



London Borough
of Hounslow

YOU AND YOUR TEENAGER

A guide for parents



If your preferred language is not English or
you need this brochure in another format
please call 020 8583 2298



London Borough
of Hounslow



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Hounslow's 'You and your teenager' Handbook.

Your job as a parent is one of the most difficult there is - it can be both challenging and rewarding. It is a job where very little training is given to prepare parents for what lies ahead.

Every family experiences difficulty from time to time and this can test the best of parents. When additional pressures come along, these can make a hard job nearly impossible. At these times it may be hard to think about what help or information you might need.

When things go wrong it does not mean that someone has failed in parenting - things go wrong for everyone. It is often the way difficulties are handled that can make a difference to your teenager, both now and in the future. There is no such thing as the perfect parent. However, there are some ways that can make it a less stressful and more rewarding experience.

What is the handbook about?

It is hoped this handbook can offer some ideas and information to help you find your way through what can be a maze of issues and advice. It gives contacts and further information you can follow up when you are deciding how to deal with your worries and difficulties. This handbook also lists some of the warning signs of particular difficulties and offers helpful tips.

We hope that these impartial guides will provide you with innovative ideas to enable you to meet these challenges and to help you to enjoy a happy and fulfilling family life.



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"I was dreading the teen years and, yes, I have to shout at all the usual things, like doing homework, but what I didn't expect was my son to turn out so interesting."

ADOLESCENCE AND PUBERTY

Changing times

- **Listening is the key to a good relationship**
- **Your teenager wants independence - but still needs you!**
- **Growing up can be frightening for teenagers**
- **Hormones set off physical changes, mood swings and changes in feelings**
- **Give your teenager the information they need**

Adolescence is a time of change. It is the time in a young person's life when they develop from a child into an adult. While teenagers may be excited about some changes they may be less happy about others.

For many parents the teenage years can seem like a time of arguments and bad family relationships.

Puberty in both boys and girls is starting earlier. At the start of puberty, hormones are triggering physical changes and emotional feelings that are not only hard to deal with, but hard to talk about.

Hormones cause many changes in a teenager's body. Your teenager is also developing deeper and more complicated relationships. All sorts of pressures - for example pressure from friends to do things they may not feel comfortable with, can affect their sense of well-being and confidence. They will be having new sexual feelings that are difficult to cope with, and may be worried about their looks.

They will also be trying to work out who they are. Your teenager is learning about views, opinions and beliefs that may not be the same as those they have grown up with. On top of all this, they also have to cope with school or college work that can make them worried and stressed.

Teenagers will take it out on those closest to them - you!

Supporting your teen

How you deal with your teenager can make the difference between a close relationship and a difficult one.

Untidiness, not doing homework, not letting you know where they are or not helping around the house can cause arguments. Bargaining with your teenager works better than making demands: 'If you tidy your room, I'll put this in the wash for you.'

Talking with your teenager about what's going on in their life will help you understand them and help build up their confidence. Listen to their ideas and try to understand their thoughts and feelings. Respect your teenagers' privacy - remember you were a teenager once! Be open-minded and do not judge your teenager, so they feel they can trust you and turn to you when they need help.

The teenage years can be tough and your child needs to know they have your support. It's common for them to argue or even ignore you at times, because they know that, on the whole, you will take the bad moods with the good. If they upset you, don't forget a lot of it is just for show and that when things go wrong, the person they'll often turn to for comfort is you.



Warning signs

Mood swings, arguments, talking back, an 'over-the-top' interest in hygiene, or a complete lack of it are quite normal. Difficulty in saying what they feel calmly and untidiness are all warning signs that your child has become a teen! As well as coping with emotional changes brought on by hormones, your child will have to deal with physical changes.



Action

Listening and talking to your teen will help you understand what they are going through emotionally and physically. One of the best things you can do for your child is to let them know that you are there for them.



What to say

Teenagers can be clever, interesting and thoughtful as well as having set ideas, being sarcastic and sulky. Bring out the best in them by talking things through rather than arguing. You will probably have to answer lots of questions about puberty. Don't be embarrassed and be well prepared with simple facts.



Prevention

Remember you are the adult! All too often you may find yourself having temper tantrums! Being flexible and bargaining works better than rules and demands. The more information your teenager has the better he or she will be able to cope with the changes that come with puberty. Talk together to stop any worries or problems getting out of control.



Contacts

• www.raisingkids.co.uk • www.ukparentslounge.com • www.bbc.co.uk/health
• www.familyandparenting.org • Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222
• www.parentlineplus.org.uk • www.teenagehealthfreak.com
• www.thesite.org • www.likeitis.org.uk
• NHS Direct 0845 4647 • www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk



"I love my son, but I just don't understand why he's always getting into trouble. I need help to get him back on the right track."



Warning signs

Missing school or being in trouble at school, stealing, having unexplained amounts of money, mixing with a bad crowd, using drugs and/or alcohol, rudeness or violence towards you or others are all signs of bad behaviour that need to be dealt with as soon as possible.



Action

Talk to your teenager about their behaviour, why they are doing it and what action can be taken to stop it. Do not feel you are alone. There are schemes in place to help your child to aim towards education, training or employment rather than crime.



What to say

Try not to judge, but explain that you want to help stop this behaviour and you need to work together, maybe also with outside help, to steer him or her back onto the right path. Explain where this behaviour could lead unless it is stopped now.



Prevention

Keeping an open relationship and talking to your teenager will help them. Young people from a stable home-life are less likely to offend. Take an interest in schoolwork and encourage after-school activities such as sports, art programmes or courses.



Contacts

- Youth Offending Service 020 8583 6363
- Youth Justice Board For England & Wales 020 7271 3033 www.yjb.gov.uk
- Connexions Direct 080 800 13 2 19 www.connexions-direct.com
- www.parentscentre.gov.uk

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

When every day is a difficult day

- The way you behave as a parent can help your child's behaviour
- Prevention is better than cure
- Peer pressure and boredom are reasons given by teens for offending
- Your local Council can advise you about ways of solving problems in your community

Although you love your teenager, you may not always like their behaviour. As young people grow up, they will test their own and your limits.

Anti-social behaviour is a phrase used very regularly these days. There are different sorts of anti-social behaviour. Some of it might just be described as high spirits. Adults can find it difficult to trust young people and be very quick to form bad opinions. However, some teenagers do take part in behaviour that is damaging and frightening. People have the right to live without fear and that includes teenagers affected by the behaviour of others.

There are many causes of bad teenage behaviour. An unstable family life due to violence or divorce may not help. Living in an area with few things to do and few family activities could be another. Coping alone, health and money worries can add to the stress. Pressure from friends can also be a problem with mates encouraging them to join in. Problems at school or bullying may also be factors.

Research shows that young people's bad behaviour can be stopped by:

- A stable and loving family home.
- The way you behave as a parent.
- Always attending school, training or work experience.

While it is a parent's job to provide the best care they can for their teenager, this does not mean you have

to cope alone. There are many groups that can help families with teenagers to stop their bad behaviour.

The Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP) known locally as N-gage for 8-13 year olds and senior YISP for 14-17 year olds is managed by the Targeted Youth Support Service and works with young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour. They also work with parents/carers to avoid problems getting worse. They can help or families may be sent to other special agencies. The YISP is a multi-agency* panel and has lots of ideas and chances for work with young people.

The Youth Offending Service is there to stop young people carrying out crimes. There are lots of different staff made up of Social Workers, Probation Officers, Education Workers, Health Workers, Police Officers, Substance Misuse Workers, Connexions Advisers and others. Together the staff can look into the needs of a young person, giving advice and support to stop them committing crime. Youth Workers support young people when they are caught up in problematic behaviour and support them within their communities and their families.

It is better to stop your child from ever taking part in crime. A good home life and taking an interest in your teenager will help her or him in every area of their life.



BULLYING

The real story

- **Bullying takes many different forms**
- **Being bullied can have long-lasting bad effects**
- **Be able to see the signs that your child is being bullied**
- **Know how to help your child**

“Bullying has turned my son from a happy young person who loved school and meeting up with his friends, into a scared, intimidated child who has to force himself to walk through the school gates and refuses to go out.”



Warning signs

Changes such as: becoming more withdrawn or violent, regular headaches or stomach aches, worrying, a change of routine (such as the route to school) or not wanting to go out with friends, poor results at school, damaged belongings, missing money, injuries and poor sleep patterns.



Action

Try to get your child to talk to you, a teacher or to contact help groups. Talk about bullying with the school and find out how they handle situations. Don't ignore any signs of bullying.



What to say

Talk about ways that they can deal with bullying themselves, to help build up their self-confidence. If this doesn't work, talk to the teacher or headteacher about what can be done. Encourage your child to always tell someone if they are being bullied. Back up concerns to the school in writing.



Prevention

Help your child by spending time with them and listening to any worries they have, showing an interest in their activities, supporting them with schoolwork and encouraging friends. This will help them to build up the self-confidence to deal with what life throws at them.



Contacts

- Hounslow Youth Counselling 020 8568 1818
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- ChildLine 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
- Kidscape 08451 205 204 www.kidscape.org.uk
- www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Bullying happens when someone hurts or frightens another person on purpose.

Bullying can include: teasing or name calling, hitting and kicking, or stealing and damaging another person's things. Spreading rumours, ignoring someone, cruel text or email messages, being picked on because of race, religion, sexuality, disability or just seeming different.

