



# Parenting Positively

## Teenage well-being

For parents of teenagers

**TÚSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

  
Barnardos



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Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

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There is information for teenagers on well-being on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

# Introduction

Parents often approach the teenage years with the fear of the unknown, especially with their first child. Up until now their child was fairly predictable, liked to accompany them places and, generally speaking, home was a calm and peaceful place.

But parents often feel challenged when their children enter their teenage years as teenagers seem to prefer the company of their friends, have a greater need for privacy and independence, and can become challenging and critical of parents.

For the young person this is a time of intense change, occurring at many levels – physical, psychological and social. These changes can occur at intervals or all at the one time. It is this high level of change that brings new challenges to both parents and teenagers. When parents understand the intense change their teenage child is experiencing, it can benefit them in their parenting role and help them to maintain a positive relationship with their son or daughter.

Using positive parenting skills can help the relationship between parent and teenage child and help the teenager themselves.

There are many organisations offering help and support to parents and teenagers.

## Key messages

Parents need to take care of themselves too.

Parenting teenagers can pose challenges for many parents.

Children experience many changes during the teenage years.



## How this booklet will help you

This booklet will outline and discuss the needs of teenagers at this time of transition in their lives and will help you to foster your child's overall sense of well-being.

Research on parenting issues indicates that during this period, parents can feel stressed and challenged, having the view that other peoples' teenagers are so much better behaved than theirs. The truth is that teenagers often behave better outside their own home than within.

Of course not all children are the same and there can be great differences in how they will experience this period of transition. For some parents it may be their second teenager who poses the challenges. If this is your experience, you may have difficulty understanding why this is the case. It may simply be a difference in temperament as all children are unique.

You might also be experiencing changes in your own life. You may have recently separated, changed job or lost your job, had a bereavement or a new baby.

Research tells us that parents feel better when they are positive about themselves, have good self-esteem and are satisfied with their role. Whether parents are living together or apart, support from both parents contributes towards the psychological well-being of their children. A joint parenting approach which makes the young person's needs central will help your child and help them to maintain positive relationships with both parents.

There is information for teenagers on well-being on  
[www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

# Teenagers needs and rights

## THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Ireland signed up to in 1992) provides many rights to all children and young people in order to protect them, promote their well-being and help them to develop their unique potential. These include the right:

- To be safe.
- To be protected and live free from violence, abuse or harm (this includes witnessing violence and abuse).
- To be brought up by their parents in a family, unless it is not in their interests.
- To express their views and to have them taken into account in matters that affect them.
- To have decisions that will affect them made in their best interests.
- To be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- To be free from discrimination, bullying and harassment of any kind.

## WHAT TEENAGERS NEED

Teenagers of all ages need to be given responsibilities appropriate to their age and maturity levels, know the limits and learn the consequences of their behaviour. They need to know about safety in general, have an opportunity to reflect on risk-taking behaviour and become more prepared should they find themselves in danger. Young people need adequate sleep, a balanced diet, access to sports and hobbies, and time to relax with family and friends.

They need accurate information on their growth and development, and should have access to relationship and sexuality education at home and in school. While some parents may worry that this may lead to early

experimentation, research tells us that the opposite is true. Therefore, as well as learning from school programmes, it is a good idea for you to talk to your child about relationships and sexuality.

Teenagers need open communication with parents on many topics and need their support and encouragement. Above all they need their unconditional love.

## What is meant by a teenager's well-being?

'Well-being' covers issues regarding physical and mental good health, which includes relaxation and down time, a balanced diet and adequate sleep, time spent with friends, social activities and a supportive family and neighbourhood. Positive self-esteem, good communication and problem-solving skills promote well-being by enabling your child to express their needs and make healthy personal choices.

Your teenage child should have age appropriate responsibilities and understand and respect the limits set for them by you and by society. Their well-being is promoted by them having support when dealing with issues such as bereavement, bullying, divorce and separation.

Well-being can be nurtured in social organisations such as school, sport and cultural centres as well as within religious organisations.

Poverty, abusive experiences, discrimination based on race, ethnic or religious background or sexual orientation can diminish a young person's well-being and may prevent them from reaching their potential. Whether young people belong to one or two parent families, their overall well-being will be enhanced by the following factors:

- Living in a family with good problem-solving skills.
- Closeness within the family, doing things together and teenagers helping out.
- Positive communication within the family.
- Being helped to learn to take responsibility and make positive choices, meaning greater independence and freedom to make their own choices, especially regarding friends and free time.
- Support to explore, enjoy and develop their varied interests and talents.

