



Dorset
Mental
Health
Support
Team in
Schools



Dorset HealthCare
University
NHS Foundation Trust

ADVICE & RESOURCES FOR

PARENTING A TEEN

Being a parent or caregiver is an incredibly fulfilling and rewarding experience but undoubtedly it can also be quite challenging. Most parents find themselves worrying about their children and their own capabilities to provide guidance and support. This concern is particularly common among parents of teenagers.

This guide is intended for anyone who is responsible for and serves as a role model for teenagers. Throughout this guide, we use the term 'parent' to encompass all individuals caring for young people, including foster parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, and grandparents. When we mention 'son', 'daughter', 'child', or 'young person', we are referring to the teenagers under your care.





Many parents find their teenager's behaviour challenging.

Teenagers' behaviour can be baffling, stressful, hurtful and worrying. But in most cases it does not mean there is anything more serious going on than the natural process of becoming an adult.


In fact, many of the common behaviour issues that parents find hard are an essential part of puberty and growing up.

Surges of hormones, combined with body changes, struggling to find an identity, pressures from friends and a developing sense of independence, mean the teenage years are a confusing time for your child.

It can mean they, for example:

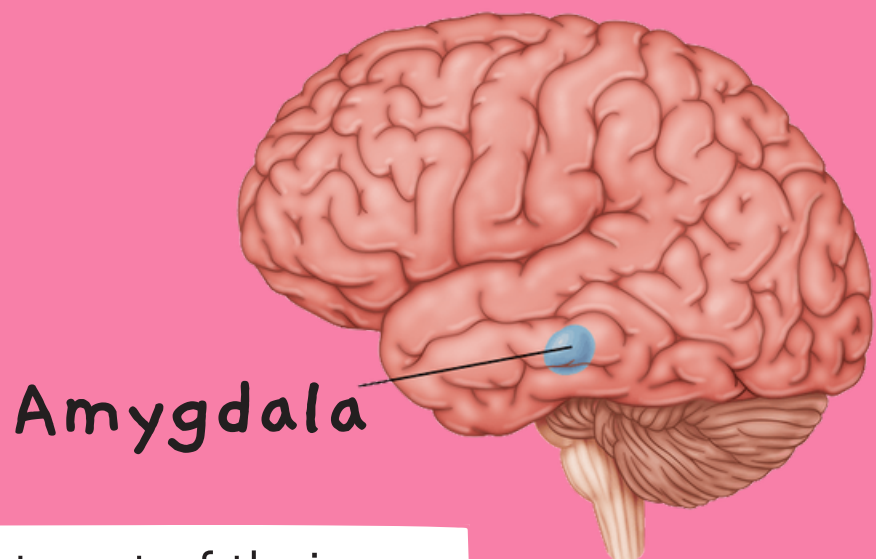
- become aloof
 - want more time alone or with friends
 - feel misunderstood
 - reject your attempts to talk or show affection
 - appear sullen and moody
- 
- 

In this guide, we are going to talk you through teenage brain development to understand why teenagers make decisions, need to sleep more, or may make risky decisions. We'll offer advice on how you can help your teenager whilst also looking after yourself in the process. It can feel hard and overwhelming, but know that even the calmest of parents can feel challenged by teenagers who push boundaries or refuse to talk or show affection.



TEENAGE BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Brain scans can now tell us more about teenager's brains and how they function differently to adult's brains. Knowing more about how the teenager's brain works helps adults understand their behaviour better - why they can be impulsive, need to sleep a lot, be emotional, rebellious, take risks, be distracted, disorganised and late.



Adults use the front part of their brain (the frontal cortex) to think, assess, and plan. By using brain scans, researchers have found that the front part of teenagers' brains is undeveloped.

Teenagers use an emotional part of the brain (the amygdala) more than adults.

SLEEP

Teenagers need at least 9 hours sleep to be optimally alert. Changes in sleep patterns are linked to puberty and changes in hormones.

Puberty is a time when teenager's physical growth speeds up and this is controlled by the release of a growth hormone (girls about 11 years, boys about 14 years).

To grow this quickly they need to make more growth hormone in their body.

Growth hormone is released during sleep.

In teenagers, the sleep hormone (melatonin) is released about 1am compared to 10pm in adults.

Teenagers will continue with this sleep pattern until they have finished puberty. Near the end of puberty, they will change to an adult pattern. For girls this is around 19.5 years of age. For boys this is around 21 years of age.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR TEENAGER SLEEP BETTER?

We all know the things that can be helpful to get to sleep: a routine leading up to bedtime, calming down, quiet and darkness, but you might just need to adapt these things to be more in tune with your teenager.

Even though your teenager's body is changing, bedtime routines and having ways to settle off to sleep are still important. Here are some tips:



ROUTINE

It brings a sense of calm

Avoid the frenzy and anxiety of last-minute activities.

It creates structure

You can better organise your day when you have a plan.

It keeps your body healthy

Routines help you sleep better and manage stress.



For more tricks and tips, check out [Teen Sleep Hub](#)



TAKING RISKS

Taking risks in the teenage years is a normal part of their development. It is part of them becoming an adult. When they are calm, teenagers can make sensible decisions, but there are some things that we know have an effect on how they make decisions about risks.

Teenagers can take more risks when they are with their friends and they are worried about what their friends might think even if they are not with their friends at the time they are taking the risk.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

You can help your teenager by being the person they can come to when they are unsure what to do.