Being bullied breaks down a person's self-confidence, leaving them feeling alone, scared and powerless. Schools can be seen as places to fear rather than places to enjoy. Being bullied affects schoolwork due to stress, missed lessons, not being able to focus and time off school for illness caused by worry or through injuries from being hurt. For a small number, it may lead to thoughts or attempts of suicide.

Look out for signs, as your child may not be able to or want to tell you what is happening to them, because they are scared that you may just make things even worse.

Warning signs:

- Things like headaches or stomach aches, caused by stress and worry.
- Not sleeping well.
- Being more bad tempered than usual or over-reacting and taking it out on brothers and sisters.
- Missing or damaged belongings.
- Bad results at school.
- Worrying about going to school in the morning, or a change in routine with friends.

What you can do

If your child tells you that they are being bullied, don't ignore them. Listen to what they are saying and first try to discuss ideas to help them sort the problem out for themselves.

If this doesn't work, suggest your child keeps a diary of things that happen and that they talk to their teacher or headteacher. You should write to the school about your worries. By law, every school must have an anti-bullying policy. If you feel the school is not doing anything about the problem, write to the Board of Governors and the Local Education Authority or contact the School's Education Social Worker.

Make your child feel better about themselves by encouraging friends they can rely upon and suggest activities or clubs where they can meet new people. Let them know they can talk to you and make them feel loved and secure.

If your child is a bully

Bullies often feel unwanted or uncared for. Bullying makes them feel powerful or popular. It can be upsetting to know your child is a bully but you need to understand why they feel the need to do it. Problems at home, divorce, pressure from friends or being bullied themselves may all be causes. Without judging them, let them know that what they are doing is hurtful and wrong. Discuss ways they can change their actions and ask the school for help if you need to.



"It took me a long time to accept it when my son told me he was gay. I still don't like it, but if that's the way he is, then I want him to know I'm here for him."



Warning signs

Younger teenagers may not yet be aware of their sexuality. Older teens may feel confused about their feelings for their own sex and try to ignore them. Their actions may change as they try to come to terms with their sexuality. Others may try to give you signs that they are lesbian or gay without having to tell you outright.



Action

If you believe your child is gay and having difficulty either coming to terms with this or telling you, start up conversations that will give them an opportunity to bring up the subject.



What to say

It may be hard to accept your child is lesbian or gay, but their sexuality doesn't change the person you have brought up and loved. Let them know you will be there for them and support them as they find their way.



Prevention

There is nothing you can do or should do to try and stop your child from being what they naturally are. Hiding feelings can only do long-term damage to their self-confidence. Encourage your child to be who they are and to be proud.



Contacts

- The Attic 020 8577 5478 www.hounslowattic.org.uk
- West London Gay Men's Project 0800 587 8302 www.westlondongmp.org.uk
- Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) 0845 652 0311 www.fflag.org.uk
- Acceptance (for parents of gays and lesbians) 01795 661463 www.ukselfhelp.info/acceptance
- Hounslow's Young LGBT Project 07960 155329

COMING OUT

Is your son or daughter gay?

- **'Coming out' is a big step for young people**
- **Accept your own feelings**
- **Discuss your worries**
- **Your child needs your support**

However much you love and think you know your child, you may find yourself feeling a range of emotions when finding out that they are gay or bisexual.

You may feel shocked, worried, ashamed or horrified. Even if you had an idea they may be gay, it can still be difficult to accept the truth.

Many young people start to become aware of their feelings at age 11 or 12, but may take years to admit it to themselves or anyone else. They often feel lonely and scared. People often do not accept others who are 'different'. It will have taken a lot of courage for your child to tell you and now is the time they need your understanding and support.

Your concerns

It is normal as a parent to have concerns. You may feel you no longer know your child and that they are not the person you thought they were. You may feel you have to give up the hope of grandchildren. You may worry about the danger of HIV and AIDS, especially for men. You may worry about the problems they may have to face in their lives. You may also feel embarrassed or ashamed to tell family, friends and neighbours. All of these concerns are natural. These are things your child may be worried about too.

Common misunderstandings

There are many things people do not understand about homosexuality. One is

that it's 'just a phase'. While many young people experiment with their own sex, if your child tells you they are gay, accept it, as they won't have said it lightly. Another is that homosexuality is an illness that can be cured. It's not - it's the way your child is. Some parents also believe their child has been 'turned' by mixing with gay friends, but it is unlikely your teenager would tell you about their feelings unless they were sure. Parents should not worry that it is something they have done (maybe being an over-caring mother or absent father) that has 'made' their child gay.

Giving support

It may take some time for you to get used to the fact that your teenager is gay or lesbian, especially if it goes against your culture or religion. But your child still needs your support. Let them know you are there for them, as they may want to discuss issues or problems they are facing. You may find it easier to understand and support your child if you contact one of the help groups aimed at parents of gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. Make sure your child knows how to protect themselves against sexual diseases. Don't make your child feel that they need to keep their friendships and partners secret from you. The more you find out about homosexuality, the more you will understand your child's lifestyle and be able to support them.



DEPRESSION AND MENTAL ILL HEALTH

Dealing with the uncertainties of life

- Many things can set off mental ill health
- Your teenager needs you to listen
- Get professional help

“At first I thought she was just being a moody teenager. But as time went on I realised something was really wrong. She’s getting counselling now - it’s slow, but I’m hopeful she’ll get out of this terrible black hole.”



Warning signs

Not sleeping, mood swings, eating disorders, not caring about their appearance, dropping friends and hobbies, staying in their room, crying, not doing so well at school, finding it hard to work, or being self-critical.



Action

If you think your child is depressed, talk to them and find out if there is any way you can help. Be patient and understanding - what may seem like small problems to you can be too much for a young person. Talk to your doctor and discuss what treatment (such as counselling) may be helpful. You could speak to your child’s school to see if they have noticed any differences in your son or daughter.



What to say

Listen to and talk to your teenager. Help and encourage them to get their lives together. Depression can’t just be switched off, it takes time and understanding to overcome it. Try to get them to contact useful organisations they can talk to in private.



Prevention

A supportive and understanding family means your child may feel more able to talk to you about any problems, rather than bottling them up. Chat about their interests, hobbies, friends and schoolwork so they feel you understand the different parts of their lives.



Contacts

- Hounslow Youth Counselling 020 8568 1818
- YoungMinds Parents’ Information Service 0800 018 2138
www.youngminds.org.uk
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- Doctor • NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

The teenage years are a difficult time and young people have a lot to deal with physically, mentally and emotionally. While every young person feels highs and lows, for some - this turns into depression.

Young people are more vulnerable and sensitive to what is happening to them and are less experienced at being able to deal with problems and anxieties.

Depression can be started by a number of things, such as: parents divorcing or separating; feeling ignored, unloved, or not being listened to; losing friends; changing school or moving home; worries about their looks, sexuality, health, exams or abuse.

What may seem like small problems or worries to an older person can seem like a much bigger problem to a young person. Boys are more likely to get depressed than girls and suffer from serious mental ill health.

What are the signs?

While young people can sometimes seem unhappy and quiet, you may feel that this is more than just a phase. Signs may include being unable to sleep, eating too much or too little, mood swings, staying in their bedroom all day, or giving up interests and hobbies. Crying, avoiding friends and

family, finding it hard to do their schoolwork, or not caring about what they look like are other things to look out for. They may talk about death or have suicidal thoughts.

To escape from their feelings or let them out in the only way they know how, young people may start taking drugs or drinking, not going to school, becoming violent or carrying out crimes such as shoplifting.

How to help

If your teenager is suffering from depression they need help. Don’t ignore their worries and take any talk of suicide seriously. You need to listen, try to understand what they are going through and get professional help if you need to. Get them to talk about their worries. If they don’t feel they can talk to you, there are a number of helplines they can contact. If you are concerned, help them to see their doctor or school nurse. They may want you to come with them or may like to go alone (remember they will still need your support). The doctor can discuss ways to help, often a referral to a trained therapist or counsellor.

A number of services (e.g CAMHS - 020 8630 3237) have specialist staff and they will be able to point you in the right direction.

EATING DISORDERS

The tell-tale signs

- Young people are more likely than adults to have eating disorders
- Controlling food is a way of controlling their lives
- Recognise the problems that set off eating disorders
- Get support - your teenager needs help

"I can't bear to see what my daughter is doing to herself. I wish I could turn the clock back and could have helped her before anorexia took over her life."

Food is an important part of our lives. For some, more often young people, how much or how little food they eat becomes the most important thing in their lives.

Eating disorders develop when food is used as a way of dealing with personal problems. How much is eaten, when, and where, can sometimes seem like the only thing they can control in their lives and have a say about.

Recognising the signs

There are two main eating disorders: Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. People with Anorexia or Anorexics, weigh at least 15% less than they should. Anorexia is a serious condition, which if not dealt with, can cause life-long problems and in rare cases even death.

People with Bulimia or Bulimics tend to maintain their body weight by binge-eating in secret. The main warning signs for both disorders are listed on the right.

Who is affected - and why?

Most of those who experience eating disorders are women, although young men can also have these types of problems. There are many reasons why people have eating disorders and if your teenager has a problem, you will need to try to understand what started it in the first place. For many, having control of what they eat is the only

control they feel they have in their lives. Triggers may include:

- Abuse - physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- Bullying.
- Family problems.
- Parents pushing their child too hard at school - people with Anorexia are often high achievers.
- Not being able to express feelings.
- Lack of self-esteem, feelings of self-hatred, guilt.
- Wanting to look like women in magazines and on TV.
- Wanting to be popular - believing being slim will make them more popular.

