



**GROWING
FRIENDSHIPS**

*A guide for carers
& caseworkers:*

RAISING TWEENS & TEENS



**NURTURING
CONFIDENCE**



**STAYING
SAFE**



**FEELING
CONNECTED**

A guide for carers & caseworkers:

RAISING TWEENS & TEENS

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Carers need support and help – we don't have all the answers. Raising kids takes patience, kindness, thinking outside the square – and it helps when you have great support and resources, too!

Donna, Wagga Wagga

HI!

RAISING TWEENS & TEENS



Life with tweens and teens has its ups and downs. Some kids have a hard time figuring out who they are, where they fit in and what they want out of life, especially if they've had a tough start.

YOU & YOUR CHILD

Caring for a teen can be tough at times. Stay strong and give yourself the credit you deserve. The child in your care needs you now more than ever, even if it isn't obvious in the way they behave. The compassion you show and the way you advocate for your teen at school, in sport and in the community are hugely important. It helps restore their optimism and pride, and gives them the strength and self-belief they need to think differently about their future. Your love, patience and hard work will have benefits that last a lifetime.

YOU & YOUR CASEWORKER

You are not in this on your own! Your caseworker and your agency are your partners in care. Together, you can create a rich and caring environment that helps your child recover from a traumatic past to become a happy and healthy teenager.

Your caseworker's experience, knowledge and contacts can be a big help. If you're looking for ways to support kids and teens through emotional, social, educational or health challenges, your caseworker can offer ideas, share insights, or connect you with professional support. And if you feel like you're having a hard time coping, your caseworker can look into things like training, counselling, home help or respite that might be just what you need to get through a tough patch.

Your own thoughts, information and experiences are key to the plans your caseworker is developing for the child in your care. You know as well as anyone how your child is feeling, what they're thinking, and what they need. Without your input, the plans for your child cannot be nearly as effective.

It's important you and your caseworker talk about the goals for your teen and keep each other up to date on news, changes or concerns.

YOU & THIS MAGAZINE

This magazine identifies the most challenging moments for carers, and offers strategies that take into account the kinds of things your teen might be dealing with including big emotions, high sensitivity, poor self-image and impulsive behaviour.

It is just one part of a support network that includes your caseworker, your agency and your own family and friends. Remember that you can always call on your caseworker to share your troubles and triumphs, give you a suggestion when you're out of ideas, and shoulder the load when you need some support. Together, you are a powerful and positive influence.



MORE HELP

Your support network goes beyond your caseworker and agency. There are lots of services and websites dedicated to raising teenagers. Many of them are listed in the margins of this magazine. You'll also find a comprehensive directory of contacts on page 50.

PRE TEENS

8-11

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1 DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM



Showing kids that you value them and you're optimistic about what they can achieve has a big influence on the way they see themselves. When they first arrive in care, some kids feel unlovable or worthless, or believe they are "bad". They may struggle to connect with you or the kids at school. They may even allow themselves to be treated badly by others.

Self-esteem will improve over time, but don't expect the change to happen quickly. The relationship you offer may be the first positive relationship with an adult they've experienced – and it might take a while for your child to get used to it!

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

PUT GOOD THOUGHTS INTO WORDS. Make a point of noticing good behaviour. You could say things like: *I like the way you got your homework finished so quickly or You were so lovely and gentle playing with the cat just now.* The little things you say can build up over time to have a big effect.

THINK ABOUT NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION. Kids who have experienced trauma are often incredibly tuned in to the emotions of people around them. If you're annoyed or feeling impatient, your tone or your body language is likely to give it away. It's better to give yourself a bit of time out and come back to the situation when you're feeling calm and constructive.

NOTICE WHAT INTERESTS YOUR CHILD. Every child has different strengths and passions. Talk to your child about what they like to do so they can develop a sense of pride and confidence in their personal choices and activities.

TALK POSITIVELY ABOUT FAMILY. Your child's sense of who they are is strongly connected to what they know about their biological family. Having a reason to feel good about family is a big contributor to self-esteem. Look at the positives in their family background and point out how the child shares those qualities. It could be anything from *You've got the most beautiful brown eyes, just like your brother to It looks like you're going to be as athletic as your mum.*

NURTURE CULTURAL CONNECTION. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, identity is rooted in community and culture, as well as family. Encourage curiosity by asking questions about language and country. For example, you might ask how to say "yum" or "yuck" or "Too easy!" in the child's language. If your child doesn't know the answer, you can find out together – then you can both start using the word. Your child should have a Cultural Support Plan with actions and goals around maintaining links with family, community, language and cultural activities. If you haven't seen the Cultural Support Plan, ask your caseworker about it.



MORE HELP

Raising Children Network

raisingchildren.net.au

Suggestions for helping kids grow up happy and confident.

Relationships Australia, NSW

nsw.relationships.com.au

1300 364 277

Courses for pre teens on building confidence and self-esteem.

Reach Out

reachout.com

Practical online tools and support for young people.



MORE HELP

Life Story

facs.nsw.gov.au

Learn more about Life Story work and download a copy of the book.

The Charter of Rights

facs.nsw.gov.au

Download comic book versions of The Charter of Rights.

