

**“I said - I’m too
young to be a
granddad.**

That got us talking!”

Risky Behaviour

GETTING THROUGH THE TEENAGE YEARS TOGETHER

Keeping your teenager safe

Being a parent of a teenager can be tough. Overnight your son or daughter can become sulky, bad tempered and seem to want to do nothing but shock you. But teenagers can have a tough time too. For years they have been doing 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 most children get through this phase - so can you.

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

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 with your teenager. 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 yourself. Don't be afraid to ask for it if you need it.

Talking about difficult subjects

Sex, relationships, contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Research shows that young people want their parents to talk to them about sex. It may be hard, but it's worth it.

If you don't bring it up, they may learn about it from their friends, TV or magazines and get things wrong.

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. You can find the address by looking in the phone book under genitourinary medicine, STD or VD. You can also phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or the Sexual Health Line on 0800 567 123.

Drugs and drinking

More and more teenagers are trying drink and drugs in their early teens, often encouraged by the press, TV and their mates. 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.

Practical tips from Parentline Plus

- **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 risk of unwanted 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 schoolwork. 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

Parentline Plus 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 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? Visit:

- www.fpa.org.uk for information and advice on all aspects of sexual health.
- www.ruthinking.co.uk for information, advice and guidance for young people under 18 on sex, relationships and contraception.
- www.brook.org.uk for information and advice for young people under 25 on all aspects of sexual health.
- www.fflag.org.uk - FFLAG works to combat prejudice and discrimination in the family, in school and in society.
- www.talktofrank.com for information and advice on drugs.

HERE ARE SOME PLACES YOUR CHILDREN WILL FIND USEFUL TOO

R U Thinking

Tel: 0800 28 29 30

www.ruthinking.co.uk

fpa

Tel: 0845 310 1334

www.fpa.org.uk

Brook

Tel: 0800 018 5023

www.brook.org.uk

Can't get onto the internet at home?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.

Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL

Free Parentline: 0800 800 2222

Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: 0800 783 6783

Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

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Registered Company No. 3817762 (limited by guarantee). Registered Charity No. 1077722.

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