How to help

People with an eating disorder are usually the last ones to recognise they have a problem. If you think your teenager is suffering from Anorexia or Bulimia, then they need your help. Try to get them to eat sensibly, but just as importantly, try to find out what are the real problems.

If they don't feel they can talk to you, try to get them to talk to a friend, relative, teacher, school nurse or youth or social worker. You should also talk to their doctor, to discuss any further treatment. Counselling, self-help groups and therapy are all helpful. In very serious cases, they may need to go into a hospital or clinic.



Warning signs

People with anorexia: excessive weight loss; avoiding food while obsessing about it; pretending to have eaten already, hiding body shape, loss of periods, feeling cold, sleep problems, moodiness, not growing, thinning hair growth and dental problems due to being sick. People with Bulimia: binge-eating, sore throat and related infections, dental problems from vomiting, missed periods, disappearing after meals, puffy skin, not drinking enough and using laxatives.



Action

You can't make somebody eat, but you can give your teenager the chance to talk about his or her problems. Let them know that you are there to help them, no matter what. It may also help for you to speak to other parents who have gone through similar experiences with their son or daughter and to share and support each other.



What to say

Try to get them to talk about any problems that may be setting off the eating disorder. If they feel they can't talk to you, encourage them to talk to a friend, relative, teacher or social worker.



Prevention

Girls are more likely to develop eating disorders during their teenage years. If your child knows she can talk to you about any worries, she is less likely to use food as a way of dealing with her problems.



Contacts

- Beating Eating Disorders 0845 634 1414 (helpline) www.b-eat.co.uk
- YoungMinds 0800 018 2138 www.youngminds.org.uk
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk



“Last year my daughter had no idea what she wanted to do. This year she’s taking subjects that will help her reach her ultimate goal - a career in IT. I’m amazed and really proud!”



Warning signs

If your teenager is getting into trouble at school, discuss ways of getting them interested again in their education. If they still behave badly they could be excluded, so make sure they know the results their actions will have on their future education and job.



Action

Find out about the subjects your teenager is studying and take an active interest in their school and homework. Use course material and educational websites to help you. Try to get them to think for themselves and encourage them to express their own ideas.



What to say

Support your child’s education whenever you can. Talk to the school about their education and career choices and how you can best help your teenager.



Prevention

Children who have a stable home life and parents who take an interest in their education and future career tend to stay longer in education and do better. Try to get them to talk about any problems to stop them becoming too worried and stressed.



Contacts

- The Attic 020 8577 5478 www.hounslowattic.org.uk
- Learning for Life Programme contact Hounslow Integrated Youth Support Service 020 8583 2947 Email: youth.service@hounslow.gov.uk
- Education Welfare Service 020 8583 2770
- www.raisingkids.co.uk • www.qca.org.uk • www.dcsf.gov.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk/schools • Jigsaw4u 020 8687 1384
- Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) 0808 800 5793 www.ace-ed.org.uk

EDUCATION

Encourage them to keep learning

- **Help your teenager choose the right subjects**
- **Try to get them to keep learning at school, in higher education or on the job training**
- **Show an interest in their learning**
- **Help with homework where you can**

Modern secondary schools offer a wide range of learning choices for young people. Offering subjects they are interested in or enjoy often means young people will stay in education for longer.

Schools now have systems in place to give young people the help they need to make choices about their future education. This will help them to choose subjects and skills that will keep them interested in their education until they are 18. Support is also given to help work through problems they may come across during that time and to aim for longer-term learning and a better job in the end.

Connexions Service will advise your child either on how to carry on with their education past the age of 16, at school, 6th form college or other colleges of further education. With training on the job (such as an apprenticeship) they can improve their future career choices and often earn some money too!

While the choice of subjects and skills taken is up to your teenager, there are things you can do to back up their interest in education. Spending time helping in your teenager’s education will give them the support they need to make choices about learning and help them to get the career or job they want. Find out what their school’s education plan is and how you can help your child. Take an interest in the subjects they have decided to take and help with homework when you can. As it is probably some time ago that you were in school yourself, ask the school for advice or use some of the many websites that contain education pages (see Contacts).

If your child is excluded

There are two types of exclusion, which means your child being stopped from entering the school or the grounds. The first is a fixed term which may only be for a day, but cannot be for more than 45 days. A permanent or full-time exclusion means a child cannot return to that school but the LEA (Local Education Authority) must find them another place to learn.

The Department of Education has a list of reasons why a child may be excluded from school, including assaulting another pupil or teacher, threatening behaviour and bullying.

If your teenager is getting into trouble at school and has lost interest in learning, talk to them and their teacher as soon as you can. Try and find ways to get them to act more reasonably before it gets to a point where they could be excluded. If your child is excluded but you do not agree with the decision, you have a right to a meeting with the school’s Governing Body.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

The Government’s EMA can be used by young people aged 16-19 who are staying on in some form of education. EMA is intended to help with the day-to-day cost of staying on at school, college or training.

The funding is for young people with a bank account, living in a household with an income of less than £30,000 per year and young people who are UK nationals or granted a stay in this country.

Small weekly payments are made in line with the family’s income.



"I love the fact that my son goes to a multi-cultural school, he has learned so much about different faiths and is just as interested in learning about Divali as Easter."



Warning signs

If you hear your teenager talking in a bad way about other cultures or religions or about other people, tell them that this is wrong and explain why.



Action

Lead by example. Show your children that just because somebody looks or behaves differently it doesn't mean that they are any worse or better than they are.



What to say

Your children spend years listening to your views and ideas so try to make sure that what you are teaching them is fair. Try to have an open mind and remember that not all people are the same.



Prevention

Give your children the chance to spend time with people who they may not normally get the chance to meet. This way they will accept people who appear different and understand that difference should not be a problem.



Contacts

- The Racial Equality Commission, St Dunstan's House, 201-211 Borough High Street, London SE1 1GZ
- Equality and Human Rights Commission 0845 604 6610 www.equalityhumanrights.com
- Hounslow Race and Equalities Council 020 8583 2525

EQUALITY, ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY

Different and equal

- Enjoy living in a place where people come from all around the world
- Try to help your children understand others
- Being different gives us something to talk about
- Lead by example

We live in a country made up of many different faiths, races and cultures which makes it an exciting place to live. In many areas there is a huge mixture of different types of people.

Whatever your background, you may not know much about other cultures or religions and you may think it is better to ignore what you don't understand. It's important that you try to help your children understand others. They will be learning at school about other cultures so try to get them to take an interest in those people that don't always look or act the same way as them.

Equal but different

We are all judged by what we are - sometimes in a good way and other times in a bad way. We are judged for our similarities or differences in so many areas of life, for instance, whether we are male or female, our age, our religion, where we come from, our ability or disability, our political beliefs or how much we earn. For young people, being part of a group is very important and they often want to be the same as everyone else and not 'stick out' in a crowd.

It won't be easy for your teenager to understand that it's okay to be different. You can try to get them to understand why people are different before judging them. You can tell them about differences and that this is what makes people special. Children often take on their parents' beliefs, so make sure you lead by example with a family life that respects difference.

Being abused for being different If you feel that something that has happened is because of where you come from or how you look, tell the police and they will get involved. This is known as racism. Talk to social services or the police. If your teenager is facing problems at school, talk to their teacher or headteacher to try to sort out the problem. Ask your teenager to write down what happened, so this can back up what they say.



“Every time my daughter’s best friend has her hair cut, she gets hers cut in exactly the same way. Why doesn’t she try to be more individual?”

FRIENDSHIPS AND PEER PRESSURE

Coping with demands

- Friendships help your teenager to develop in many ways
- Most young people like to look the same as everyone else and be part of the crowd
- Pressure from other teenagers to act in a certain way can be powerful
- Family support is important - but be prepared, your teenager could turn to their friends first

Friendships are very important to teenagers. Having a close friend or group of friends and belonging to a group helps them feel good about themselves, learn to deal with people, and develop their own identity. This helps them learn about the values and ideas of others.

The meaning of friendship

Girls tend to have smaller groups of friends. Fitting in with a group and sharing secrets is very important, and how you look, what band you like and the length of your hair all need to be just ‘right’.

Friendships are important to boys too, but they usually form larger groups of friends. They may play sports with some mates or just hang out with others. Boys want to look good but they don’t talk about fashion as much as girls do. Worries about who’s ‘doing it’ and who’s not are more important!

Peer groups

Peer groups often form in school or out on the street. Belonging to a group is very important. Young people may want to be part of a group because their friends are, even if they don’t really like what everyone else

does. As they get into their later teens, they will probably make up their own minds rather than going along with the crowd.

Putting on the pressure

Many teenagers feel under pressure to do things they are not happy about because they don’t want to stick out from the crowd. This might mean wearing certain clothes or shopping in the ‘right places’. On a more serious level, this might mean being absent from school, trying alcohol or drugs, shoplifting or going further with a boyfriend or girlfriend than they feel ready to.

Worried about friends

You may feel worried about the effect certain friends are having on your teenager. They may also be worried about what they are doing and do not know how to talk to you about it. Support your child by letting them know they can talk to you and that you will help. You can help your teenager trust their own feelings and values, building up an emotional strength that will help them as they get older.



Warning signs

If your child is unusually quiet or seems unhappy, there may be friendship problems. Suddenly having money or new clothes, unusual behaviour that you think may be caused by drink or drugs and not wanting to tell you about what they are doing are all signs that your teenager may be getting into trouble. It’s unlikely that they’re doing it alone.