### **TEENAGERS FROM OTHER CULTURES OR ETHNIC GROUPS**

Ireland is now a multicultural society with many differing family types. It takes time to adapt to a new environment and this applies to children too. When children feel accepted it helps them to integrate naturally into their school and community. Awareness of racism and bullying and a commitment to diversity greatly helps children and families from other cultures to achieve integration.



## FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

In an ideal world, children would be reared by both parents in their own home. Of course sometimes, for many reasons, this is not possible. Whether parenting together or apart, research has shown that there are many benefits when a father remains involved with his children.

In the case of boys, fathers often take on the role as the person who shares humour and can “have a laugh” with them and both sexes can enjoy activities with their fathers such as playing computer games, football and watching TV together. The involvement of the father with the child at the age of 7 and 11 has been shown to predict the number of national examination passes at age 16. Studies have shown that the children who fare best after divorce are those who see their fathers most often.

# Teenage Development

Adolescence is defined by the World Health Organization as a period between the ages of 10 and 19, though this can vary from one young person to another. To understand broadly the different stages, they can be described as early, mid and late adolescence.

Changes occur for young people due to physical development and hormonal changes in their bodies. These changes happen in the following areas – **physical**, **psychological**, **emotional** and **behavioural**. These areas will be described in detail in the different stages as follows:

- Early adolescence (10–13)
- Mid-adolescence (14–16)
- Late adolescence (17–19)

## PHYSICAL CHANGES

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

10–13  
year  
olds  
may:

- Have sudden growth spurts (boys and girls).
- Have an increase in appetite (boys and girls).
- Develop body hair: underarms, pubic region and chest hair in boys.
- Show development of breasts in girls with slight weight gain and broadening of hips.
- Have onset of periods for girls.
- Show development of the sexual organs in boys.
- Have spontaneous erections and wet dreams in boys.
- Show development of pimples/acne (boys and girls).
- See voice changes for boys.
- Begin to develop more abstract thinking and ask philosophical questions such as “Why does God let wars happen?”
- Challenge parent’s behaviour “Why do you tell me not to lie when you do?”
- Begin to question parents’ authority.
- Look outside the family for role models or to their own personal heroes such as footballers, movie and pop stars.
- Still need parents’ support in helping them to choose between right and wrong.
- Begin to reflect on their identity.
- Begin to identify their maleness or femaleness and like to spend time with their own gender.
- Display interests and talents such as in music, sport, debating etc.
- Start to become self-conscious.

PHYSICAL CHANGES	PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES
<p><b>14–16 year olds may:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have faster growth rates (boys and girls).</li> <li>• Show greater development of breasts for girls and sexual organs in boys.</li> <li>• Have a need for more sleep and food (boys and girls).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop greater reasoning, imagination and wider understanding in general and consider “What if...?”</li> <li>• Have the ability for abstract thinking and be able to generate solutions.</li> <li>• Have intelligent debates on many issues and may look for a cause or commitment to things like politics, religion, the environment and animal rights.</li> <li>• Become very idealistic and have a greater interest in philosophy and examine moral dilemmas from different points of view.</li> <li>• One day appear mature and the next day seem childish.</li> <li>• Fly off the handle and seem to have a lack of thought for others.</li> <li>• Become very passionate about things.</li> <li>• Become very self-conscious and think everyone is admiring them and at the same time be self critical.</li> <li>• Think the world is exciting but overwhelming at the same time.</li> </ul>

PHYSICAL CHANGES		PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES
14–16 year olds may:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become confused by multimedia messages about appearance.</li> <li>• Believe the world revolves around them and have grandiose ideas about their lives.</li> <li>• Believe that they are safe from accidents, illness and death.</li> </ul>
17–19 year olds may:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show less dramatic changes in growth as teenagers of this age appear physically mature, though growth may continue for a few more years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appear mature though worry about adulthood.</li> </ul>