They may not appear to take notice but if you are calm and talk it through with them they are more likely to have the confidence to say 'no' when they know they are in danger. Positive face-to-face connection is the quickest, most efficient way to reduce stress by calming and focusing the nervous system.

Be aware of your own stress levels. If you're angry or upset, now is not the time to try to communicate with your teen. Wait until you're calm and energized before starting a conversation.

Listen without judging or giving advice. When your teen does talk to you, it's important that you listen without judging, mocking, interrupting, criticizing, or offering advice. Your teen wants to feel understood and valued by you, so maintain eye contact and keep your focus on your child, even when they're not looking at you.

Expect rejection. Your teen may often respond to your attempts to connect with anger, irritation, or other negative reactions. Stay relaxed and allow your teen space to cool off. Try again later when you're both calm.

RELATIONSHIPS & FRIENDSHIPS

The teenage years are an important time when adolescents are learning about relationships and friendships.

But again their brain development can make it difficult for them to think clearly at times.

They may sometimes appear to become overwhelmed by something that has happened with their friends, especially if they feel left out or rejected.

This is because the part of their brain that makes sense of situations is still not developed and the part of their brain that feels strong emotions is very active.

So, as an adult, we might be able to see that there is a reason why they haven't been invited to a party, but they might feel it is the end of the world.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Use what you know about your teenager to help them calm down. Sometimes, they might need longer to calm down.

Teenagers are still learning about emotions and relationships and still need your help.

Acknowledge how they feel. When they seem calm, you could see if there might be a reason for the situation (e.g. I wonder if...)

There are lots of resources and information to read up on to help support your teenager with relationships and friendships, you could look at websites such as:

[YoungMinds](#)

[Childline](#)



The following pages in this booklet, for example, show what a good friend looks like and what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like. You could look at these together to help them to think about their own friendships and relationships but also to think about if they are being a good friend or partner, too.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD FRIEND

THEY LISTEN

THEY RESPECT YOUR BOUNDARIES

THEY APOLOGISE FOR THEIR MISTAKES

IN DIFFICULT TIMES, THEY ARE THERE FOR YOU

THEY ARE HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY

THEY ACCEPT YOU FOR WHO YOU ARE

THEY STAND UP FOR YOU

THEY ARE KIND



COMPROMISE

ENCOURAGEMENT

CHOICES AND OPTIONS

RELIABILITY

OWN SPACE

BOTH ARE EQUAL

PRIVACY

OWN INTERESTS

HONESTY

**HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIP**

SUPPORT

FRIENDSHIP

RESPECT

OWN HOBBIES

LOVE

OWN FRIENDS

CONSISTENCY

MANIPULATION

CONTROL

ABUSE

FEELING TRAPPED

CHECKING PHONE

MISTRUST

CRITICISM

ISOLATION

OVER-JEALOUSY

NO CHOICES

ISOLATION

ACCUSING YOU OF CHEATING

**UNHEALTHY
RELATIONSHIP**

CHEATING

FEELING OVERWHELMED

FEELING SCARED

LIES

ERRATIC BEHAVIOUR

FEELING ANXIOUS AROUND THE OTHER PERSON

WANTING TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE ALL THE TIME



THE POSITIVES

There are positive aspects of teenage brain development:

- Their brains are growing at a rapid rate and have enormous potential
- They are more open to ideas, amenable to change and less set in their ways

With support and understanding from you and other adults around them:

- Their brains will mature and they will eventually function as a responsible adult.
- They will be more able to organise and plan.
- Their sleep pattern will change.

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Teenagers can challenge even the calmest of parents. When you have further pressures in your life, such as other children, work, relationships, family commitments or illness, it can feel as though your teenager is going to push you over the edge.

Try to step back from the situation, and remember your child or young person may have physiological reasons for behaving in ways that can be difficult to live with. They're probably not enjoying it either.

You're the adult and you will feel that it's your responsibility to guide them through the difficult times, but that is not always easy. Do not expect to enjoy your time with them all of the time, and remember to look after yourself.

FURTHER SUPPORT



ANNA FREUD

- The Anna Freud Centre is a world leading mental health charity for children, young people and their families.

CONNECTION

- Dorset's 24/7 helpline that anyone, of any age, can call for advice/support. 0800 652 0190.

LISTENING EAR

- 1-1 telephone appointments with a family support adviser for parents/carers looking for a listening ear, reassurance and practical and emotional support.

PLACE2BE

- Parenting advice from child mental health experts.

RELATE

- If you're having problems in your family life, there are lots of ways Relate can help you. They can offer parenting tips, advice, as well as family or individual counselling.

YOUNG MINDS

- Mental health support and resources for young people and their families.

Dorset Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) are working with a number of schools across Dorset to tackle the challenges children and young people experience, by helping them to feel more resilient, arming them with techniques to look after themselves and strategies to help them cope better with life's ups and downs. This includes support for things like mild-moderate anxiety or worries, exam stress and friendship issues through 6-8 sessions of low intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (LI-CBT), counselling sessions, themed group work or information workshops.



get access to our resources

visit our website for more info

bit.ly/dorset_mhst



Dorset Mental Health Support Team in Schools



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Take a look at our social media channels for more ideas, tips and activities to keep you busy and feeling good.



@DORSETMHST