Action

Find out if your teenager is having any problems at school or with friends. Ask if there is anything you can do to help and let them know you are always there for them. If the problem carries on, talk to the school or a Connexions Personal Adviser.



What to say

Talk to your teenager calmly and try not to judge them, as this will only make it less likely that they open up to you and feel they can trust you. Problems or friendship break-ups that may seem small to you are very important to your teenager.



Prevention

Even though you may not be the first person your teenager turns to when in trouble, your support is still important. To help stop your child from keeping problems in, let them know you are always there for them when they need you.




Contacts

- www.bbc.co.uk/parenting
- www.raisingkids.co.uk
- Parentlineplus 0800 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk

INTERNET ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

New technology, old problem

- The Internet can be fun and useful
- Have family Internet rules to encourage safer use
- Paedophiles can use the Internet to contact children
- It is important that parents understand the Internet



“My 14-year-old son was spending hours on the computer every evening. As well as worrying that he might become addicted, he was so secretive, I realised I had no idea who he was contacting and what sort of personal information he might be giving out.”



Warning signs

Keeping it secret when using the Internet, changes in how they act, unusual sexual questions, leaving clues (such as emails) that they are having chats with others which seem sexual or you are not comfortable with, or problems at school and not telling you where they are going or who they are meeting.



Action

Set up and stick to your Internet use ground rules. Learn all you can about the Internet and how to use it yourself so you can understand what they are viewing and whether it is suitable.



What to say

Discuss with your teenager the dangers of chat rooms and looking at unsuitable websites. Make sure they know that any personal information, including their real name, should not be passed on to anyone else. Be open-minded about the teen-websites they are viewing, but let them know that if they are worried about anything they see or read on the Internet they can ask you about it.



Prevention

Keep the computer in a family room, with the monitor facing outwards, so you can always see what's on screen. Discuss which websites they are looking at and take a look for yourself. Make sure your teenager is aware of the dangers.



Contacts

- www.kidsmart.org.uk • www.chatdanger.com • www.parentscentre.gov.uk
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
0870 000 3344 www.ceop.gov.uk
- Parentlineplus 0800 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk

The Internet is a wonderful and quick way for young people to find information, help them study and keep in contact with friends or meet new ones.

Unfortunately, the Internet is also a tool for child abuse. People who sexually abuse children - often referred to as paedophiles - use chat rooms to become friendly with children or young people, often by pretending to be another child. Other risks include people who want to get personal information like names, addresses or telephone numbers for fraud. Using the Internet too much can lead to an unhealthy lifestyle and can be addictive.

Keep it safe

Keep an eye on what's going on by keeping the computer in a family room, rather than in a bedroom. Learn how to use a computer, access Internet sites and try out a chat room for yourself so you understand what can happen. Check out which sites your children are visiting to see if they are acceptable.

Ask other parents to tell you about good chat rooms or websites. Look for sites that check messages in chat rooms and those which include clear guidelines for use, teen-friendly advice, warnings and how to report concerns.

You can buy software filters which block access to websites with a sexual content. These don't make Internet use

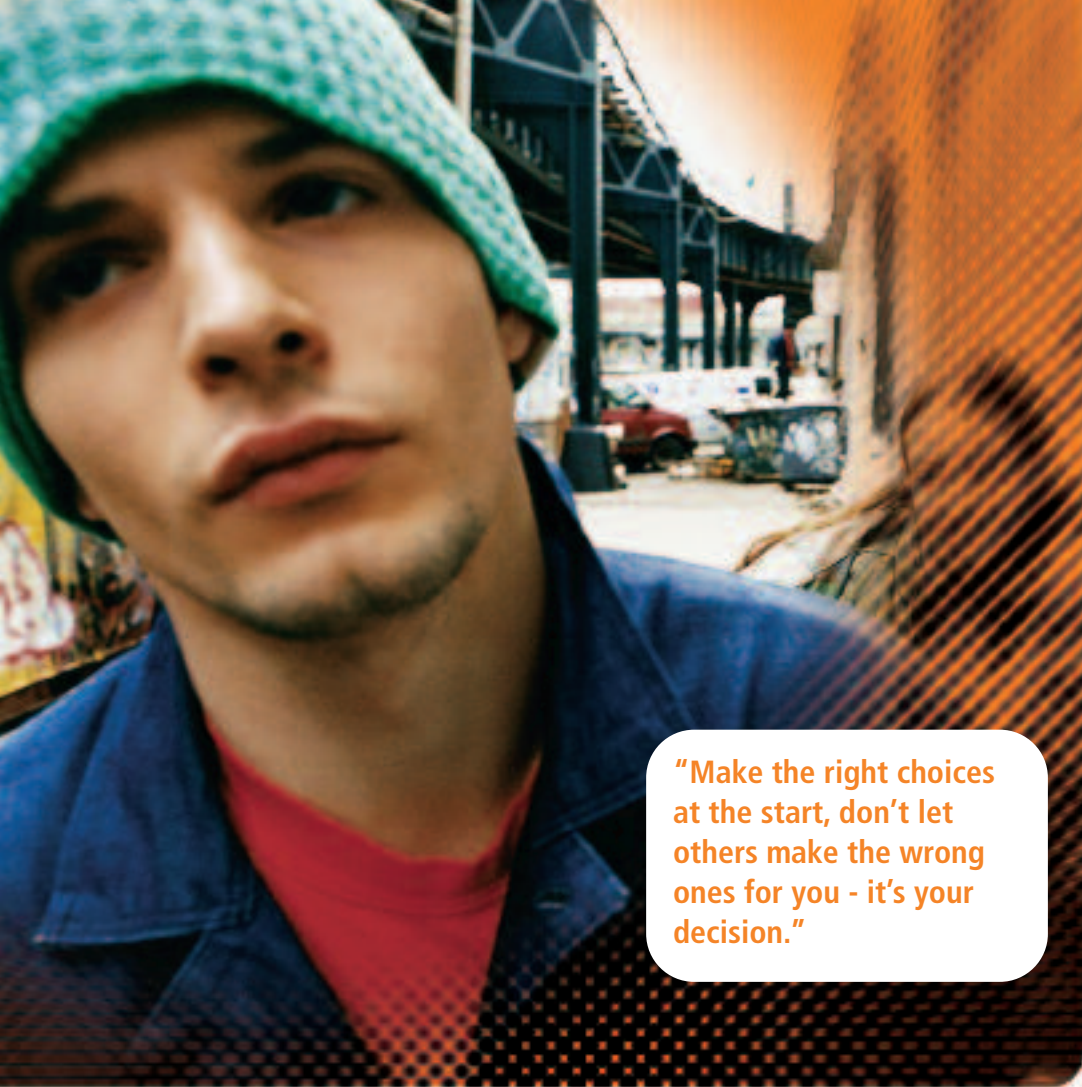
totally safe so it is still much better for you to take an active interest in the sites your child is browsing.

Set ground rules:

- Limit the amount of time your teenager spends on the Internet - and stick to it.
- Discuss the kind of websites they can visit which are right for their age.
- Make it clear that they must never give out their real name, address, home or mobile phone numbers or any other personal details, or post photos of themselves on the Internet.
- They should always let you know if someone is asking questions or wanting details they don't feel happy about giving.

It's important that your child understands why there need to be rules. Explain that because they can't see or hear the people they chat to on the Internet, they may not be who they seem. Paedophiles gain the trust of young people on the Internet. Remind your teenager that strangers on the Internet can be just as dangerous as strangers on the street.

If your teenager is secretive when using the computer, if you notice changes in how they act, problems sleeping or changes in routine or they are suddenly asking about sexual matters, you should look into whether their Internet use has anything to do with it.



“Make the right choices at the start, don’t let others make the wrong ones for you - it’s your decision.”



Warning signs

Changes in behaviour, such as stealing, using drugs, having unexplained amounts of money and mixing with friends who take part in crime. Keeping secrets, not going to or being in trouble at school and being rude to you or others.



Action

Talk to your teenager about what they are doing, what made them do it and how you can help them to put an end to taking part in crime. You are not alone in coping - Youth Offending Services are there to help you both and can offer you support too.



What to say

Try not to judge your teenager. Explain that you want to help them to stop future criminal behaviour and that your teenager will need to work with agencies such as the Youth Offending Service. Explain what will happen if they do not stop.



Prevention

Show your teenager that you and other agencies are trying to help them. Research shows that young people who are in education or training and have good support from their families are less likely to offend. Take an interest in your teenager’s education, employment or training and activities or hobbies.



Contacts

- Youth Offending Service 020 8583 6363
- Youth Justice Board for England & Wales 020 7271 3033 www.yjb.gov.uk
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk

INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Making positive changes

- Listen to what made your child behave as they did
- It is possible to make changes
- ‘Acting tough’ can be a way of coping
- Your child needs your support to stop taking part in crime

If your child is a victim of crime

- Listen and take seriously the information they tell you
- Help them to make informed decisions
- Talk to them about how they would like to see the problem sorted out

Finding out that your teenager has been involved in crime can be a terrible shock and you may feel upset or ashamed.

Before a parent or carer has a chance to catch up with their own feelings there are certain things that may need to happen. If the police have arrested your teenager it is important that you go to the police station to be with them during their interview. Make sure that they have a solicitor. The police will be able to contact the Duty Solicitor service if you do not have one. Remember that your child may be frightened or ashamed and could find the arrest and the police cells a very scary place. Sometimes a way of coping with this is to appear to be ‘acting tough’, this is just their way of coping rather than showing you how they really feel.