	EMOTIONAL CHANGES	BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES
<p>10–13 year olds may:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become moody and withdrawn.</li> <li>• Experience many emotions especially fear, which is often expressed as anger.</li> <li>• Feel safer expressing anger at home than in the outside world.</li> <li>• Start to look for emotional support from peers, especially at school.</li> <li>• Feel socially awkward and self-conscious.</li> <li>• Worry about unwanted attention from boys (particularly girls who are maturing quicker than peers). Late maturing boys may fear they will never catch up with friends who are maturing faster.</li> <li>• Appear to reject parents but at the same time need parental support and love.</li> <li>• Need to know they are loved unconditionally by parents.</li> <li>• Start to become aware of sexual feelings in relation to their own bodies rather than in a relationship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to withdraw from parents and want to spend more time with friends, though usually only in school or home settings.</li> <li>• Like to share activities with children of the same sex.</li> <li>• Begin to challenge authority figures in general and start to realise that parents don't know everything.</li> <li>• Start to reject parents.</li> <li>• Have secrets and have a need for some privacy but at the same time have a need to be safe.</li> </ul>

## EMOTIONAL CHANGES

14–16  
year  
olds  
may:

- Want to exert more independence than before.
- Need to be around friends more.
- Need to feel loved and supported by parents.
- Have strong feelings in romantic relationships.
- Have difficulty understanding feelings of sadness and worry, and these are often expressed as anger.
- Continue to be preoccupied with body image – both boys and girls – and may worry a lot.
- Feel less sure of their identity than before and become more self-conscious.
- Become very idealistic and challenge parents' values and attitudes, especially if they consider them to be "unfair".

## BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

- Have a greater need for independence than before.
- Sometimes feel very confident and take risks, such as experimenting with alcohol or drugs. They may pretend they are older and try to get into pubs, especially if in a group.
- Start to show the world who they are by wearing particular clothes, shoes, dressing in black, dying hair and having a piercing and/or tattoo.
- Learn the skills of friendship by giving support, showing empathy, trust and honesty.
- Start spending more time with friends and going further afield with them.
- One day appear mature and the opposite the next day.
- Express the opposite to parents' values, especially in relation to religion and politics.

EMOTIONAL CHANGES		BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES
14–16 year olds may:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to notice what parents do rather than what they say, for example will challenge a parent who demands them to be in on time but who is late picking them up.</li> <li>• Be self-centred yet caring and learn how to solve conflict.</li> <li>• Begin to become exposed to the world of alcohol, drugs and sexual relationships.</li> <li>• Have heightened sexual energy and may be prone to exaggeration in this area.</li> <li>• Test the limits in many areas yet they need to clearly understand them and know the consequences when limits are not kept.</li> </ul>
17–19 year olds may:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worry about life choices and need support and guidance from parents.</li> <li>• Feel a strong impact when romantic relationships break up and need parent's support.</li> <li>• Worry about their parents when they move out of home or move on with their own lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become more exposed to alcohol, drugs and risky sexual behaviour and experience problems around these.</li> <li>• Appear mature and confident but need parents support with career, work, relationships and choices in general.</li> </ul>



# Frequently Asked Questions

Understanding that much of your child's behaviour, challenging as it can often be, is due to the physical, psychological and emotional changes the young person is experiencing is crucially important during their teenage years. The following section will outline frequently asked questions from parents in parenting programmes when they want to know how to develop a better relationship with their teenage children. It also outlines how to set appropriate limits for them, and how to help teenagers keep to these limits.

## Making a connection

### WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD SEEMS TO BE PULLING AWAY FROM ME?

This is just a passing phase and is a normal stage of teenage development as your child begins to assert their own identity. Remember, your child still loves you, it is not personal. It is normal that you will feel a little sad about this but it will pass eventually and you will feel connected again.

## Communication

### WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD WON'T TALK TO ME?

It is not easy sometimes to communicate with teenagers. They can be moody, appear to be miles away and not interested in your world. At the same time, your child needs to know that you love and care for them and are always there to talk if they want to. Try to spend a little time with your teenage child when you can do something together that they like, such as watching a TV programme, listening to their music and chatting about it afterwards. Just be present, have discussions where possible and avoid rows. Teenagers respond to humour too so try to see if there is a funny side to a discussion.

'When he was younger he was always hanging out of me but lately I have to go looking for him if we are to have any kind of a chat.' (Kevin, father of a 14-year-old boy)

### IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE EAT TOGETHER AS A FAMILY?

Having a meal together is one of the best ways to tune in to each other and communicate. If teenagers usually watch TV while eating, it may be difficult at first to change this habit. Have patience and stay calm. If you never have a meal together, arrange at first to have one at the weekend. Agree to turn off the TV during this period. Get them interested in the meal, perhaps sometimes letting them choose what to cook. Gradually build this pattern up until it becomes the norm.

