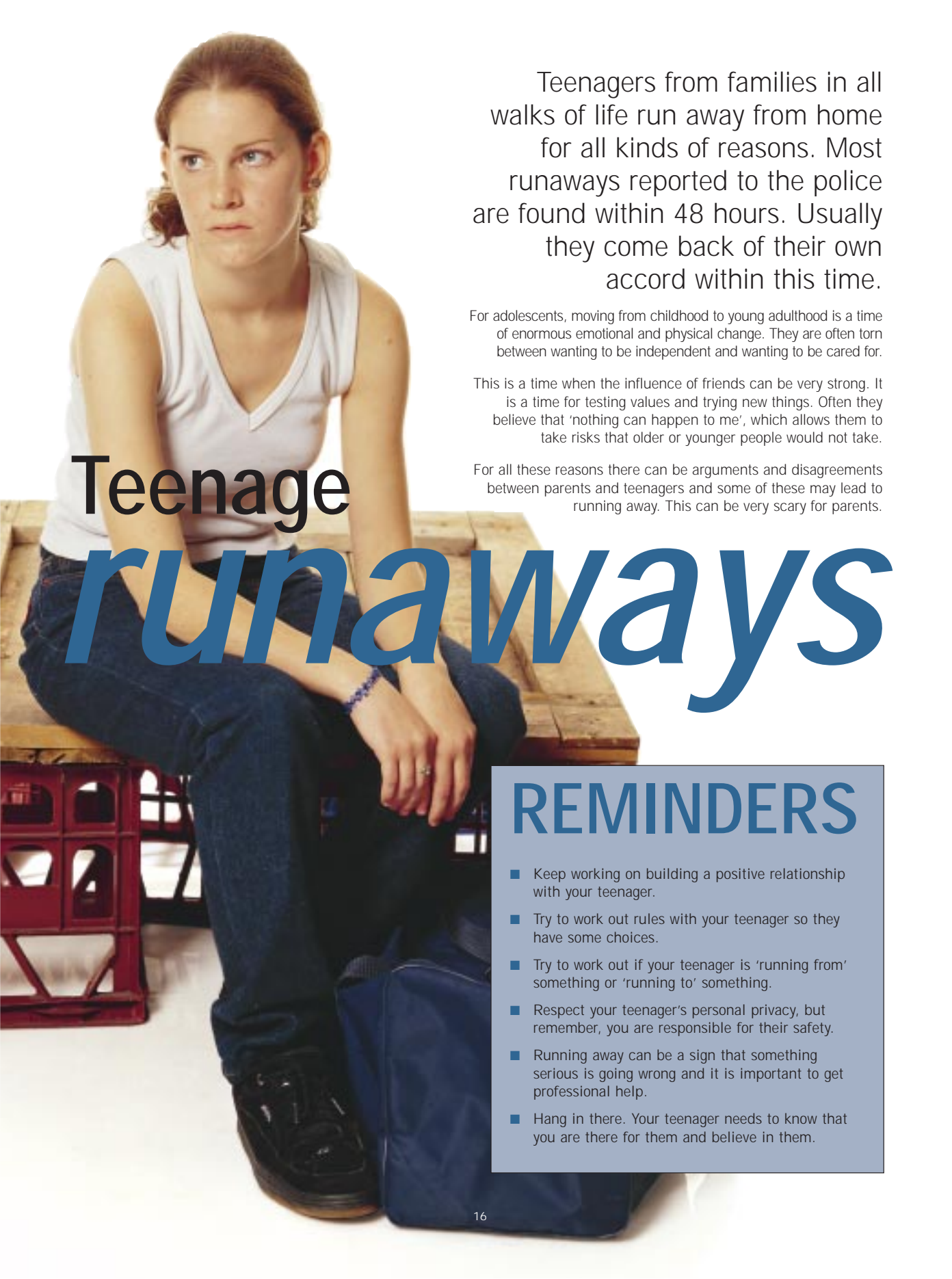
Talk about the sexual choices for young people. Include discussions about how to say 'no'. Encourage self assurance and the ability to say 'no' without feeling guilty.