At the age of ten years a child can be held responsible for what they do and can be charged and brought before the Youth Court. If your child is carrying out anti-social or criminal acts they can be sent to the Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP), which is managed by the Youth Offending Service (YOS). The YISP helps to assess the young person and see what help they need. The YISP helps stop children from the age of eight years from entering the Criminal Justice System. Parents can contact the YISP if they see the warning signs.

If your child is arrested for a small crime and has never been in trouble before it is likely that a reprimand or warning will be given. The YOS will look into the

reasons why they acted this way to help them put an end to taking part in crime.

If the young person is charged they will have to go to court. If they say they are guilty or are found guilty by the court they will have to meet with the YOS to talk about their actions. They will have to think about how what they did hurt the victims of the crime and they may have to say sorry for the harm caused. Young people who are given Court Orders have strict rules about the number of times they must meet with the YOS, which depends on the type of Order given by the Court.

The YOS helps parents and families deal with what is happening and can help you in your parenting role with your son or daughter. Your support and involvement is vital to help stop any future bad behaviour. Youth workers support young people when they are caught up in problematic behaviour and support them within their communities and their families.

Victims of crime

Even though we often see and hear reports on the TV or radio that it is teenagers who carry out crime, it is far more likely that teenagers will be the victims of crime.

Make your child aware of how to keep themselves and their belongings safe. However, it is important to remember that it is only possible to take steps to reduce the risks of being a victim of crime and that stopping it altogether is about addressing the offender’s behaviour not the victim’s.



MISSING FROM HOME

And running away

- Know where your teenager is
- Give family support - your child is at risk
- Physical and sexual abuse can make young people run away
- Get help for your family

"She makes me so angry when she doesn't do what she's told. Now she won't talk to me or tell me where she's been."



Warning signs

Staying out late, not telling you where they've been, not coming home at night and not going to school are all signs that your teenager could be getting into trouble.



Action

Setting ground rules such as what time to be in by will let your child know what is expected of them. Your child may have reasons for not wanting to be at home, such as family problems or physical or sexual abuse. Let your child know you are there for them if they want to talk about problems.



What to say

If your teenager doesn't want to be at home and can't talk to you about what's going on in their life, you need to get communication started again. Choose a time when you can sit quietly together, talk about any issues and how you can re-build your relationship.



Prevention

Talking is the key to a good relationship. If your teenager knows they can talk to you about any problems, they can often be dealt with before it gets too late. It is up to you to keep your child safe, so if you have a good relationship they are more likely to tell you where they are going and what they are doing.



Contacts

- ChildLine 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
- Shelterline National Helpline 0808 800 4444 www.housemate.org.uk
- Missing Persons Helpline 0500 700 700 (24hours) www.missingpersons.org.uk

Young people love being able to do what they want and part of that is not having to always tell you where they are or answer to you.

This is fine if you have built up trust and you can usually rely on them to be sensible and to be home at a time you both agree on. Problems may happen if your child often stays out late or is missing for a night or two, or they will not tell you where they have been or who they have been with. If this happens they may be trying drugs or alcohol and could be open to sexual abuse or may be getting into trouble with the police. Do not panic, but try to talk to your child in a calm supportive way.

Home sweet home?

If your teenager is spending a lot of time out of the house and does not want to be at home with family you need to look at the reasons why. Are there fights at home? Are there money or personal problems? Do family members have trouble talking to each other calmly and sensibly? Are you worried about your teenager's friends or where they might be hanging out? Have you set fair rules that will make everyone's life easier?

What could happen

If your child doesn't come home when you ask them to and often stays out later, or at times doesn't come home at all and says they have been 'staying with mates' do not panic. Try to understand why they are acting this way. It may be because they do not feel they are getting the family support they need or there is mental, physical or sexual abuse. If they are out all hours and don't want to tell you where they've been it is possible that they could be mixing with people involved in drugs, alcohol, anti-social behaviour or crime. They are also more likely to be missing school. You must tell the police if your child goes missing.

Running away

Running away is a call for help from young people. Most run away because of arguments or violence at home, because of pregnancy, or physical and sexual abuse. The charity, ChildLine says 37% of boys and 63% of girls who call them about running away or being homeless also talked about being physically or sexually abused. If your child has run away contact the police or appropriate organisation who will help you find them.



"I couldn't understand why my 15-year-old daughter's arms were always covered in cuts. When I found out what she was doing, I went mad. She's just attention-seeking... isn't she?"



Warning signs

Look out for injuries such as cuts, burns, scalds or bruises. Your child may try to hide them from you.



Action

Try to find out if your child is self-harming. Think of reasons why they might be doing this so that you can talk through problems and other ways of dealing with them.



What to say

You will be upset but try not to judge them, show them you are angry or try to force them to stop. Make time to really listen to them and try to get them to talk about their problems. Suggest they see their doctor who can get them more help if needed. You could ask your teenager if they would like you to go with them or maybe try talking about things as a family.



Prevention

People who self-harm feel lonely and unloved. Giving your teenager time to talk to you, discussing difficulties they have and letting them know you are there for them will help. Your support will make them feel better about themselves.



Contacts

- Hounslow Youth Counselling 020 8568 1818
- ChildLine 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
- The Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 www.samaritans.org
- Self Harm Alliance www.selfharmalliance.org
- National Self Harm Network www.nshn.co.uk
- National Children's Bureau www.selfharm.org.uk

SELF-HARMING

Understanding and support

- Self-harm is a sign of deeper problems
- Understand the reasons why your teenager self-harms
- Find out how to help your teenager

Self-harming or hurting yourself can take many forms.

This may include: cutting; burning or scalding; hitting; picking skin; head banging against a wall or other object, or taking an overdose.

According to the charity Samaritans, one in ten young people self-harm and girls are more likely to self-harm than boys. While the aim is to hurt, it is not usually to kill themselves and it may carry on for years without getting any worse.

People who self-harm often use it as a way of dealing with problems, such as depression, bullying, abuse or feeling unloved. Young people who self-harm say it is a way of being in control and use it to help them cope, as the physical pain takes their mind off their problems.

Self-harm is not just about getting attention, as it is most often carried out in private and kept secret from family and friends. What they are doing is a sign that they need help. Those who self-harm usually think badly of themselves and need even more attention and support. Young people who self-harm often do not get help for themselves because they may be worried about what you will think of them and their self-harm. Hurting yourself is a serious problem even if the person only lightly cuts themselves. A person who self-harms can't just decide to stop - they need help to get over their problem. Most cases of harming do not lead to death, but can be a sign that your

teenager may be thinking about more serious harm or even suicide.