Mealtimes can be used as an opportunity to focus informally on family issues such as who does what chore or discuss holiday plans. Some families prefer to have family meetings where all issues can be discussed and everyone has an opportunity to express their point of view. Teenagers can have a strong sense of what's fair and will often come up with solutions which are acceptable to everyone. Teenagers should help out with day to day chores but shouldn't be burdened with adult responsibilities.

'We weren't in the habit of eating together, one in the sitting room watching TV, another at the computer. Then I got them to cook something easy and now we eat together a few times a week.' (Sally, mother of four children, two of whom are teenagers.)

### MY CHILD SEEMS AWKWARD WHEN I ATTEMPT TO HAVE A CHAT WITH HIM. WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?

Some teenagers find it easier to talk to parents than others. Most will tend to avoid what they perceive as 'intense' or 'prying' conversations by parents, but will usually try to start a conversation when they want to

talk themselves. They often want to do so when a parent is busy such as when preparing a meal. Seize the opportunity and let them see that you want to talk too. Give warm body language and appear open and interested when your child makes an attempt to talk to you. Going for a walk together or when in the car can be an ideal time to talk to your teenager.

Remember, even though you get the impression that your input or views aren't important, they are. Show some interest in your teenager's life, friends and interests. Let them know you are always available to talk with them.

**'My daughter would always ask me something as soon as I started preparing dinner. I would ask her to wait a minute but then I would never get back to her. Lately I just stop what I'm doing, sit down at the table with her and she opens up about the day.'** (Joan, parent of a 15-year-old girl).



### ALL WE SEEM TO DO IS ARGUE!

It is important to notice things your child has done or attempted to do rather than focusing on the things they haven't done. If your child is struggling with a subject in school, ask them how they approached it in the past and how they could generate solutions. Do they need to find out more information, or are there distractions around when they are doing their homework, such as a TV on in the background, friends calling, texting or phoning? Watch out for your child's feelings and notice them by saying, for example, "I can see you are worried about that, what's that like for you?"

Avoid criticising, comparing or giving too much advice and be prepared to make compromises, for example, if your child won't keep their room tidy, could they agree to be tidy in the rest of the house? "Mistakes" made by teenagers, in all aspects of their lives, can be looked at as learning opportunities.

### HOW CAN I GET MY CHILD TO UNDERSTAND THAT I ONLY ASK QUESTIONS BECAUSE I CARE?

Parents tend to worry a lot about teenagers and find themselves questioning them about all kinds of things, clearly things teenagers do not always feel like answering.

Listening, on the other hand, is a major part of communicating, something you probably find easy enough to do with adults. **Active listening** is a skill in itself and is a way for the other person to feel heard and understood. With teenagers, as indeed with all of us, this is all that is needed sometimes to solve a situation. Active listening goes something like this:

Teen: I had a horrible day.  
Parent: So you had a horrible day. Do you want to tell me about it?  
Teen: No.  
Parent: Oh, you had a horrible day but you don't feel like talking about it?  
Teen: Well it was only horrible because my best friend has stopped talking to me.

The conversation can continue in this way and will help your child to express what's going on inside. Expressing feelings is very healthy, especially for teenagers. To really help your child to feel understood, you can make a little **summary** at the end of the story. By doing this, they will feel heard and can come back again to talk about other things.

## Confidence and self esteem

### HOW CAN I HELP MY TEENAGER TO FEEL MORE CONFIDENT AND HAPPY ABOUT THEMSELVES?

A little bit of praise and encouragement will go a long way towards your child's confidence and self-esteem. Notice their achievements, no matter how small, whether it is with school work, sports, hobbies or how they get on with family and friends. Remember, all children are unique and special. Point out what is special about your child and let them know you love them without conditions.

'I used to point out the things my son did wrong, like getting poor marks in one of his subjects. Now I pay more attention to the other results and would compliment him more about things in general. I can't believe the change it has made to our relationship.' (Mary, parent of a 14-year-old boy)

There is information for teenagers on well-being on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

### **MY TEENAGER IS VERY INFLUENCED BY FRIENDS AND WHAT THEY THINK. IS THIS NORMAL?**

Having friends is very important to teenagers; it is a normal part of growing up. Healthy friendships based on trust and support can have a very positive influence on them. Peer influence can be positive and motivating. However, some teenagers can experience negative peer pressure and bullying.

Having regular communication with your child will help you to pick up on the type of impact peers are having on them. Tune into your child's feelings and use the active listening skill described above, especially if you have concerns. Talk to teachers if bullying is occurring at school and also potentially to the parents of the child who is bullying. Get support for yourself if you feel you need it.