If you really find it too uncomfortable to talk about sex, let your child know that you find it difficult. You can always use books. There are also others your teenager can talk to such as a Family Planning Clinic, their doctor, another family member or one of your friends.

Build your teenager's self esteem

Make sure they know they are loved. Understand their need to feel wanted, at home and with friends. Let them know that you value them for themselves, whether they are male or female.

Model mutual respect in your home. This is very important. If people in your home put each other down, your teenager will learn to put others down or let others put them down. If they see other people valued, they will learn to value others and to expect to be treated well. This model will carry over into their sexual lives.



Teenagers from families in all walks of life run away from home for all kinds of reasons. Most runaways reported to the police are found within 48 hours. Usually they come back of their own accord within this time.

For adolescents, moving from childhood to young adulthood is a time of enormous emotional and physical change. They are often torn between wanting to be independent and wanting to be cared for.

This is a time when the influence of friends can be very strong. It is a time for testing values and trying new things. Often they believe that 'nothing can happen to me', which allows them to take risks that older or younger people would not take.

For all these reasons there can be arguments and disagreements between parents and teenagers and some of these may lead to running away. This can be very scary for parents.

Teenage *runaways*

REMINDERS

- Keep working on building a positive relationship with your teenager.
- Try to work out rules with your teenager so they have some choices.
- Try to work out if your teenager is 'running from' something or 'running to' something.
- Respect your teenager's personal privacy, but remember, you are responsible for their safety.
- Running away can be a sign that something serious is going wrong and it is important to get professional help.
- Hang in there. Your teenager needs to know that you are there for them and believe in them.

Why teenagers run away

Some run away impulsively after an argument. Often this is done because they don't know how to express their feelings and they believe that it will make their parents 'come around'.

Some run away because they are afraid of punishment.

Some run away because they *think* their home has too many rules and limits and that life out in the big, wide world will be more free and exciting.

Some run away because there are too many restrictions at home.

Some run away because there is something serious going wrong in their lives. This can include abuse, neglect or parents continually fighting. Some teenagers genuinely feel that they are unwanted and unloved in their home.

What parents can do

When a teenager runs away parents can feel helpless and that they have lost their influence and control. But whatever your teenager says, you are still very important to them and you still have influence in many ways. It can be very scary for your teenager if they feel you have given up on them.

Prevention

If things are starting to go wrong between you and your teenager, try to rebuild your relationship before there is a crisis. Even if there are lots of 'ups and downs', make sure your teenager knows that you love them. Try to listen to their point of view before giving yours. Talk with them about things other than problems.

Try to find some middle ground where you can each 'win' something. Leaving your teenager feeling totally powerless is not helpful.

If your teenager threatens to run away, take it seriously. It does not help to dare a teenager to run. Don't say 'Alright, go then, you'll be back soon enough' or forbid it by saying 'No! You're not going'. Listen to how they are feeling and what their problems are. Spend time trying to work out how things can be better for your teenager.

You both may need some time apart to avoid a crisis. Arrange for them to stay with a close relative or friend they trust. Young people often do better in someone else's home for a while. This will give you a chance to rethink what is happening and try to do some things differently.

Talk to yourself differently. For example, say to yourself 'What can we do to make everyone in the family feel better' rather than 'Why are they always making trouble?'.

If your teenager runs away

Try to stay calm. Remember, most runaways return of their own accord.

Find out what you can about your teenager leaving. Was it planned or impulsive? Did they go off with friends? Did they leave a note? What did they take with them?

Work out whether you think your teenager is likely to be safe. Think about where they could run to and what you know about why they left.

Contact your teenager's friends or their parents. If your teenager is with friends, let these friends know that you are worried and you want to talk with your teenager about what is upsetting them. Don't leave messages that are threats.

Be prepared to make some changes. If things are not different they will be likely to run again. You may need a third person to 'bridge' any conversation in the beginning.

The fact that you are looking for your teenager is reassurance that you care. It doesn't mean that you have to give in on everything, but that you want to discuss ways to make things better for you all.