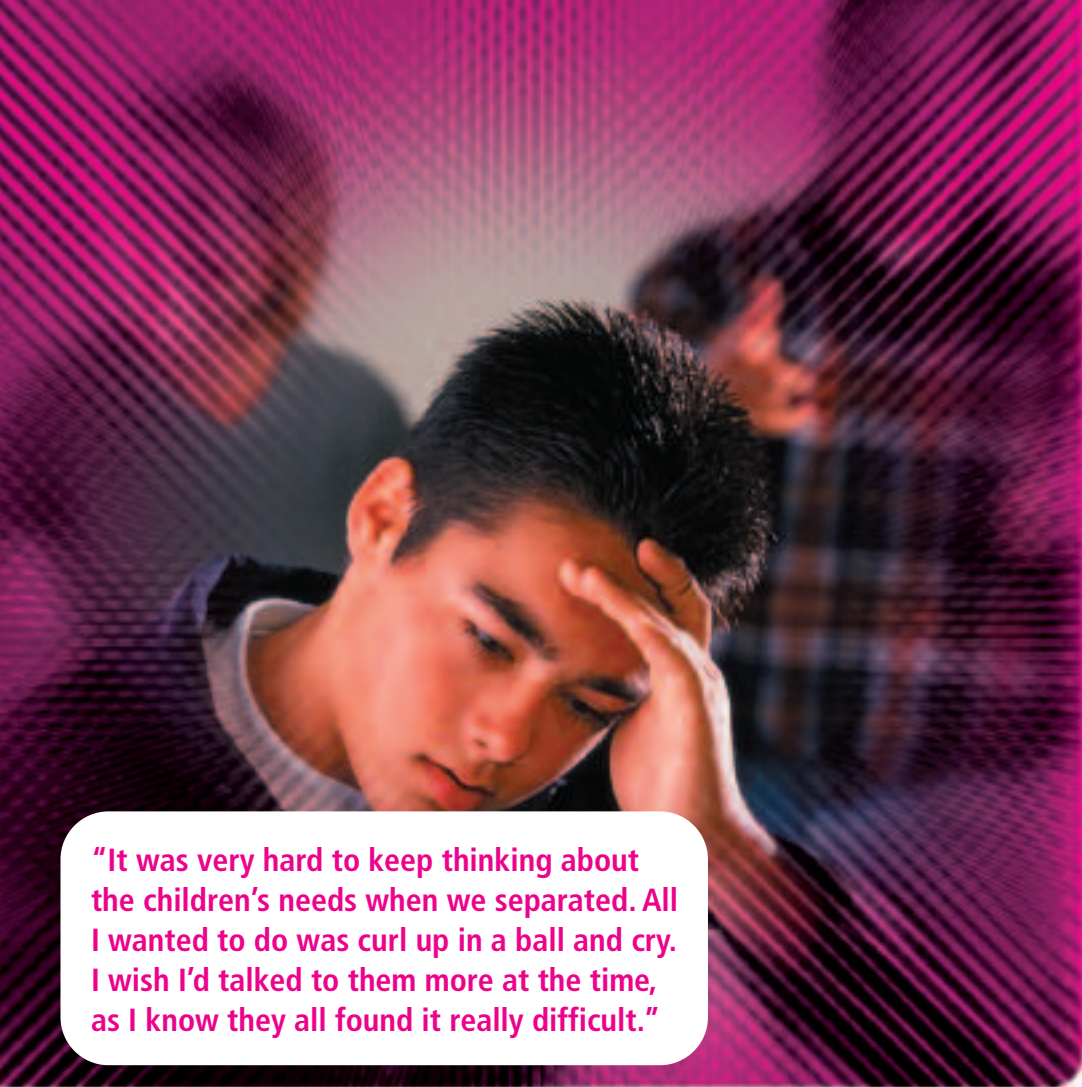
How you can help

If you know that your child hurts themselves on purpose it is normal to feel very upset, angry and powerless. Your teenager needs your understanding and support. Listen to what they are telling you without judging them and try not to show you are angry or upset or try to force them to stop. If this is their way of handling problems then other ways of dealing with them need to be found and tried before they can stop harming themselves. Helping them learn to deal with stress and stopping the things that cause them to self-harm in the first place will be more useful.

If your teenager finds it difficult to tell you about their feelings try to get them to talk to another family member, friend, teacher, youth worker or social worker.

Make sure your child can get first aid supplies to treat injuries and stop infection. If a wound looks serious or your child has taken an overdose, however small, call 999. You should also try to get your child to call you or the emergency services if they ever self-harm and hurt themselves seriously.

Try to get your child to talk to their doctor, who can tell them about other ways of dealing with stress and who can tell them where to get more help. One-to-one counselling, support groups and practical support can all help.



“It was very hard to keep thinking about the children’s needs when we separated. All I wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry. I wish I’d talked to them more at the time, as I know they all found it really difficult.”



Warning signs

Saying bad things or fighting with your partner in front of your children is only going to hurt them. Try to keep calm when talking about what’s going to happen as how you handle things will have a big impact on their future. Your child may take the side of one parent, or become withdrawn and keep secrets.



Action

Tell your children about what’s happening and how it will affect their lives. Show them that their well-being is important to you both by listening to their feelings and wishes.



What to say

Children often think the break-up of their parents is somehow their fault. Explain why you are breaking up and that it is nothing to do with things your child may have said or done. Always give them a chance to talk about their feelings and worries.



Prevention

If you do separate or divorce try to stop your children feeling hurt, guilty, or unloved. Talk to them so they understand why you are breaking up and how this will affect their lives. Let them know that both of you will do what you can to keep their lives as normal as possible.



Contacts

- Hounslow Youth Counselling 020 8568 1818
- www.justice.gov.uk
- www.itsnotyourfault.org (Advice and support for both parents and teenagers)

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

It’s not their fault

- Separation can be as upsetting for your children as it is for you
- Talking helps them understand what will be happening in their lives
- Let them know you will both still be there for them
- Try not to talk your child into taking sides

When a relationship breaks down it is hard for the whole family. While you may think it is kinder to try and protect your children from the details, the truth is that the more your teen understands what is going on, the easier they will find it to cope.

If possible, have both parents there when you explain what’s going to happen and why. Try not to fight in front of them and make clear that even though you will be living apart you will both be there for them whenever they need you. They may have mixed feelings during this time including feeling hurt, confused and unloved. You both need to be patient and understanding of their needs as well as your own.

Children often think that their parents’ breaking up is somehow their fault and that they’ve done something wrong. They may also feel that if they do things differently in the future you may get back together. They need to understand that what’s happened is not their fault.

While most children want contact with both their parents, a young person can view what’s happened differently and may blame one of you for the break-

up. You may find your child taking the side of one parent. Hopefully, this will pass and by explaining the facts, a good relationship can be kept with both parents.

Learning to listen

Talk to your children and listen to what they have to say. How you handle the break-up is important for their well-being. Try to get them to talk about their feelings and involve them in making choices about the future. As well as feeling like they are losing a parent in some way, they may also be worried that they will have to move house or change schools, so tell them about what may need to happen. Talk to your children about who they will live with, where and what other changes may happen. Even though you are going through a difficult time yourself, your child will also be feeling a sense of loss and hurt, so let them know what is happening to help them deal with their own feelings.

Making arrangements

If you and your partner are finding it hard to talk and agree you can get help from your local Mediation Service.



“I used to blame myself. How could I be so stupid to get into this! Now I know better. I was thirteen; he was twenty. He said he loved me, but all along he knew exactly what he was doing.”



Warning signs

Not going to school or staying away from home, unexplained money, clothes, jewellery or other gifts, new relationships with older men, evidence of drug or alcohol abuse, changes in mood or behaviour, loss of contact with former friends and new relationships with an older age group, lack of self-esteem.



Action

Try to get your child to tell you about what's happening, do not ignore your child or make them feel that they are to blame. Get in touch with information and support agencies that can help you and your child.



What to say

Make sure that your child knows that you are there to help them, no matter what has happened. Let them know that they shouldn't feel ashamed, that they are victims of abuse and that you understand how difficult it must be for them.



Prevention

Offer a positive and supportive home life. Watch out for low self-esteem and other warning signs. Get information and support from local agencies if you feel your child may be at risk.



Contacts

- NSPCC 0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk
- Save the Children 020 7703 5400 www.savethechildren.org.uk
- Barnardo's 020 8550 8822 www.barnardos.org.uk

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Drawn into prostitution

- The prostitution of children is a form of sexual exploitation and abuse
- Children can be drawn into prostitution by manipulative adults who wish to make money
- Adults who abuse children should be held responsible, rather than blaming the children
- Children involved in prostitution face devastating physical, emotional and psychological risks
- It is never too early or too late to get help

It may be hard to imagine how any child could be drawn into prostitution.

The sad fact is that those adults who benefit from child prostitution use clever methods to catch their victims, and keep them. It can begin with an 'exciting' new friendship with an older boyfriend who may in fact be, or become, a pimp. The child may receive expensive gifts and be given alcohol or drugs. Before long the pimp creates a loyal and dependent relationship with the victim and can then get them to make money for him by giving sexual services. This is not a business relationship, it is against the law and a form of sexual abuse, which puts the child at risk from severe physical, emotional and psychological damage.

The damage

Children involved in prostitution can become victims of serious physical and sexual attacks, which can sometimes lead to death. They can easily become addicted to drugs and alcohol and face a high risk of catching sexually transmitted infections. The emotional and psychological damage can be huge and can lead to self-harm, severe depression and even suicide.

How to spot it

There are some warning signs detailed (right) that could show that your child is at risk from or is involved in

prostitution. If all or even some of them apply to your child, you should seriously consider that they might be at risk. All children are at risk from harm.

How to stop it

Keeping or getting children out of child prostitution can need specialist help. A close and positive relationship with your child can reduce their vulnerability. Making sure that they have high self-esteem and feel good about themselves can stop them falling into abusive relationships. However, even with the best parents in the world, some children will find themselves open to this form of abuse. Parents can often feel powerless to stop what can be a difficult and dangerous situation.

There are agencies (some detailed right) who work with families to help stop child prostitution. If you feel your child is at risk they can provide information and support for you and your child to help stop dangerous relationships. If your child is involved in prostitution they will work with you and your child to form a plan and package of support to make sure that they are no longer left open to those who wish to take advantage of them. It is never too early or too late to get help.



“My parents explained so little to me about sex, I had to find out from friends - and half of what they said was wrong. I’m determined that my kids know exactly what to expect and learn about safer sex.”



Warning signs

Young people are starting to have sex younger and younger. Don’t think that this won’t happen to your teenager. By the time you see the warning signs it may be too late to give them the help they need. Make sure they learn about sex early on.



Action

There are many leaflets, books and websites that can give you advice on how to tackle the subject of sexual health with your teenager. The more you read, the more comfortable you will be talking to them about it.



What to say

Rather than sitting down and having a one off talk about sex, STIs and relationships it may be better to have regular chats, for example when doing the washing up. Use magazines and TV programmes to help bring up subjects and to use as examples.



Prevention

One third of under 16s are already having sex. The more your teenager knows about sex, the longer they are likely to wait for their first time. They are also more likely to use contraception to stop STIs and pregnancy. Young people want their parents to talk to them about sex so make sure you have the information to help them.



Contacts

- The Attic 020 8577 5478 www.hounslowattic.org.uk
- Marie Stopes 0845 300 8090 www.mariestopes.org.uk
- Brook Advisory Centres 0800 0185 023 www.brook.org.uk
- Family Planning Association 0845 122 8690 www.fpa.org.uk
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

SEXUAL HEALTH

Know the facts

- Young people with all the facts often wait longer before trying sex
- You won’t always know if you have a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)
- Some STIs can stop you from being able to have children if not treated
- Condoms help protect against STIs and pregnancy

Children and young people want their parents to talk to them about sex. They may get information from TV, magazines, friends or PSHE (Personal, Social, Health Education) classes at school, but it is still their parents they trust.