## **School**

### **MY TEENAGER IS DUE TO START SECONDARY SCHOOL NEXT YEAR. IT'S A BIG CHANGE. WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?**

Most parents worry about this change in their child's life. Talk to your child and check out their concerns, they may be quite different to yours. Are they familiar with the school and will present friends also attend? Reassure your child that it is normal at first to feel a little worried about this transition and that others in the class will probably feel the same way. Point out other situations when they made new friends in the past, for example in school, in clubs or on holidays. Explain how you felt at that age when you had to make changes. See this as another opportunity to explore feelings and help your child to express them.



# Assertive communication and managing conflict

## MY SON THINKS I AM OLD FASHIONED AND OVER PROTECTIVE AND WE HAVE REGULAR ROWS.

Conflict is a normal part of life and especially so with teenagers. Due to changes they are experiencing, especially hormonal changes, teenagers can become very intense over something relatively trivial. You may feel intimidated by this and get drawn into arguments or feel unsure how to handle your son. How you relate is what is important. You may be **passive** and give in or **aggressive** where you shout and threaten and perhaps eventually give in anyway. It is best to remain calm and be assertive instead.

**Assertiveness** is about having respect for yourself and at the same time respecting others and their different opinions. It is about understanding rights and responsibilities for yourself and others. Using “I” language and respecting your own values is at the heart of assertive communication. You can listen to your son’s point of view, acknowledge his feelings and say something like “I know you want to go to the disco and you feel embarrassed if your friends see me picking you up, but I need to know you are safe and will pick you up at midnight.” If he has a tantrum, as may be typical in a situation like this, you can calmly walk away and return when things settle down.

Giving in is what spoils children and does not teach them about limitations. If you are having a lot of rows, think about whether you are giving a lot of negative attention to things which are better ignored, such as moodiness and annoying habits.

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE RULES AND HOW CAN I STICK TO THEM?

It is important to have rules, but only a few. They should be about serious things like safety (what time to come in, not hurting anyone), money (limits on spending), about education (not skipping school, doing homework) and overall respect at home and outside.

These are serious issues and rules about them should be clear, consistent, and agreed between parents or guardians.

Your teenagers should clearly understand that there will be consequences if these rules are broken and the consequences must be carried out. Consequences do not have to be major to be effective, they could be the removal of something for a **short** period of time such as TV or games, reducing pocket money or cancelling a social event. Avoid cancelling sport or similar activities.


This is a time for action and not for words. Avoid getting caught up in excuses or rows. When your teenagers know there are limits and know how to keep them, they actually feel safer and know you care about them. Teenagers learn from experiences, it helps them to make choices and take responsibility for their lives. When you have to set limits for your child, let them know you still love them and that it is the behaviour you don't like.

**'Before, his mother was saying one thing and I was saying another, especially about what time to come in. Now we both sit down together and come to a decision and our son seems to accept it.' (Paul, parent of a 16-year-old boy)**

### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT SEX?

Children and young people have a natural curiosity about sex and research tells us that education and open communication about it helps to prevent them from getting into risky situations later in life. There have been many studies carried out about sex education and they all tell us that teenagers need this type of information. Instead of encouraging them to start experimenting, these sex education programmes do the opposite.

Young people are exposed to many media influences and messages about appearance and sexuality and they may have concerns about themselves in this regard. You do not have to be an expert on these



issues; just an openness to talk may be all that is required to offer reassurance to your child. You can also check out useful websites for teenagers given at the back of this booklet. There are also many helpful books available in libraries and book shops that give information that is appropriate to your child's age.

### **SHOULD I LOOK AT MY DAUGHTER'S TEXT MESSAGES AND CHECK ON WHAT INTERNET SITES SHE IS LOOKING AT?**

There is a delicate balance for parents between giving their teenage children enough privacy and at the same time keeping them safe. Most teenagers have mobile phones which, in theory, should be useful from a safety point of view. However, teenagers should be advised about the risk of theft or assault for their phone and what to do in such an event. Bullying sometimes occurs at night through texts or calls. Keeping phones downstairs and switched off at night helps to prevent this. If you have reason to be worried about your daughter's safety, talk first and explain your concerns. Tell her that reading her text messages would be a last resort and that confiding in you would maintain the trust that exists between you.