Have an open door attitude to their return.

If you can't find a reasonable explanation for your teenager leaving and you can't assure yourself that they are safe, phone the police.

When your teenager returns

Don't launch into major discussions as soon as they walk in the door. Give them time to settle and to know that you care first. Let your teenager know you have been worried and you need to talk about what has been happening.

Allow them to 'save face'. Don't say things like 'I knew you'd have to come crawling back!'

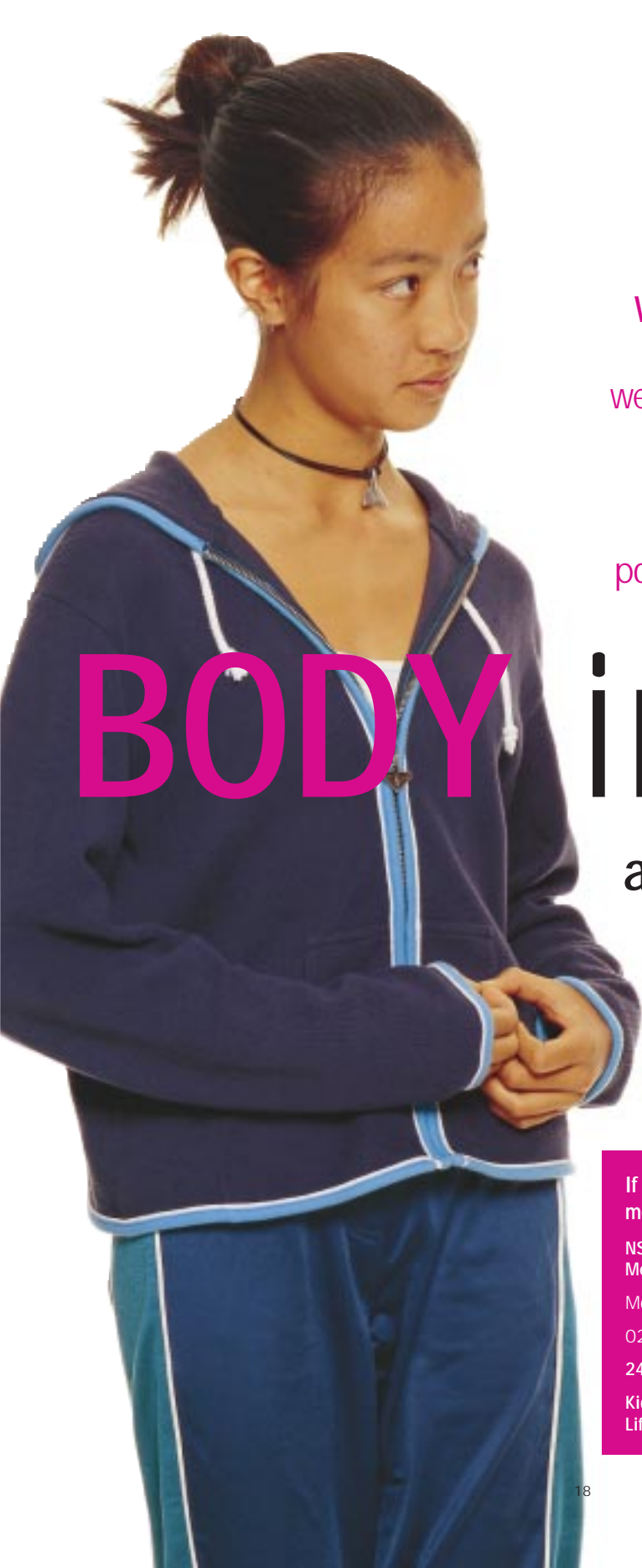
Try to see the problem from your teenager's point of view. Make sure they know that you understand their point of view before you put yours.

Try to work together on ways to make things different. Use their ideas if possible, as well as your own. Ask your teenager what rules they think they could live with. You also have the responsibility to try to keep your teenager safe.