Youth Beyond Blue

youthbeyondblue.com

1300 22 4636 (24 hours)

A resource that helps kids understand the thoughts and moods that make life hard, and what they can do to feel better.



USEFUL TIP

Explain things clearly and consistently

Every child should have a clear, age-appropriate understanding of why they are in out-of-home care. Have a talk with your caseworker and agree on exactly what to say and how to say it.

DESCRIBE THE QUALITIES AND ACTIONS THAT MAKE YOU PROUD. When you explain exactly what it is that you're praising, your child knows what you mean. For example, *I like the way you've organised your room. You've found a spot for everything or I was so proud of how you made sure your friend felt included, that was very kind.* Descriptive praise is much more convincing than vague praise.

TAKE NOTICE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK. When kids make negative comments about things like how they look or how intelligent they are, it's probably a sign that they're struggling with self-esteem. Give your child smiles, hugs and lots of your time to show them how much you love and value them. If the negative self-talk keeps going, check in with your caseworker for suggestions or strategies.

CHERISH LIFE STORY WORK. Show how much you value your child's Life Story work by taking an interest in it and offering to help. Encourage them to use it as a way of understanding and being proud of who they are. Sometimes Life Story work may trigger a painful or traumatic memory. If your child shares information with you about past abuse, you must report it to your caseworker. Your child may want to keep their Life Story work private, and that's okay, too.



Nan tells us we are no better than the other and she loves us both the same.

8-year-old boy

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

MAKE KIDS FEEL IMPORTANT. Kids in care really benefit from knowing that the people around them care about them – and that includes caseworkers. It's great for caseworkers to have a rich relationship with the child in care, from doing fun things like going out for an ice-cream occasionally to making a special effort to help organise holiday outings.

INTRODUCE THE CHARTER OF RIGHTS. The Charter of Rights clearly states the rights of children in care, including the right to be treated fairly and respectfully, and the right to be involved in decision-making. Caseworkers should introduce the Charter and talk about how the child's beliefs, interests and opinions are valued and respected by the people involved in their care.

FOCUS ON LIFE STORY WORK. Life Story work creates a safe space for children to ask their caseworker questions about their family and why they are in care. Supporting kids to understand and accept their personal story provides a solid foundation for self-esteem. If sensitive or traumatic information is shared, the caseworker may recommend speaking to a psychologist to discuss counselling options. Some psychologists include Life Story work as part of therapy.

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT FAMILY CONTACT. Having healthy relationships with parents and siblings can help kids in care to deal with feelings of anxiety, grief or guilt about what has happened in their lives. Caseworkers should support kids to establish and maintain those connections.

GETTING ON TRACK WITH LEARNING

Sound skills in reading, writing and maths will help your child do well at school and in adult life. The good news is that kids of any age (even adults!) can become better learners and improve those skills with the right support.

Kids in care sometimes have gaps in their learning and struggle with numeracy and literacy. It could be because they have changed schools, or missed a lot of school, or because education wasn't a priority in their family home.

Some kids also have learning difficulties that affect how their brain processes and stores information. These problems can make it hard for a student to learn as quickly as other kids in the classroom. The earlier you act, the easier it will be to get things on track.



MORE HELP

School A to Z, Practical Help for Parents

schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au

Practical help for parents around education, wellbeing and technology.

Department of Education Learning and Support Services

dec.nsw.gov.au

1300 679 332 or 131 536

Available to all public school students. For details, talk to your school or call the Department.

Reading Writing Hotline

readingwritinghotline.edu.au

1300 6 555 06

Australia's national telephone referral service for adult numeracy and literacy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

REWARD SMALL SUCCESSES. Children with learning challenges might be extremely capable and intelligent, but still think of themselves as "stupid" because of their school results. Support their self-esteem by noticing and rewarding their effort and their small successes.

MAKE USE OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY.

If you're concerned about your child's reading level or maths skills, speak to the school about accessing literacy and numeracy programs. Most schools run programs to help bring struggling students up to the same level as their classmates. Some schools run homework clubs, too.

LOOK AT STRENGTHS. If schoolwork is a problem for kids, look at the areas in which they excel – perhaps sport, art or music. Support and encourage those activities and let your child know you value their abilities in those areas.

TAKE PART IN SCHOOL LIFE. Getting involved at school is a way of showing that you think education is important and you want to support your child's learning. You may not have time to help out in the canteen or volunteer for classroom activities, but you can do your best to introduce yourself to the teacher, attend parent-teacher nights and get along to school events.

LEARN TOGETHER. Don't worry if your own English literacy skills are less than perfect. Both you and your child can get support from literacy experts. Learning (and even struggling) together will teach your child as much about persistence and problem-solving as it does about reading and writing.

USE YOUR HOME LANGUAGE. Carers who speak English as a second language might feel they can't help their child learn to read and write. Research suggests that reading and writing in any language helps establish fundamental literacy skills, so feel confident about using your home language.



USEFUL TIP

Get on track with help from tutors

Out-of-school tutoring can get literacy and numeracy back on track. Talk to your caseworker about including tutoring in the Case Plan and covering those costs.



MORE HELP

Reading Eggs

readingeggs.com.au

A subscription-based reading program for children aged 3 to 13.