You also need to be aware of the sites your child visits on the computer or mobile phone. Could you set down a ground rule that you will occasionally monitor the sites visited? Of course it means that you will have to be sufficiently skilled to do this. There are a number of safety booklets and webpages on this issue listed at the back of this booklet.

Avoid putting TVs in bedrooms, watching a programme together is a way of connecting with your teenager and creates an opportunity for discussion and communication.

### **WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD SEEMS REALLY WITHDRAWN?**

Parents often have worries about a lot of their teenager's behaviour. While your child has a need for privacy, staying in a room for very long periods is a worrying sign and could mean that there is something wrong. It is normal for teenagers to sometimes appear withdrawn and in their own world, but this shouldn't last for long periods or get

progressively worse. While looking after your child's physical health is important, it is equally important to look after their mental health. We all have mental health needs such as feeling safe, understood, supported and able to face the challenges of life, that will help our sense of well-being. There are times, however, when mental health issues can arise for anybody and this includes teenagers. They may be experiencing bullying, bereavement or a lack of confidence. Talk to your child and help them to express feelings and worries.

If you are struggling to deal with your child's emotions or behaviour, you both might need help and support.

On page 24 there is a list of behaviours that might suggest a teenager is experiencing difficulties. If you are concerned about any of them, talk to your child and get professional help through your GP, school counsellor or from the agencies listed at the back of this booklet such as Bodywhys or Headstrong. There are a number of useful websites for teenagers such as Jigsaw and Spunout listed at the back of this booklet as well as the Barnardos' website [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)



## WORRYING BEHAVIOUR

Here's a list a list of **worrying behaviours** to look out for in all teenagers. It is important to get professional advice when a teenager shows signs of these and you are concerned.

- Becoming withdrawn and losing interest in friends, sport or favourite activities.
- Having changes in sleep patterns such as not sleeping or sleeping for long periods.
- Avoiding food, over eating and/or excessively exercising.
- Seeming to be preoccupied or obsessed about a particular issue.
- Having a change in mood, becoming hostile or having feelings of anxiety or depression.
- Having a sudden drop in school work.
- Doing things that don't make sense to others.
- Seeing or hearing things that nobody else sees or hears.
- Being excessively tired or neglecting personal hygiene.
- Wearing long sleeved clothes in hot weather and avoiding places like swimming pools. It **may** suggest they are hiding signs of self harm.

## AND DRUGS. WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS AND WHAT CAN I DO?

The teenage years are a time for experimentation and many young people try alcohol in particular and sometimes other drugs. This can be very worrying for parents who know the risks these substances pose for their children. Parents can lead by example and need to be aware of their own use of alcohol or other drugs. Many teenagers access alcohol at home, at their friend's house or from off-licences.

You can be reassured that many teenagers do not go on to develop serious problems in this area. However, if your child is displaying two or more of the following list of behaviours, it might be a signal that they are experiencing difficulties, requiring professional help and advice.

- Loss of interest in family, hobbies or sporting activities.
- Missing classes, a drop in school grades, ignoring school work or repeatedly leaving school early.
- Excessive mood swings.
- Uncharacteristic withdrawal from responsibilities and disrespect for family rules.
- Being verbally or physically abusive.
- Sudden decrease or increase in appetite.
- Disappearance of valuable items and/or money.
- Repeatedly staying out late without adequate explanation.
- Not telling you where they are going.
- Makes excuses for their behaviour.
- Telling lies about their whereabouts and activities.
- If you find cigarette rolling paper, pipes, small plastic bags, etc. in their belongings.

### PRACTICAL TIPS

- Smell their breath. Say hello up close as it is easy to detect the smell of alcohol and hash.
- Can you smell mints or gum? (But be careful of this one! They may have a new boyfriend or girlfriend!)
- Are their eyes red and very teary or are their pupils dilated?
- Is their speech slurred?

You can talk to your child and tell them firmly that you are concerned. If you establish that there is a problem, get help from the school counsellor or your GP can help you find other services. Then apply all the parenting skills described, keep the lines of communication open, monitor money, where your child is going and who they are with, get the names and addresses of people they are hanging out with, find out what time your child will be there, what they plan to do and talk to their friend's parents.

Your child may not like this level of intrusion at this stage but will appreciate it later.