Fight fair. Talk about the problem, not the person. For example, you could say '**Wagging school** is ...' rather than '**You** are hopeless and irresponsible'.

If your teenager won't talk to you, or you both talk but can't get anywhere, get someone else to help you sort it out.

When your teenager runs away, it is often a serious cry for help about a situation too distressing for them to continue living in. You need to take this seriously. If the running away is part of a problem that has been going on for a long time, reach out for help.



What is the issue? Over half of all adolescent girls try to lose weight. Dieting or overeating are common problems that affect many girls but they can also affect boys. Depression and poor self esteem may be factors in problem eating habits.

BODY image and eating problems

The most serious eating disorders experienced by young people are *anorexia nervosa* and *bulimia nervosa*. In anorexia, a person worries about becoming fat or gaining weight no matter how thin they become. With bulimia, the person has repeated bouts of binge eating and then tries to compensate in ways such as dieting or vomiting.

If you would like more information about mental health and services contact:

NSW Association for Mental Health,
Mental Health Information Service

Monday - Friday 12.30pm - 4.30pm

02 9816 5688 or 1800 674 200 (freecall outside Sydney)

24 hour telephone services are:

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800
Lifeline 13 11 14

Parents can help their child develop a healthy body image

Children and adolescents may compulsively over-eat to cope with feelings of depression, anxiety, guilt or anger. These young people may be a little overweight to obese. If young people have an eating disorder for a prolonged period of time their health and growth may be seriously affected. Girls who have begun to menstruate may miss periods.

Early and effective treatment for these disorders may prevent life-long and sometimes fatal problems.

The best time to help your child develop a positive body image is well before their teens. Unrealistic ideas about looks and the 'ideal body' can affect children and young people from very early ages. Young people are often highly conscious and critical of their own bodies. Self-criticism and poor body image may be factors in the development of eating disorders. Your own eating habits, sense of body image and attitudes can affect your child.

Young people often take any comments others make on their weight, body shape or appearance very seriously. Parents may mistake the body changes associated with puberty as an unhealthy weight gain. The young person may respond by dieting, followed by binge eating which, in time, may lead to long term eating problems.

Young people may be very good at hiding their problems from their families. If parents are concerned about their child's eating they should seek advice and assistance at once.

What are the signs of an eating disorder?

Parents frequently ask how can they know if their child has an eating disorder. The following warning signs may alert families:

- They will often believe they are fat no matter how thin they become.
- They may avoid eating with the family or want to go to the bathroom straight after meals.
- They may eat large amounts of food without gaining weight (people with bulimia often overeat then make themselves vomit or use laxatives).
- They may appear excessively preoccupied with food and dieting.
- They may exercise excessively to lose weight.
- They may eat compulsively, hide food or eat in secret.
- They may wear loose clothes that hide their body.
- The child or adolescent may feel they have a sense of control when they say "no" to food.

It is sad, but true, that many young people dislike their bodies. They may feel fat and unattractive even if their mirror image shows otherwise. Girls often think they are fat even when they are not and boys may fear they are not big enough.

Helping young people with eating disorders

You can help your child to develop a positive sense of body image in several ways.

- ▲ Point out that healthy, attractive, successful people come in many sizes and shapes.
- ▲ Help your child to discover what they like and value about themselves.
- ▲ Discourage family members from criticising each other's appearance.
- ▲ Reassure your child about the changes to their body size and shape during puberty.
- ▲ Emphasise how these changes are part of growing from childhood to adulthood.
- ▲ Include the whole family in the goal of health and fitness (rather than single out an overweight child for a special regime).
- ▲ Encourage your child to express their emotions in effective and appropriate ways.
- ▲ Keep plenty of healthy snacks in the house such as fruit and bread.
- ▲ Explain how images of women on television and magazines are often changed to make them look slimmer.
- ▲ If a doctor determines your child needs to lose weight, adjust the family's exercise and eating habits to make it easier. Be clear about a healthy weight range for your child.

If you think your child has signs of an eating disorder discuss this with your general practitioner. They can make a referral to a child and adolescent mental health service.