It’s important that your child learns about sex and relationships and using contraception before they have sex. This means they will understand the male and female body and what happens during sex. They also need to understand the dangers of getting STIs and how to stop unwanted pregnancy. It is important to explain that relationships are about love and friendship as well as sex.

How to tell them

It may be hard to talk to your teenager about sex, let alone imagine them having sex! Even though it can be difficult it is important to talk. Young people who understand sex and relationships are less likely to have sex too early. They are also more likely to use contraception when they start having sex which reduces the risk of pregnancy and STIs.

The risk of not having the right information is very real. One in nine people in this country has an STI and sometimes there are no clear signs so they might not even know. The most common STIs are HIV, Chlamydia, Herpes and Gonorrhoea. Most of AIDS sufferers in their 20s will have got HIV

as teenagers. Chlamydia affects teenage girls more than any other age group and if not treated can lead to not being able to have children in the future.

The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe. The younger your child is when you start to talk about sex, sexual health and relationships and the more facts they have, the more natural and less difficult it will be for both of you.

Answer questions teenagers have about sex or their bodies with simple, clear answers and make sure you get all the facts right! Talk about relationships as well as sex and how using protection is up to both people. You don’t have to know the answer to all the questions they might ask and if you’re not sure, say so and maybe find out together.

There are plenty of useful books and leaflets, as well as websites for both parents and teenagers that can help.

The law says that both boys and girls can have sex at 16 even though one third of young people under this age are already having sex. The law says under 16s can get advice, contraception and abortion without telling their parents, if they are seen as sensible enough by their doctor, health visitor or clinic.

Make sure that your child knows where they can get information about local services so that they can make the right choices about their health.



"He keeps hinting that he's tried drugs once or twice. I'm trying to keep cool about it, but I am worried that he'll end up trying something addictive."



Warning signs

Changes in behaviour, such as stealing, being absent from school, getting into fights, being moody, lazy and keeping secrets can all be signs that your teen is taking drugs or drinking.



Action

Try to get your teenager to talk to you about what they are doing, without pushing them. If you think that there is a serious problem, talk about the issue without judging them, as your child will need your help and understanding.



What to say

A good relationship between you means that your teenager will make safer choices. Make sure they know about the different drugs they may come across and their dangers. The more informed you are, the more you will be able to help them.



Prevention

Being educated about drugs and their dangers from an early age means it's less likely that they will have serious drug or alcohol problems. It's also good to lead by example. If your children see you getting drunk or using drugs, it increases the chances of them doing the same.



Contacts

- ADFAM 020 7553 7640 www.adfam.org.uk
- FRANK 0800 77 66 00 www.talktofrank.com
- Drinkline 0800 917 8282
- NHS Smoking Helpline 0800 022 4 332 www.gosmokefree.nhs.uk
- Visions (Drug & Alcohol Service for Under 18's) 020 8583 6440

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Spotting the signs

- It's normal for young people to want to try out new things
- Having the right knowledge leads to safer choices
- Know the signs to look out for
- Be supportive and do not judge your teenager

It's natural for young people to be out more often and to have friends you don't get to know, and go to places you know little about.

It is also likely that your teenager will mix with some people who use alcohol, drugs or other chemicals (such as sniffing glue). While most young people will want to try things out, you can give them advice on how to say no if they are offered drugs or alcohol. Those who have been told about the dangers are less likely to drink heavily or take any drugs.

Studies by the charity Alcohol Concern show that levels of drinking among young people are going up. In one study, 47% of 15 year olds had drunk alcohol in the last week. Research also shows that one in three 14 year olds have tried drugs and by the age of 16, four out of ten young people will have tried at least one type of drug. It is also a known fact that young people are more likely to have risky sex (e.g. without contraception, with lots of different partners or unplanned sex) when they have been drinking or taking drugs. As many as one in fourteen 15-16 year olds said they'd had unprotected sex after drinking. Up to 40% of sexually active 13-14 year olds were 'drunk or stoned' when having sex for the first time.

Should you be worried?

Although drinking and drug taking is serious, for most young people it is a

phase they go through and grow out of as they get older. While it may be an issue for you, your teenager probably won't see drinking or occasionally taking drugs as a problem. This is a natural age to want to try out new things, testing boundaries and being part of the 'in-crowd'.

However, there may be signs that your teenager's drinking or drug taking is more than just trying it out. They may keep secrets, steal and find it hard to concentrate on schoolwork or be absent from school. Their moods may change and they may become lazy or difficult.

Being supportive

You can help your teenager by making sure they are given the facts and know about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

Building up a good relationship with your teenager means they are more likely to talk to you about any concerns they have, which also means they are less likely to turn to drugs or alcohol as a way of getting away from problems.

If you think your teenager does have a problem, choose a quiet time to talk. Don't over-react, accuse or threaten, but try to get them to talk about what's happening. If they find it hard to talk to you, try to find another adult, such as a family friend or teacher they can open up to. Talk to your doctor if you feel your child needs more help. There are also many organisations that offer information and advice to help you and your teenager (see Contacts).

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Preventative parenting

- Lack of information is a common problem for teenagers
- Talk to your teenager

"I was a teenage mum myself, and while I love my daughter, I wouldn't want her to go through the financial and emotional hardship I did by having a baby so young."

The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe.

More than 90,000 teenagers get pregnant every year. 7,700 are under 16 and 2,200 are under 14 years old. Each year 15,000 under 18s have an abortion. Rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) have also gone up in the UK. Teenagers often do not understand the types of contraception available and how to get them. They may not know how to use it (such as how to put on a condom) and that they can get the Pill if they are under 16.

Many teenagers have never been told by an adult that it's okay to say 'no' and not to have sex just because all their mates say they are. It is important to let them know that relationships are about love and friendship and not just about having sex. Most parents feel that there would be fewer teenage pregnancies if more parents talked to their children about sex.

What your child should know

Even though most young people are getting sex and relationship education from school (some schools are better at this than others) teenagers want their parents to talk to them about sex and relationships. The earlier you start talking about sex, relationships and contraception, the less likely they are to have sex too early. They will also be more likely to have safe sex, and cut down the risk of teenage pregnancy and STIs.

Answer questions they have about sex or their bodies with simple, clear answers and find out the answer if you are unsure. Use TV programmes or magazine articles to introduce topics and look at them together. Talk about relationships, as well as sex, and how both boys and girls need to think about protection. Explain that it is not ideal to have an unplanned pregnancy and that being a teenage mum or dad can be tough.

Although the sexual age of consent is 16, one third of young people under this age are already having sex. Under 16s can get advice, contraception or an abortion, without having to tell their parents, if their doctor thinks that they are mature enough to make this choice.

Unprotected sex

Emergency contraception is available to young people and can stop pregnancy in most cases if it is taken in time (usually up to three days after unprotected sex). If it is three days or more, they may still be able to have an emergency IUD (Intra Uterine Device) fitted. Emergency contraception is free from family planning clinics and some chemists.

If your teenager has taken emergency contraception and has not had a period within three weeks they should take a pregnancy test and see their doctor.



Warning signs

One third of under 16s are already having sex, so don't think your teenager is any different. Warning signs that your teenager may be pregnant include keeping secrets, missed periods, morning sickness, worrying and changes in body shape.



Action

If you think your daughter is pregnant, the sooner you talk about it and she can make an informed choice the better. The longer she does nothing about it the fewer choices she will have. Try to get her to go to her doctor or a local clinic and offer to go with her if she wants you there.



What to say

While it may be a shock to learn that your daughter or your son's partner is pregnant, they need your help and understanding, so try not to judge them. Talk about the options of abortion, adoption or keeping the baby and the good and bad points about each choice. Whatever you think, the final choice must be theirs alone.