## **SOME IRISH STATISTICS TAKEN FROM STATE OF THE NATIONS CHILDREN REPORT 2006**

### **Binge drinking: 2003**

57% of children aged 15 years reported to have had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row in the past 30 days. There were no differences between boys and girls. Ireland ranked third highest among 33 countries.<sup>1</sup>

### **Illicit drug use: 2003**

40% of children aged 15 years reported to have used an illicit drug in their lifetime. There were no differences between boys and girls. Ireland ranked third highest amongst 33 countries.<sup>2</sup>

1 ESPAD Survey 2003

2 ESPAD Survey 2003

**My world questionnaire: 2009**

Levels of young people's personal risky behaviour were high in the 14-16 age category with one in five drinking weekly (up to 50% monthly), and over one in ten bingeing weekly (nearly one in three monthly).<sup>3</sup>

**Referrals to the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme: 2005**

A total of 17,517 children aged 7–17 years were referred to this service. About 21% of children referred were girls, 79% were boys.<sup>4</sup>

## Self Care for Parents

Understanding teenage development goes a long way in coping with the ups and downs of parenting teenagers.

- Take time out for yourself to do things you have always enjoyed such as reading, visiting friends, exercise, cinema and so on.
- Talk to friends who have teenagers and get a perspective on the issues. Talking to the parents of your teenager's friends may be helpful in terms of information sharing and mutual support.
- Try to lighten up and bring a bit of humour to the job.
- See if there is a parenting course in your area.
- Seek out help for yourself in other areas of your life such as with relationship, budgeting, housing, bereavement, bullying, separation etc.

Check out details at the back of this booklet for further information.

<sup>3</sup> My World Questionnaire, Headstong and UCD, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Crime stats, 2005

## Parenting alone and shared parenting

Parenting teenagers can be challenging at the best of times but parenting apart poses other demands for parents. There are many useful insights and tips available which can help you understand the needs of young people and place these needs centre stage. See details When Parents Separate at the back of this booklet. Also see Barnardos booklet on Helping Teenagers to Cope with Separation developed as part of the Parenting Positively series.



# Finding Help

## **Barnardos**

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8  
Tel: 01 453 0355  
Email: [info@barnardos.ie](mailto:info@barnardos.ie)  
[www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

## **Tusla - Child and Family Agency**

Tusla - Child and Family Agency is the State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It is responsible for child protection, early intervention and family support services in Ireland.

Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter,  
Dublin 8.  
Tel: 01 771 8500  
Email: [info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie)  
[www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

## **Family Mediation Service**

Family mediation is a service to help married and non-married couples who have decided to separate or divorce, or who have already separated.

For contact details of local centres see [http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/content/Family\\_Mediation\\_Service\\_](http://www.legalaidboard.ie/lab/publishing.nsf/content/Family_Mediation_Service_)

## **Family Resource Centre National Forum**

A support network working with the Family Resource Centres (FRCs) located in communities throughout Ireland.  
[www.familyresource.ie](http://www.familyresource.ie)



## Support for both parents and teenagers

Barnardos and Tusla have support and information on parenting programmes all over Ireland available online. See [www.barnardos.ie/resources-advice/parents/parenting-course-database.html](http://www.barnardos.ie/resources-advice/parents/parenting-course-database.html)

Barnardos has support and information for teenagers on well-being, separation, death and domestic abuse on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

Tusla's online resource Parenting24Seven offers parents support to improve outcomes for children and young people [www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven](http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven)

**Aware** – Provides support to those experiencing depression and their families  
T: 01 661 7211  
Email: [info@aware.ie](mailto:info@aware.ie)  
[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

**Bodywhys** A charity offering support, information and understanding for people with eating disorders.  
T: 01 283 4963 / 1890 200 444  
Email: [info@bodywhys.ie](mailto:info@bodywhys.ie)  
[www.bodywhys.ie](http://www.bodywhys.ie)

### **Centre for the Prevention of Self-harm or Suicide**

Email: [mary@pieta.ie](mailto:mary@pieta.ie)  
[www.pieta.ie](http://www.pieta.ie)

### **Childline**

Tel: 1800 666 666  
[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

### **Children's Rights Alliance**

Tel: 01 662 9400  
Email: [info@childrensrights.ie](mailto:info@childrensrights.ie)  
[www.childrensrights.ie](http://www.childrensrights.ie)

### **Crosscare Teen Counselling A**

service that provides professional counselling services for adolescents and their families who are struggling with behavioural and emotional problems.  
Tel: 01 557 4705  
Email: [teencounselling@crosscare.ie](mailto:teencounselling@crosscare.ie)  
[www.teencounselling.ie](http://www.teencounselling.ie)