Encourage healthy eating and exercise for the whole family.

How to get help for eating disorders

- ◆ Your general practitioner.
- ◆ Your local Area Health Service (during business hours), including community health centers or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.
- ◆ Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists.

Disturbed eating is very common in young people. Overeating may be related to tension, poor nutritional habits and food fads.

Bulimia and anorexia nervosa most commonly begin in adolescence. Studies show that many girls, as young as 6-8 years, believe an 'ideal weight' is thinner than their own body.

Parents can encourage healthy eating and help their children feel good about their bodies.

Self esteem

By Dr Ken Nunn

and your teenager

What is self esteem and why is it important?

Self-esteem is the way we feel about ourselves. Teenagers who feel good about themselves are usually healthier, make better students and have stronger friendships. They are bothered less by worries and fears and are not so often depressed. Self esteem grows where young people feel valued by other young people around them.

It's important to give our teenagers the skills to handle life and not to handle it for them. Most young people need to become confident that:

- ▲ problems usually can be worked out if we learn to stick at them
- ▲ a problem in one part of our lives does not mean a problem in the whole of our lives
- ▲ when things go wrong it is not always our fault. It is important to take responsibility, but not for everything that goes wrong
- ▲ it is equally important to take responsibility for what goes right.



Dr Ken Nunn is a Child Psychiatrist and the Chair of the Division of Psychological, Developmental and Rehabilitation Medicine, The New Children's Hospital

Most parents want to reassure their teenager that they love them. Lots of teenagers with low self esteem do not need to be re-assured that they are loved. What they need to know is that they are worthy of the love and have done something worthwhile. Sometimes we rob young people of opportunities to show what they can do.

How you can help build your teenager's self esteem

The following steps can help your teenager feel better about themselves:

- ▲ tell them when they get things right
- ▲ be specific about what you appreciate

- ▲ don't make a big deal about praise - keeping praise low key and mentioning it in passing works better
- ▲ focus on what your teenager **does**, not what they **are**
- ▲ when your teenager does something right don't take the credit away from them
- ▲ make it clear you are not giving up all your good times for them so they won't feel guilty.

When teenagers get something wrong:

- ▲ try to keep communication calm and let them know what you want them to do
- ▲ avoid turning molehills into mountains
- ▲ show them a way they can make amends
- ▲ remind them of what they do well and when they get things right
- ▲ point out what is bad luck and what is **not** their fault
- ▲ tell them when you have made a mess of things, but it has worked out.

Teenagers feel better when they know they have something to contribute. So encourage them to make more and more of their own decisions. Based on what's appropriate for your teenager's age and level of maturity, give your son or daughter challenges, the freedom to make choices, the opportunity to experience independence and the chance to savour small successes that together add up to big ones.

No one feels good about themselves all the time. But when we put into practice these principles with each member of the family we are likely to feel better more of the time.



SUICIDE PREVENTION

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Suicide rarely happens without some warning.
**Learning how to recognise the signs
and take them seriously can help.**

Young people can be helped and
suicide may be prevented. Most
young people are relieved to
have someone intervene.

Be willing to listen and ask questions about needs and concerns. Encourage distressed young people to seek help as soon as possible. Offer to take them to appointments and stay with them if necessary. Many young people think they can't be helped and that their problems can't be solved, however, counselling can help them to see solutions to their problems.

Although it is common for young people to be defensive and resist help, most are relieved when someone expresses genuine concern. Support and constructive assistance can come from many sources. Assistance from professionals is much more effective if a network of support is also available from family and friends.

It is important to take suicide threats seriously. Do not assume the situation will get better by itself. Young people can be helped. Sometimes a young person may tell you their suicide plans in confidence, however, their life is more important than keeping a secret. Getting professional help may save a life.

Suicide and the mental health of young people

Most young people who attempt suicide have mental health problems, especially depression. While all of us feel sad or unhappy at some time, when young people are depressed they may feel hopeless or overwhelmed by despair.

Young people who are depressed may feel like they are 'losers' and have little confidence. They may see themselves as powerless and unable to improve their situation. However, depression can be treated and most get better within a year.

Not all young people with depression are suicidal, and not all adolescents

who attempt suicide are depressed. However, if young people are depressed they should be assessed for suicide risk.

Young people with mental health problems may be more vulnerable to stresses such as:

- Loss of an important person through death or separation.
- Recent suicide of a friend or relative.
- Recent break up with a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- Trouble with school or the police.
- Feared or confirmed pregnancy.
- Being a victim of sexual or other abuse (now or in the past).
- Family conflict or domestic violence.

Misuse of alcohol or other drugs can increase the risk of self harm including suicide.

Suicide may take one life, but it affects whole communities. It is a human tragedy, especially when it involves the lives of young people. As many as 90 percent of young people who attempt suicide have a mental health problem at the time. This includes depression, hazardous use of alcohol and other drugs and behavioural problems.

What Are The Warning Signs

Many factors are linked to youth suicide. Although it is not possible to prevent every suicide, knowing about some of the warning signs may help people intervene sooner. These include:

- ▼ Expressing feelings of hopelessness.
- ▼ Decline in school work and attendance.
- ▼ Death or suicide themes dominating written or creative work.
- ▼ Giving away personal possessions.
- ▼ Statements showing suicidal ideas or thoughts about death such as "I wish I was dead", "no one cares if I live or die", "does it hurt to die?".
- ▼ Feelings of worthlessness, letting parents or others down.
- ▼ Withdrawal from friends.

What Can Parents Do To Help?

Adolescence is a difficult time, bridging childhood and adulthood. Parents may feel frustrated by challenges to their ideas and attitudes. Although parents may have difficulty in talking with young people about personal issues, good communication is important in understanding what they are feeling and thinking.

- Be honest about your concerns and feelings and try to discuss them calmly.
- Allow the young person time to talk about their situation and feelings. If possible arrange for a time and place free of interruptions.
- Try and be as non-judgmental as possible. Avoid offering too much advice.
- Do not trivialise the concerns of the young person. Their perspective may be very different.
- Be prepared to ask if they are thinking about hurting themselves.
- Take any talk of self harm or suicide seriously. Suggest that the young person receives assistance as soon as possible.
- Be prepared to help them make and keep contact with professional assistance.
- Do not promise to keep secret any threat of self harm.
- Stay with the young person if you think there is an immediate risk of self harm.
- Convey a message of hope and support.
- Presenting alternatives to suicide and affirming the worth of a young person can assist them to feel less alone and hopeless.

Where To Get Help:

In an emergency contact your general practitioner or local hospital Emergency Department.

For other help, the first point of contact can be:

- Your local Area Health Service (during business hours), including community health centers or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.
- Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists.
- Reachout website which provides a comprehensive online database of services to prevent youth suicide. www.reachout.asn.au

24 Hour Telephone Services are:

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teenage

Having parties, being invited to parties and going to parties are all very important parts of the life of adolescents. But they can be a worry for parents!

What are parties all about?

Parties are:

- ◆ for fun
- ◆ an opportunity to share
- ◆ a help for teenagers in making friends and being accepted by the group
- ◆ an opportunity to meet new friends
- ◆ an opportunity to show off their friends to their family (don't criticise your teenager's friends, even if they do wear earrings in strange places)
- ◆ an opportunity for parents to see their children growing up and socialising (you might be in for some nice surprises)
- ◆ an opportunity to learn the skills of entertaining
- ◆ a celebration of milestones in growing up (milestones need to be marked!).

What parents can do

When your teenager is invited to a party here are some of the things you might want to do.

- ▼ Speak to the parents beforehand to make sure they will be at home.
- ▼ Ask the parents if there will be alcohol at the party. Decide whether you think that is appropriate for your teenager (you may have to make a decision based on health and safety which will be unpopular with your teenager in the short term).
- ▼ Decide to pick up and deliver your teenager (and some of their friends).
- ▼ Don't be afraid to go to the door when you collect your teenager. This is often acceptable to teenagers because they get to stay longer and you get to meet parents (who may become friends). Going to the door when you drop them off can sometimes embarrass teenagers. However you may need to if you are not sure whether the parents will be home.
- ▼ Discuss with your teenager a time when you expect them to be home. Don't be too different from what other parents decide. (Talk it over with a friend who has teenagers if you feel unsure).
- ▼ *Check with your teenager that you are **both** clear about the rules (what is OK behaviour and what is not acceptable).*
- ▼ Ask the parents what, if any, videos will be shown. Teenagers love thrills and suspense but R and X rated movies (and some M rated ones) are not appropriate for young teenagers and may be very disturbing. Talk to your teenager about the sorts of movies they like to watch and the reasons you have concerns about some movies.

Don't be afraid to go to the door when you collect your teenager

What your teenagers might expect to do

- × Decide what they will wear.
- × Have a say in what time they will come home.
- × Decide whether they want to go or not.
- × Go with someone. It is sometimes difficult for teenagers to go in to parties alone. Make it possible for them to go and come home with a friend, even if it means going out of your way. You may need to transport a friend (or several friends) or take your teenager to the home of a friend to get ready.
- × Sometimes have a friend to sleep over after the party. Reliving the party can be half the fun.
- × Have a friend over so that they can get ready together.
- × Choose and buy the present themselves if it is for a birthday party.

If your teenager is older, they can gradually take over these responsibilities themselves. Eventually they will be making their own decisions. Practise, with you in the 'passenger seat', is a good idea.

- × Parents have the right to remind older teenagers about being safe, such as not drinking and driving and not being alone in dangerous situations.
- × Parents have the right not to be worried and to be told of changes in plans such as homecoming time.

When your teenager is giving a party

If you have a teenager, here are some things you could reasonably expect to do.

- ▲ Work out with your teenager how many friends will be invited and what time the party will end. Be specific about the invitations.
- ▲ Expect your teenager to entertain within the family's budget limits.
- ▲ Expect visitors to obey house rules about smoking. Don't be too heavy handed when you talk to your teenager about rules.
- ▲ Take away alcohol. Watch out for bottles that look like soft drinks but are alcohol in disguise.
- ▲ Warn the neighbours about noise beforehand and turn the noise off at midnight.
- ▲ Keep an eye on proceedings without being obvious. For example, you might bring in a plate of food occasionally.
- ▲ Make sure the bedrooms (beds) are occupied by younger children and not available for party guests to sneak into.
- ▲ Ask another couple (parents) over for moral support.
- ▲ Occasionally check the garden and boundaries.
- ▲ Expect your teenager to help prepare and clean up.
- ▲ Expect your property to be respected (although accidents may happen).
- ▲ Refuse gatecrashers (even if they thought they had an invitation).

REMINDERS

- **Helping your teenager plan for a party can be fun!**
- **Let your teenager go to parties, but do your homework first.**
- **Some teenagers are 'nervous' about going to parties and might need support.**
- **Talk to other parents. They are often feeling the same as you.**
- **Half of the fun of parties is getting ready and talking it over afterwards.**

Visit our
Parenting Website
at

www.community.nsw.gov.au

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

Parenting: the most important job in the world

Tips on being a parent, building self esteem and managing grief

Caring for babies & toddlers (0 to 5 years)

Tips on tantrums, toilet training and mealtimes

Caring for children (6 to 12 years)

Tips on choosing the right child care, discipline and TV addictions

The teenage years (13 to 18 years)

Tips on discipline, drugs and peer group pressure



NSW Department of
Community Services

How we help

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) is one of the biggest and most important community service organisations in NSW.

Our job is to:

work with the community to help protect and care for children and young people and support their families

provide and monitor care and support for children who can't live with their families

help people with intellectual disabilities and high support needs achieve greater independence, community involvement and a better quality of life

provide and regulate adoption services

help people separated from their families trace their records

fund and regulate child care services

regulate children's employment

fund community agencies to ensure there are services for the care and support of children and their families as well as for people who are homeless

coordinate services to meet the basic needs of people affected by disasters.