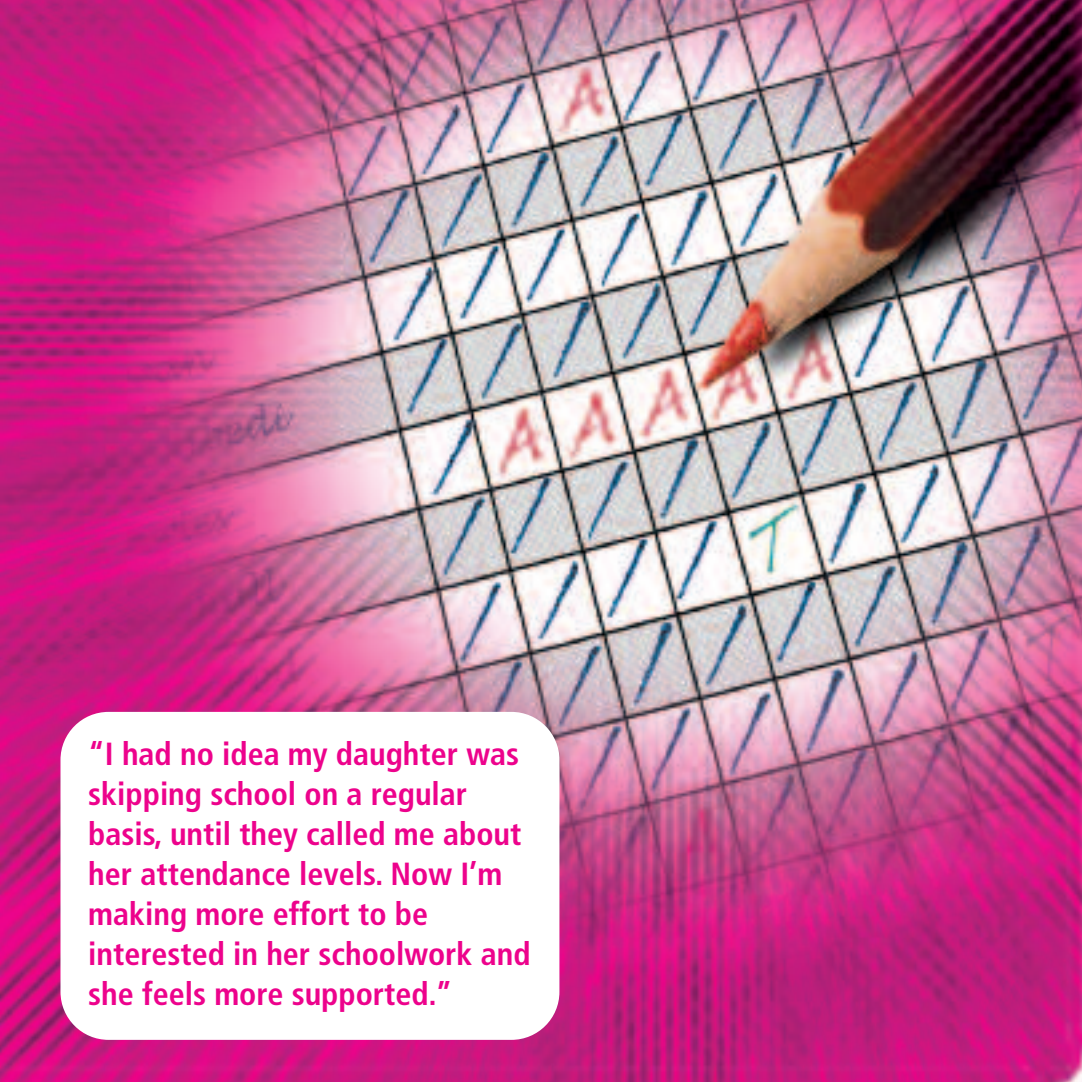
Prevention

The more teenagers are informed the less likely they are to have sex too early and they are more likely to use protection when they do. This reduces the risk of pregnancy as well as STIs.



Contacts

- The Attic 020 8577 5478 www.hounslowattic.org.uk
- Brook Advisory Centres 0800 0185 023 www.brook.org.uk
- Doctor



“I had no idea my daughter was skipping school on a regular basis, until they called me about her attendance levels. Now I’m making more effort to be interested in her schoolwork and she feels more supported.”



Warning signs

Notice what times your child is around. If they should be in school check up if they say the school has allowed them out. You may not even know until you are told by the school or police.



Action

Find out why your child is missing school and talk about any problems such as bullying or fear of failure. Discuss what your child wants for their future and how to reach short-term goals.



What to say

Talk to your child about any school problems and listen to their worries. Take an active interest in schoolwork or activities such as arts or sports clubs.



Prevention

It is your job to make sure that your child gets an education. Always take an interest in their school life and what they are doing, so your child knows they can talk to you about any problems before they get out of control.



Contacts

- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- www.parentscentre.gov.uk
- www.ukparentslounge.com
- Your child’s school

TRUANCY

Are they at school?

- **Young people not going to school is a big problem**
- **Try to understand why they are not going to school**
- **Missing school affects their chances of a good job**
- **It is your job to make sure your child gets an education**

Truancy is a national problem. If your child regularly misses school it can have a big effect not only on your child but on you, the school and even the community.

The results of missing school are serious for your child. The more schoolwork they miss, the harder it is to catch up and the more likely they are to skip days or even want to drop out. They are missing out on building and keeping friends who are often a real support during teenage years.

Truancy also reaches into the community, as there is a knock-on effect of higher levels of anti-social behaviour and crime. If your teen misses school they are more likely to come across situations of risk.

Allowing children to miss school is also a problem. Some parents need their child’s support at home more than others, perhaps because they have an illness or other younger children at home. Contact the school or Education Social Work Service to talk about this. Any time away from school, even for a short family holiday, can affect their education.

How to stop truancy

If truancy is a problem, you need to find out why your child wants to miss school. They may find school frightening, lack self-confidence, feel they are failing or maybe they are

being bullied. The school will help you get your child back into school with the help of Local Education Authority (LEA) professionals, such as Education Social Workers.

Once you understand the causes, it may be easier to get your child to return to school.

Make sure they understand the importance that education and going to school everyday has on their future. Take an interest in what happens during their school day and with homework. Praise them when they do well and listen to any concerns they may have. Talk to teachers about how they are getting on.

What you should be doing

It is the law for parents to make sure that their child receives an education and you are breaking the law if you fail to do so. Parents could get a fine of up to £2,500 or even a prison sentence of up to three months or a community sentence if their children do not go to school. Courts can also give a Parenting Order of up to twelve months. If ignored this order could result in a criminal record or fine. You may be offered a Parenting Contract* in which you meet certain rules and the school or LEA helps you with any support.

Helpful national organisations

- **ADFAM**
(Advice for Families and Friends of Drug and Alcohol Users)
0207 553 7640
www.adfam.org.uk
- **Bullying UK**
www.bullying.co.uk
- **Barnardo's**
020 8551 0011
www.barnardos.org.uk
- **Beating Eating Disorders**
0845 634 1414
Youthline 0845 634 7650
www.b-eat.co.uk
- **Brook Advisory Centres**
0800 0185 023
www.brook.org.uk
- **Child Accident Prevention Trust**
020 7608 3828
www.capt.org.uk
- **Cruse Bereavement Care**
0844 477 9400 (helpline)
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- **Cry-sis Helpline**
08451 228 669
www.cry-sis.org.uk
- **Daycare Trust**
020 7840 3350 (Parents helpline)
www.daycaretrust.org.uk
- **Family and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (FFLAG)**
0845 652 0311 (central helpline)
www.fflag.org.uk
- **Family Planning Association (FPA)**
0845 122 8690
www.fpa.org.uk
- **Family Rights Group**
0800 731 1696
www.frg.org.uk
- **FRANK**
0800 77 66 00 (24 hour free advice)
www.talktofrank.com
- **Internet Watch Foundation**
www.iwf.org.uk
- **Kidscape**
08451 205 204 (parents bullying helpline)
www.kidscape.org.uk
- **Message Home**
(for young people to get a message to their parents)
0800 700 740
www.missingpeople.org.uk
- **Missing Persons Helpline**
0500 700 700 (24 hours)
www.missingpeople.org.uk
- **National Debtline**
0808 808 4000
- **National Domestic Violence Helpline**
0808 2000 247
www.womensaid.org.uk
www.refuge.org.uk
- **NHS Direct**
0845 4647
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- **NSPCC**
0808 800 5000
www.nspcc.org.uk
- **One Parent Families/ Gingerbread**
0800 018 5026 (helpline)
www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk
www.gingerbread.org.uk
- **Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)**
08457 023867
www.pada.org.uk
- **Parentline Plus**
0808 800 2222
www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- **Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)**
0121 248 2000
www.rospace.com
- **R U thinking?**
0800 28 29 30 (7am-12 midnight under 18 years old)
www.ruthinking.co.uk
- **Samaritans**
08457 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org
- **Young Minds**
0800 018 2138 (parents information service)
www.youngminds.org.uk

Helpful local organisations

- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**
020 8630 3237
- **EACH**
020 8577 6059
- **Futures - Hounslow Leaving Care Service**
020 8583 3577
- **Homeless Persons Unit**
020 8583 3842
- **Homestart Hounslow**
020 8577 9552
- **Hounslow African & Asian Youth Association (HAAYA)**
020 8577 6350
- **Hounslow Bereavement Services**
020 8568 6776
- **Hounslow Children's Information Service**
0800 783 1696
childcare.information@hounslow.gov.uk
- **Hounslow Citizen Advice Bureau**
0870 126 9500
- **Hounslow Council Community Safety Team**
020 8583 2503
- **Hounslow Disabilities Network**
020 8758 2014
- **Hounslow Education Welfare Service**
020 8583 2770
- **Hounslow Integrated Youth Support Service**
020 8583 2947
- **Connexions Hounslow**
020 8577 5478
- **Hounslow Action For Youth at Hanworth Youth Centre**
020 8898 0892
- **Hogarth Youth and Community Centre**
020 8747 1999
- **Hounslow Footprints**
07508 000 151 or
07508 000 152
- **Hounslow Youth Centre**
020 8572 6077
- **Hounslow Youth Counselling Service (HYCS)**
020 8568 1818
- **Southville Centre**
020 8751 9836
- **The Hub**
020 8583 5701
- **Hounslow Law Centre**
020 8570 9505
- **Hounslow Police Community Safety Unit**
020 872 9110
- **Hounslow Primary Care Trust**
020 8630 1000
www.hounslowpct.nhs.uk
- **Hounslow Primary Care Trust Child Protection Team**
020 8630 3344
- **Hounslow Welfare Benefits & Money Advice Unit**
020 8583 5016
- **Hounslow Youth Offending Service**
020 8583 6363
- **KISS at Be Wize**
(The Young Person's Sexual Health Service at West Middlesex Clinic)
020 8321 5718
- **Leisure & Cultural Services**
www.hounslow.info
- **London Metropolitan Crimestoppers**
0800 555 111
- **Princes Trust**
020 7382 5100
www.princes-trust.org.uk
- **Tasha Foundation**
020 8569 9933
- **Victim Support Middlesex**
01895 421200
- **Visions**
(Drug & Alcohol Service for Under 18's)
020 8583 6440