**GROW in Ireland** An organisation which helps people with mental health problems  
Tel: 1890 474 474  
Email: [info@grow.ie](mailto:info@grow.ie)  
[www.grow.ie](http://www.grow.ie)

### **Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)**

Tel: 01 676 7960  
[www.ispcc.ie](http://www.ispcc.ie)

**Jigsaw Galway** A community based system of care supporting young people to achieve better mental health. In conjunction with Headstrong  
Tel: 091 549 252

**Headstrong** The National Centre for Youth Mental Health  
Tel: 01 472 7010  
Email: [info@headstrong.ie](mailto:info@headstrong.ie)  
[www.headstrong.ie](http://www.headstrong.ie)

**Mental Health Ireland** Provides help to those who are mentally ill.  
Tel: 01 284 1166  
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)

**National Youth Council of Ireland Child Protection Unit**  
Tel: 01 478 4122  
Email: [info@nyci.ie](mailto:info@nyci.ie)  
[www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

**Office for Internet Safety**  
Tel: 01 602 8258  
Email: [internetsafety@justice.ie](mailto:internetsafety@justice.ie)  
[www.internetsafety.ie](http://www.internetsafety.ie)

**One Family** Services and support to one-parent families  
Lo-call: 1890 662 212  
[www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie)

**Parentline** Confidential helpline for parents under stress or seeking parenting advice and support  
Lo-call: 1890 927 277  
Email: [info@parentline.ie](mailto:info@parentline.ie)

**Samaritans** Offers emotional support to adults and teenagers.  
Tel: 116 123

**Shine** Supporting people affected by mental ill health  
Tel: 1890 621 631  
[www.shineonline.ie](http://www.shineonline.ie)

**Spunout** An online support and information service for young people aged 16–25.  
[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

**The Office of the Ombudsman for Children**  
Tel: 01 865 6800  
Email: [oco@oco.ie](mailto:oco@oco.ie)  
[www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

**Treoir** National Information Centre for Unmarried Parents  
Tel: 1890 252 084  
[www.treoir.ie](http://www.treoir.ie)

**Youth Information Centres** are available in many towns and cities  
[www.youthworkireland.ie/what-we-do/youth-information](http://www.youthworkireland.ie/what-we-do/youth-information)

# Useful reading

## **Don't Lose the Head**

A support booklet (produced by two Crosscare programmes Teen Counselling and Drugs & Alcohol Programme) for parents/guardians in dealing with the issues of drugs and alcohol in the family.

Available to download at [www.drugs.ie/pdf/parents\\_manual.pdf](http://www.drugs.ie/pdf/parents_manual.pdf)

## **Straight Talk: A Guide for Parents on Teenage Drinking**

Health Service Executive

## **The Get With it! series by the Internet Advisory Board**

A guide to cyberbullying

A parents' guide to social-networking websites

A parents' guide to filtering technologies

A parents' guide to new media technologies

## **Parenting 24Seven – Tops Tips for Family Wellbeing**

Tusla – Child and Family Agency [www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/](http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/)

The following books are available on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

## **Games and Activities for Exploring Feelings with Children: Giving Children the Confidence to Navigate Emotions and Friendships**

Vanessa Rogers (2011) Jessica Kingsley Publishers

## **Integrated Working with Children and Young People: Supporting Development from Birth to Nineteen**

Nadia Edmond & Mark Price (2012) Sage Publications

## **The Teenager Guide to Stress**

Nicola Morgan (2014) Walker Books

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This booklet is one in a series on Parenting Positively. Parenting is a very rewarding job but one which can be difficult at times, especially when parents are faced with challenging situations. The aim of this series is to provide information and guidance to you, as a parent of a teenager, to help create a positive, loving and supportive relationship between you and your child.

The series covers teenage well-being as well as the complex life issues of death, separation and domestic abuse. The booklets outline teenager's understanding of the particular issue and how you can support them through this difficult time. Each booklet also gives further resources that you can follow up for more information and help on the issue covered.

There is also information for teenagers on these issues on [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)

Also in the series: Parenting Positively for parents of children aged 6–12. Booklets in this range cover a range of topics including death, bullying, separation and domestic abuse. For more information see [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)

Tusla - Child and Family Agency, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8  
T: 01 771 8500 E: [info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie) [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8  
T: 01 454 9699 E: [resources@barnardos.ie](mailto:resources@barnardos.ie) or [training@barnardos.ie](mailto:training@barnardos.ie) [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie)