

Teenagers and risky behaviour

Getting through the teenage years together



“I told him I was too young to become a granddad – that got us talking!”

Having a teenager in the family can be tough. As a parent, you might feel that overnight your son or daughter has become sulky, bad tempered and seems to want to do nothing but shock you. But teenagers themselves may be feeling that they are going through a tough time too.

For years they have been trying to do what you think is right. Now they have to learn how to think and act for themselves. They might say or do things that upset or frighten you. The good news is that, with love and support, most children grow out of this phase.

The world has changed a lot since you were a teenager, and they will be facing very different problems and pressures. It's best to be open about the risks they might be taking so that you can do what you can to keep your teenager safe.



TIPS

for talking to teenagers

- ✓ *Listening and talking openly to your teenager about the risks and challenges they will come up against, can help reduce the risks that they face in their day-to-day life.*
- ✓ *Don't try to force a conversation. It's a good idea to keep an open mind and accept that talking about difficult issues might be tricky for you both.*
- ✓ *Let them know that you understand that the pressures teenagers face can be difficult.*
- ✓ *Give them practical ways to help them stay safe so they don't have to learn through their mistakes.*
- ✓ *Sometimes the best way to help your teenager is to get help and support yourself. Don't be afraid to ask for it.*

Talking about difficult subjects

Research shows that young people want their parents and adult carers to talk to them about sex and healthy relationships. It may not be easy, but it's worth making the effort. If you don't bring it up, they may learn about it from their friends, TV or magazines and get things wrong or become more confused.

Some pointers to remember

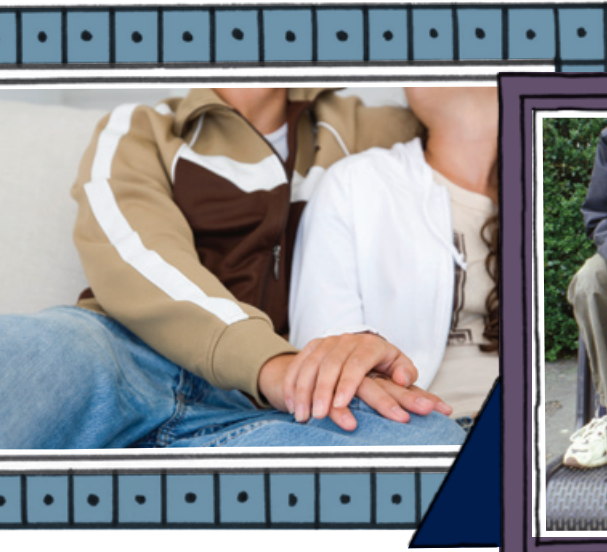
- **Keep an open mind** about your child's sexuality. You might feel shocked, but they deserve your respect and support. You can both get support from Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays www.fflag.org.uk
- **Remind** your teenager that only condoms protect against STIs such as HIV and Chlamydia. Even if a girl is on the pill, it's important to use condoms as well

- If there's a chance your child has caught an STI, encourage them to contact your nearest NHS sexual health clinic as soon as possible. Call your GP for more information on services available in your area. You can also phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or look on the website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk.

Drugs and drinking

More and more teenagers are trying drink and drugs in their early teens.

Young people often have sex for the first time – without using a condom – when they have been taking drugs or have been drinking too much. Many who have had sex after taking drugs or drinking wish it hadn't happened.



TIPS...

Practical tips from Family Lives

- Don't panic if you think your teenager is using drugs or drinking. Wait until you are calm and let them know you are worried. Encourage them to tell you what's happening
- Positive messages help. Your behaviour will influence them most. Don't expect them not to drink and smoke if you drink and smoke in front of them
- Help them say 'no' to pressure. Point out that their friends might just be showing off. Help them see that they can have a mind of their own
- Make sure they are aware of the risks. Teenagers need to understand the risks surrounding sex and getting involved in antisocial behaviour. Lots of young people get in trouble with the police because of things they do when they are drunk or on drugs
- Don't expect instant solutions. Drugs and alcohol might be covering another problem such as bullying or difficulties with school-work. Let them know you are there to talk and don't try to solve everything with one conversation. Don't be afraid to ask for outside help
- Be clear about what is and what isn't allowed in your house. Help them understand what your worries are too.

Keeping your teenager safe

Family Lives' tips for protecting your teenager


- Talk about the risks of pregnancy, catching an STI, accidental overdose, a bad 'trip', having an accident, a fight, or unwanted sex while under the influence
- Talk about safe choices and options – not going out late alone, knowing how they will get home, keeping in touch by their mobile, letting you or a friend know where they are going
- Keep on talking about condoms. Condoms protect against pregnancy and against STIs.
- Let them know they can call you for help if they need you.

Want to find out more?

- **FPA**; www.fpa.org.uk for information and advice on all aspects of sexual health. Call **0845 310 1334**
- **R U Thinking**; www.ruthinking.co.uk for information, advice and guidance for young people under 18 on sex, relationships and contraception. Call **0800 28 29 30**.




Family problems? We can help.


 Free¹ 24-hour, confidential **Parentline** on **0808 800 2222** for advice, information and support on any aspect of parenting and family life

 Or Skype us via our website – **www.familylives.org.uk**

We offer advice and information as well as extended support for complex and difficult issues.

 **Free textphone** for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired – **0800 783 6783**²

 Personalised email service at – **parentsupport@familylives.org.uk**³

 **Online advice and information** on all aspects of parenting and family life

Live chat at **www.familylives.org.uk/livechat**

Give and receive support and advice from other parents and adult family members experiencing similar problems – **www.familylives.org.uk**

Advice and information for professionals working with families at – **www.familylives.org.uk/professionals**

 Face-to-face support groups and workshops. Find out what is available in your area at – **www.familylives.org.uk/localsupport**

¹From landlines and most mobile networks. ²Please note, this service is available from 9-5pm Monday to Friday.

³Guaranteed reply within three working days.