SPELD NSW

speldnsw.org.au

02 9739 6277

Supporting specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Your Tutor

yourtutor.edu.au

Subscription-based online tutoring service for kids aged over 7.

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (AECG)

aecg.nsw.edu.au

02 9550 5666

Programs and events about education from the Aboriginal community's perspective.

READ FOR FUN, NOT FOR SCHOOL. Think about what your child enjoys and encourage them to read more about it on websites, online forums, email newsletters, social media, magazines, comics or books. Let your child discover the benefits of reading, without making the link back to schoolwork.

TAP INTO LEARNING AND SUPPORT HELP. Talk to the teacher about the strategies used in the classroom and find out how you can back those up at home. Ask about accessing Learning and Support resources if you think your child needs them. These are available to all students in NSW public schools who are having difficulties with learning or behaviour, regardless of the cause.

MAKE CONTACT WITH THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICER (AEO).

Schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students usually have an AEO. It's the AEO's job to support Aboriginal kids at school and help them build on their strengths. Get to know your child's AEO. They can be an important and valuable part of your child's support network.

CHECK IN WITH A PSYCHOLOGIST. Psychologists are the health professionals with the expertise to diagnose a learning difficulty. Talk to your child's school or caseworker if you think your child would benefit from a professional diagnosis. School counsellors can also run assessments for learning difficulties. If a learning difficulty is identified, talk to your child about what it means and help them to understand there is no link between learning difficulties and intelligence.



I'd like to do more things I'm good at. I'm not good at school work. I'd like them to make sure I get to do some things I would be good at. I don't like always talking about what I'm not good at.

10-year-old girl

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CONTACT THE SCHOOL. When a child first comes into your care, your caseworker will contact the school principal and let them know about the arrangement. If the child is moving schools, then the caseworker will also provide the new school with appropriate information about the child's history and medical conditions, current schooling arrangements and any existing educational support.

KEEP THE EDUCATION PLAN UP TO DATE. Caseworkers and carers are involved in the annual review of the Education Plan – but they are also responsible for keeping the school up to date, between reviews, on anything that may affect the child's ability to learn. Caseworkers can help organise the external services recommended in the Education Plan, including specialist literacy or numeracy support. Education Plans should be practical, useful and active.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

3



Having a good bunch of friends makes children feel secure and valued. It also helps them feel like they belong. But making and keeping friends isn't easy for some people. Sometimes kids who have experienced abuse and neglect feel insecure and vulnerable, and find it hard to trust people. Create opportunities for your child to stay in touch with old friends as well as make new ones. And talk to them about what it takes to build a good relationship.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE. The way you behave and interact with your child will set the pattern for the relationships they make with others. Teach good conversation skills by using friendly eye contact, listening to what your child has to say, asking questions and taking turns talking. Let your child see you using good manners, at home and when you're out, and prompt them to say things like *please, thank you* and *excuse me*. Show how to be kind and considerate of other people, for example by standing back to let someone pass through on a crowded footpath, or picking up something someone has dropped to return it to them.

ENCOURAGE EMPATHY. Teach kids to understand how their actions affect others. Keep an eye out for opportunities to help your child see those connections. For example, you might say *Can you hear the dog growling now? That's because it doesn't like you pulling its ears* or *That little boy is hiding from us now. Do you think it scared him when you started shouting?*

TALK ABOUT BEING A GOOD FRIEND. Remind kids that friendship is a two-way relationship and that it's important to be a good listener. Teach them to be kind, caring and respectful, not to put other people down, not to pressure their peers, not to gossip and not to judge people by their appearance.

SUPPORT EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS. Do as much as you can to help kids stay connected with their old friends, extended family and existing social networks like dance classes or sports teams. It may mean that you spend extra time travelling to neighbourhoods, clubs or activities outside your local area, but your child will benefit from maintaining those relationships.

BE OPEN TO CONTACT WITH FORMER CARERS. Your child may want to keep in touch with carers and foster siblings from previous placements. Check in with your caseworker to ensure this is safe and appropriate, and do what you can to support the relationships that are meaningful to your child.



MORE HELP

Office of Sport and Recreation
sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au
13 13 02

Outdoor holiday camps that help kids learn new skills and make new friends. The site also has links to local clubs.

Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au

Practical ideas on helping kids with social skills and friendships.

CONSIDER PASTIMES AND HOBBIES. If your child is not making friends easily, think about encouraging them to pursue an interest like art or sport outside of school. If you have time, you could start up a regular activity for your child and some of the other kids at school or in the neighbourhood, like a weekly bushwalk, regular kick-arounds at the park, or a craft club at home.



I don't know... she knows what we've been through, somehow. She gets us and she helps us with our problems.

11-year-old girl

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S NEW FRIENDS. Invite your child to have friends over to the house, and try your best to help them get to social events and activities with their new friends. Make it as easy as you can for them to strengthen the new friendships they make.

DON'T RUSH TO JUDGE. Sometimes you might disapprove of the friends your child is making. At this age, your disapproval could just make those friends seem more attractive. First, listen without judgment and take the opportunity to discuss what it means to be a good friend. If you continue to be concerned about the connections your child is making and the influence they might be under, talk to their teacher or have a discussion with your caseworker.



MORE HELP

Connecting Carers NSW

connectingcarersnsw.com.au

1300 794 653

Creating opportunities for carers and kids to connect and share their experiences.

CREATE Foundation

create.org.au

1800 655 105

Supporting kids in care with forums, workshops and events.

Kids in Care (KiC) Club, UWS

02 9678 7603

An out-of-school-hours recreational and educational club for kids in Western Sydney.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

TAKE GAMES. When caseworkers play age-appropriate board games or card games with kids during visits, it not only helps build the relationship between them, it also gives the kids an opportunity to get used to winning, losing, taking turns and playing by the rules. All of these skills can support the development of friendships.

TRY ROLE-PLAY. Caseworkers can help kids learn about social behaviours through role-play. If the child is interested, try taking some typical pre-teen experiences and act them out with the child, taking turns to play different roles. Then discuss how different sorts of behaviour affected the outcomes.

GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRAMS FOR KIDS IN CARE. Some kids in care are more comfortable in the company of other kids in out-of-home care. Groups like Connecting Carers NSW, The Create Foundation and the University of Western Sydney run camps, workshops and other special programs specifically designed for kids in care.

AIM TO MAKE PLACEMENT CHANGES A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE. Caseworkers can help children maintain strong and stable connections with the people in their lives by sharing relevant information with both a new carer and a previous carer. If appropriate, caseworkers can also put carers directly in touch with each other so the child can have ongoing contact with their previous carer and foster siblings.

4

HAVING A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE



As kids approach their teen years they become more self-conscious and more aware of how their bodies look. At this age, a positive body image can be an incredibly influential contributor to mental health and wellbeing. You can encourage the child in your care to eat well, stay active and feel good about their body.

Body image can be particularly challenging for some children in care who struggle to hold on to a stable sense of self. It's not unusual for some kids to have issues with body image, low self-esteem, shame and guilt.

It's also not unusual for some kids to have a troubled relationship with food. Children who experienced neglect in a home where there was no regular source of food may secretly hoard food or binge eat. Others may have developed a pattern of food refusal as a way of asserting some control over their lives.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

INTRODUCE GOOD EATING ROUTINES. Have a regular routine around breakfast, lunch and dinner, and talk about what sorts of snacks are the smart choices between meals (things like fresh fruits and vegetables, or a glass of milk). It might help to put the meals timetable on the fridge or the family noticeboard.

KEEP HEALTHY SNACKS AT HAND. Have bowls of fruit and other healthy snacks in easy-to-reach places. This can be very reassuring for kids who have experienced food insecurity and may help them give up hoarding behaviour.

BE A BODY IMAGE ROLE MODEL. It will be easier for your child to feel good about their body if they see that you feel positive about your own body. Eat well, stay active, and talk in terms of what your body can do, not how it looks.

CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPES. At some stage, you'll probably notice your child comparing themselves to images they see in the media. Talk to your child about how the media manipulates body image and how real-life healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

DON'T ALLOW TEASING. Make it a rule that teasing about appearance is not allowed. Teasing can have a negative influence on body image and can also lead to children teasing and even bullying peers at school.

WHAT YOU CASEWORKER CAN DO.

BE REALISTIC AROUND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE. Caseworkers can remind carers that it may take time for children to let go of old habits and start to learn new ones. While carers should be encouraging healthy eating habits, they should also be flexible, have realistic expectations and be prepared to make slow progress.



USEFUL TIP

Talk about health (not weight)

If you talk to your child about their relationship with food, focus more on health and how they're feeling, and less on food, weight or body shape. Tell them you want to help them feel happier and healthier. If you get a bad reaction, don't argue. Let it go, and try again another time.



MORE HELP

Completely Gorgeous

completelygorgeous.com.au

Author and cartoonist Kaz Cooke tackles size, shape and self-esteem.

Positive Body Image – a weight off my mind

cyh.com/healthtopics/library/WOMM_bb.pdf

A journal that helps teens shift their thinking about personal body image.

The Butterfly Foundation

thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)

Support for eating disorders and negative body image.

5

STAYING SAFE ONLINE



USEFUL TIP

Teach kids to trust their instincts

Remind kids that if something is wrong or risky, they'll probably feel it: maybe their heart will pound or their stomach will churn. If they feel that way during any sort of exchange online or on social media, they should exit and let you know.



MORE HELP

Office of Children's
eSafety Commissioner
esafety.gov.au

E-safety guides in languages including Arabic and Chinese.

Cyber Smart Kids Quiz
esafety.gov.au/kids-quiz

An online quiz about cyber safety issues.

Digital Citizenship
digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au

Information on how to stay safe, positive and responsible online.

At this age, it's best if kids only use computers and smartphones in shared family spaces where you can keep an eye on them. Make it a rule that all digital devices are left in a shared family space overnight.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

MAKE THE PRIVACY RULES CLEAR. Tell kids never to share their full name, home address, school address, current location or phone number. Explain that reputable people and businesses won't request that information, so if someone is asking for it, they should let you know. Let them know their safety is important to you and that's why you want to check the privacy settings of anything they download or sign up for. Choose strict privacy settings and make sure location sharing is turned off.

THINK ABOUT PARENTAL CONTROL SOFTWARE. You can get software that limits what sort of content your child can see, or the times when they can use their device. If you decide to use parental control software, let your child know so that they don't feel tricked or mistrusted.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO THINK AHEAD. It can be difficult for kids to understand that anything they post can be easily shared and could hang around the internet for decades to come. The general rule is that you should only post something if you are happy for anyone and everyone to see it. If your child is "cyber-bullied" by friends or anonymous users, encourage them to ignore the bullying and delete or block the bullies so they no longer see their messages.

BE SMART ABOUT ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS. Meeting up in the real world with people met online can be risky. Explain the danger, and let your child know that if they want to meet an online friend, you will come along and make sure they're safe.

REPORT IT TO THE POLICE. If you know your child has had inappropriate contact online, report it to the police, and also let your caseworker know.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

TALK ABOUT ONLINE CONTACT. Some kids want to speak or connect with their family online. In most cases that's fine, but if the Case Plan specifies that contact must be supervised, or if there are any other reasons for concern, then online contact will have to be discussed and agreed. Carers should be encouraged to use good judgment when it comes to online contact. For example, if a carer has confiscated a device for some reason, they should be sure to make it available when the child next needs to contact a family member.

6

UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

Because of their experiences, sometimes kids in care don't recognise bullying or understand that it's not acceptable. Your support will help the child in your care feel protected.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS. If you believe your child is being bullied, ask them what's making them feel bad. Listen calmly and take their feelings seriously. Offer to help find ways to deal with the situation. It could be as simple as walking home from school a different way, or having the confidence to say *Stop, I don't like that*. If your child is threatened, stalked or physically assaulted, report it to the police and notify your caseworker.

ASK THE SCHOOL TO RESPOND. If bullying is happening at school, speak to the school, tell them what you know, and ask them what steps they will take to prevent it happening again. If your child is anxious about talking to the school, let them know that you believe speaking out will make things better. Your calm but strong response will set a good example for the child in your care. Stay in touch with the school until you believe the matter has been resolved.

KEEP UP THE LOVE. Children who have grown up feeling unloved or who have experienced violence may start bullying other children. Your empathy and kindness are crucial. Continue to encourage good behaviour by praising them when they do or say the right thing. Kids who get lots of positive attention are less likely to bully.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CONNECT WITH A COUNSELLOR. Building resilience will help children deal with bullying. It could be valuable to connect with the school's counsellor or get some outside support from a specialist.

FOLLOW UP WITH THE SCHOOL. Not all schools will respond quickly and effectively to reports of bullying. If the child's carer or caseworker are not satisfied, they should arrange a meeting with the school to discuss the matter.

TARGET THE ISSUES BEHIND BULLYING. When kids bully, it's often because they've been bullied themselves. Caseworkers can work with counsellors or psychologists to help the child understand the patterns and make better choices.

MAKE THE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN WORK. A good Behaviour Support Plan is built on an understanding of the impacts of trauma and the best ways to teach and support better behaviour. It is essential that the child's school keeps to the Plan and that consequences for bullying behaviour are consistent and appropriate. The caseworker should check in with the school to ensure that all staff, including relief staff, are aware of the Plan and understand how to implement it.



MORE HELP

Bullying. No Way.
bullyingnoway.gov.au

Information and links to the National Safe Schools Framework.

Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au

Tips on how to work with the school to resolve bullying issues.

School A to Z
schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au

Search for videos on topics including "What is bullying?" and "Who will help my child?"

MANAGING ANGER



Anger is as valid as any other emotion and is something all kids need to learn to manage. The goal isn't about feeling no anger at all; it's about managing anger in the right way. Kids who have grown up around adults with poor anger management may be inclined to lash out. You can do a lot to teach self-awareness and self-control.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

Calm down mentally

Have your child visualise a relaxing scene, such as floating on a cloud or in a swimming pool. Tell them to imagine a candle in front of them and then, as they exhale, ask them to imagine making the candle flicker but not go out. This combines deep breathing with visualisation for a calming experience.

From kidsmatter.edu.au

ACKNOWLEDGE THE ANGER. Your child will probably give you plenty of signals when they're angry: they'll scowl, slam doors, throw school bags, speak rudely to you or other people in the household. But they probably won't volunteer information about what made them angry. Let your child know you can see they're angry and encourage them to talk about what made them feel that way.

TALK ABOUT FEELINGS. Your child might find it hard to recognise that they are angry or to explain the reason for the anger. They may have difficulty identifying their feelings. Putting a name to feelings can be the first step. Talk about feelings on a day-to-day basis (not just when there is an anger crisis in the house), and encourage them to name and describe them. Visual cues such as happy, sad and angry faces can be helpful tools.

EMPATHISE, BUT DON'T EXCUSE. When your child explains why they're upset, let them know you can see how that might make them angry – but also remind them that anger is not an excuse for being aggressive or rude. If they have done or said something rough or inconsiderate, ask them how they think it made the people around them feel. And ask them how it made them feel, too.

MAKE EXERCISE A PRIORITY. Holding on to stress can make it all too easy to tip over into anger. You can help your child lose some of that stress by encouraging them to do some regular exercise. Some kids will enjoy fast-paced activities like team sports or athletics. Others will respond better to less competitive, more meditative activities like yoga, bushwalking, swimming and martial arts.

BE IN IT FOR THE LONG RUN. For some kids in care, anger, rage and even physical violence were the responses that helped them survive a chaotic or traumatic environment. Those behaviours can take a long time to unlearn. If you can be patient, understanding and supportive and continue to model good anger management skills yourself, you will be helping to set up a happier, healthier, more productive future.

SPOT AND RATE THE ANGER. Teach kids how to spot when they're beginning to get upset. Some will clench their muscles, grind their teeth, turn red or start breathing fast. Others will try to hide their anger and end up with headaches or stomach aches. Encourage them to rate their anger on a scale of one to 10. Get them to think about how their body is responding as anger increases or decreases. The angrier they are, the harder it will be to bring that anger back under control. If the anger level is low, tactics like deep breathing, going for a walk or listening to some music can help. If it is high, your child might need to spend some time on their own, or get some help from you to calm down.

ENCOURAGE A COOL-DOWN. Taking a break from a confronting situation makes it easier to keep anger under control. Let your child know that taking time to cool down is a smart strategy, and that you will respect their need for time and privacy. Encourage them to try one of the simple calming techniques recommended by kidsmatter.edu.au that appear on these pages.

TIME IN, NOT TIME OUT. Some families use “time out” to encourage a child to bring their behaviour back under control – but time out in isolation can be distressing for kids who have experienced trauma. For those kids, it is better to take a “time in” approach. When things are getting heated, ask your child to slow down, sit down, think about what’s going on and perhaps talk it through with you.

LOOK FOR PATTERNS AND TRIGGERS. When the episode has passed, think about what triggered the rage and consider whether there are some emotions, situations or even words that commonly spark anger. Keeping a diary can help. If you see a pattern emerging, try to find an opportunity to discuss it with your child so you can both think about ways to deal with those triggers. It could be about thinking ahead to avoid those moments. Or it could be about recognising the anger reaction and finding different ways to react.

GET THE HELP YOU NEED. If your child is frequently and intensely angry, or you feel like you are struggling to cope, let your caseworker know that you need support. For kids in care, anger is often related to genuinely challenging or traumatic life situations and it could be that professional psychological or counselling services are needed. It may also be appropriate for the caseworker to develop some behaviour support strategies with you.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

SUPPORT FOR YOU. These angry episodes may be more than you have ever had to handle before. If you’re really not coping, talk to the caseworker or psychologist. They may be able to suggest new tools or strategies for managing those situations. The caseworker may be able to organise some respite to give you a break.

SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD. Anger management can be a big issue and cause a lot of disruption in your home. If a child is having destructive tantrums or big shows of anger more than once a week, a caseworker should discuss the situation with a psychologist and make arrangements for professional help if appropriate. Something as simple as introducing some regular calming practices like yoga, music therapy or swimming could make a difference.

CONSIDER A BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN. A caseworker can look at developing a Behaviour Support Plan if the child is putting themselves or others at risk of serious harm, or if their behaviour is likely to see them excluded from school or other activities. The Plan is developed collaboratively by the carer, the caseworker and relevant specialists. It describes the behaviours that are a concern and outlines safe and constructive strategies to manage or prevent the behaviour. Kids in care should never be disciplined in ways that could make them feel scared or humiliated. If you feel like you’re struggling, have a talk with your caseworker.



USEFUL TIP

Calm down physically

Get your child to tense up all their muscles and visualise themselves as a robot. Have them hold this position for 15 seconds. Then ask them to release all the tension and visualise themselves as rag dolls, with all muscles very loose. Stay relaxed like this for 15 seconds.

From kidsmatter.edu.au



MORE HELP

ReachOut

reachout.com/anger-management

Tips for recognising and managing anger.



STARTING HIGH SCHOOL

Leaving primary school and starting high school means going through a lot of changes – and some kids can find that much upheaval a challenge. Give your child plenty of information about what to expect and let them know you are there to help them cope with any worries or problems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

Find the local Homework Club

Kids who feel swamped by high school homework might benefit from a Homework Club. Your school or library might run one; if not, they can probably suggest where you can find one locally.



MORE HELP

School A to Z
[schools.nsw.edu.au/
gotoschool/highschool](https://schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool)

Videos and checklists for starting high school.

Public School Locator
[online.det.nsw.edu.au/
schoolfind/locator](https://online.det.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/locator)

An online tool to identify your child's local public high schools.

GET TO KNOW THE HIGH SCHOOL. If you can, make sure you and your child get to the events offered for new students, such as orientation days, so there aren't too many surprises when school starts. Talk to the school about the best way to stay up to date with your child's progress. They may suggest a single point of contact, such as a Year Adviser, or they might ask you to go directly to individual teachers.

BE 100% READY. Make sure your child has everything they need for the first day. This will include a school uniform, books and stationery. Your allowance should cover these costs. If your child needs laptops or other devices and you're having trouble paying for these, speak to your caseworker. If there is a school camp planned, check in with your caseworker to make sure you have approvals in place.

LOOK FOR SCHOOL NOTES. Prompt your child for notes each day so you don't miss out on important messages. As the year progresses, aim to make school notes part of your child's routine along with homework and empty lunchboxes!

HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR CHILD'S WORK. Make it part of your routine to sit down and look through your child's exercise books with them every couple of weeks. This will give you an idea of how your child is coping with the workload, and is an opportunity for you to have a chat about how they're feeling about school.

MEET THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICER (AEO). Many schools will have an AEO to help Aboriginal kids make the transition into Year 7. Get in touch so you can support each other in making your child's time at school happy and productive.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

MAKE SURE THE EDUCATION PLAN IS UPDATED. The new high school will be responsible for obtaining the child's records from the old primary school. The caseworker will ensure the new school understands the child's care arrangements and reviews the Education Plan to put the necessary support in place. Caseworkers should be sensitive around their visits to school; many kids are uncomfortable when they are pulled out of a class for a meeting with a caseworker.

MAINTAIN OLD SCHOOL CONTACTS. It could be that starting a new school will take the child away from established friends, family members or other significant people in their support network. The caseworker and carer should work together to ensure those positive friendships are maintained.

EARLY TEENS

12–15

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1

MAKING PROGRESS AT SCHOOL



Starting high school can be exciting and fun, but may also be a bit scary for some kids in care. Sometimes it's because they haven't attended school regularly in the past, or they've been moved from school to school. Sometimes it's because their personal experiences have left them with overwhelming stress and pain that make it harder for them to concentrate and learn.

It's good to get on top of school problems quickly, before they become big obstacles with the potential to have long-term impacts on your child. A quick response from you also sends your teen the clear message that you value their education and have their best interests at heart.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

SUPPORT SCHOOL EVERY DAY. All kids aged between six and 17 should go to school every day, not just because it's the law, but because it will help them feel like they belong and give them the best chance of doing well. If your child is consistently reluctant to go to school, it could be because they're having problems with friends or they're struggling in the classroom. Talk to your child, and to the school, and work together to resolve the problems that are making them want to stay away from school.

GET TO SCHOOL ON TIME. Work on a routine that will help kids get to school on time. Look at the transport timetables together and choose the most suitable bus or train service. Talk about other smart habits, such as packing their school bag the night before. It can help to put the routine down on paper in a visual way so your teen can understand it very easily, and stick it up somewhere central.

THINK ABOUT TUTORING. Having a tutor come to your home for some one-on-one teaching time could be just what your teen needs to catch up with their classmates. If you think a tutor or some other sort of teaching support would be valuable, talk to your caseworker. Extra teaching help may be included in the Education Plan.

GET SOME GOOD STUDY HABITS GOING. Forward planning can be a challenge for kids who have experienced trauma. Ask your child simple questions about what school work they've got coming up, when it's due, how much time it will take to finish and when they plan to start. Encourage your teen to mark those dates on a planner or calendar so you can both keep track of progress.



MORE HELP

Department of
Education Learning and
Support Services

dec.nsw.gov.au
1300 679 332 or 131 536

Available to all public school students. Talk to your school or call the Department for details.

Aboriginal Education Officers
1300 679 332

Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) support Aboriginal students. To find out more, contact your school or the Department.

GET TO KNOW THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICER (AEO). Your child's school is likely to have an AEO. The AEO will monitor your child's progress and support their educational needs. Get in touch with the school's AEO so you can share feedback and help your teen thrive at school.

THINK ABOUT ELECTIVES IN YEAR 8. Towards the end of Year 8, students will select elective subjects for Years 9 and 10. Use this as a trigger to talk to your teen about their strengths. It can also lead to a conversation about how the effort they put into school now will help them prepare for the life they want as adults.

BE SMART ABOUT HSC SUBJECTS. In Year 10, the teen in your care will choose subjects for the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Encourage them to think about the subjects they're good at or have a strong interest in. If your child enjoys the classes they're taking, they're more likely to feel confident and do the best work they can. Your child's current teachers, their Year Adviser and the school's Career Adviser can all help you and your child with subject selection.

LOOK AHEAD TO UNIVERSITY OPTIONS. Kids in care may not have had much exposure to the idea of going to university after school. It's a good idea to start talking to your child about university education now, even before they start making choices for their HSC. There are a range of programs that give kids in care an introduction to university life through camps and "taster" programs. Talk to your caseworker to find out more about them.

GET A HEAD START WITH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET). Your teen may think there is no point staying on for Years 11 and 12 if they don't plan to go to university. These days, high schools offer Vocational Education and Training (VET) for students interested in trades or vocational areas such as music or sport. These traineeships and apprenticeships involve school-based training and some paid work as well as ordinary school studies. If you or your teen think a VET course is a good option, talk to your school and your caseworker and make it part of the Education Plan.

ACT EARLY ON SCHOOL ABSENCES. If you are doing everything you can to get your teen to school each day, but they're still skipping school or leaving the school grounds, get in touch with the school and your caseworker so that you can work together on a solution. School absences can result in serious actions like court orders, so it's best to deal with the situation as early as possible. If your teen has not gone to school and you don't know where they are, call the 24-hour Child Protection Helpline (132 111 or 1800 212 936 TTY) for immediate support.

STAY A STEP AHEAD OF PROBLEMS. If you're aware your teen has been misbehaving or staying away from school, try to organise a catch-up with the school and your caseworker so you can discuss what is going on. It's much better if these issues can be sorted out before they become big problems.

RESPOND TO A SCHOOL SUSPENSION. If kids are involved in serious misbehaviour, they may be suspended. Usually, a suspension means your child cannot go to school for a number of days, and cannot come onto the school grounds without permission. The principal will organise a "suspension resolution" meeting and you can request that your caseworker attends. For kids in care who are already struggling at school, a suspension can trigger a complete disengagement with education. Together, you and your caseworker can ask the school to consider alternatives. For example, an internal suspension where students are supervised at school but kept out of their regular classes, can be a better option.



USEFUL TIP

Build breakfast into your teen's routine

Eating a good breakfast helps kids concentrate better in class, which in turn helps them learn better. It also supplies their muscles with energy so they can do their best in sport and other physical activities.

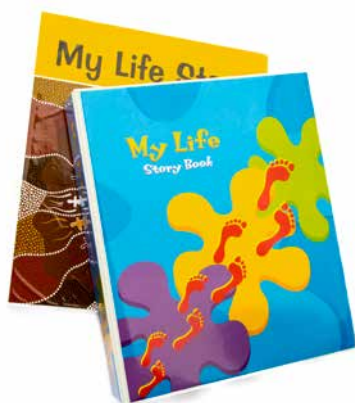

MORE HELP

**Home School
Liaison Officers**
1300 679 332

*Home School Liaison Officers
support families to maintain
regular school attendance.*

**Translating and
Interpreting Service**
tisonational.gov.au
131 450

*If you are from a non-English
speaking background, this service
can help you communicate
better with the school.*



MAKE SUSPENSION PRODUCTIVE. Carers are expected to supervise children and oversee their study when they are on suspension. If your school doesn't provide you with a study plan, ask them for one. Make sure your caseworker is aware of the suspension so you can both be involved in getting your teen engaged with school again.

HANDLING EXPULSIONS. If your school is considering expelling your child, they will contact both you and your caseworker. It's important you both meet with the school to talk about why they think an expulsion is necessary, and to ask them to consider other solutions. For kids in care, an expulsion is a breakdown in education that can be hard to recover from. If your child is expelled, connect with your caseworker about how to help your teen and find a place for them at a suitable new high school.



***It was hard moving schools and
having to make so many changes,
and to fit into so many different
families, and to make new friends.***

12-year-old girl

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

BE PRO-ACTIVE ABOUT SCHOOL ISSUES. Caseworkers and carers should keep each other up to date on how the teen is going at school, in terms of both learning and behaviour. If problems start to emerge, they should talk with the school about how to prevent small difficulties developing into big problems. The caseworker can ask the school to review the Education Plan if they believe the child's needs have changed or developed.

DISCUSS LONG-TERM EDUCATION GOALS. When a child turns 15 the goal of their Case Plan becomes "transition to independence". This is an opportunity to help the teen think about their future goals for education and employment and to start putting some plans in place for further education or training.

THINK ABOUT A RETURN-TO-SCHOOL STRATEGY. If a teenager has been suspended or expelled, then the carer, the school and the caseworker should work together on how to address the underlying issues and to make a successful return to school a priority.

RESPECT THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE. Sometimes, caseworkers have to take kids out for time with family, medical appointments or legal appointments. It's always best to avoid scheduling these in school time. Leaving school in the company of a caseworker not only disrupts the teen's education, it can also make kids feel uncomfortable.

NURTURING IDENTITY

In adolescence, teenagers begin to question how their family and cultural background fit in with their own sense of self. Carers play a crucial role in promoting and maintaining the connections that support a child's understanding of where they come from, who they are and who they want to be.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

CELEBRATE THE DIFFERENCES AND THE SIMILARITIES. Help make your teen feel proud of their unique qualities by talking in a positive way about what makes them different. Show an interest in their language, religion, culture and even their looks. But help them feel like part of your family, too, by talking about the things they have in common: maybe they like the same foods or have the same interests.

HELP OUT WITH LIFE STORY WORK. Life Story work lets your teen reflect on their past as well as what they're doing now. Let your teen know you'd like to contribute. Offer to help gather information and collect things like photos and awards.

MAKE CONNECTIONS. Find out about cultural clubs, events or activities that you and your teen can get involved in. Reach out to the elders of your child's cultural community. They can answer your questions and help guide you away from well-meaning mistakes. They can also be wonderful role models for your teen.

ENCOURAGE CULTURAL CURIOSITY. Cultural connections are fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Ask your caseworker about your child's Cultural Case Plan and work together to meet those goals. Ask questions about your child's language, stories and cultural practices. If they don't know the answers, help them connect with people who can teach them more.

MAKE IT PERMANENT. If it's appropriate, you can move to create permanency in the relationship by applying for guardianship or adoption of your teen. If you want to know more about these options, talk to your caseworker. Be aware that adoption is not usually an option for Aboriginal children.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

ACKNOWLEDGE CULTURAL MILESTONES. Cultural identity is an important part of your teenager's Case Plan. Caseworkers will work with you to make sure your teen has regular contact with people from their cultural community and that significant cultural events and rituals are honoured.

BE PART OF BIG FAMILY MOMENTS. Teens may want to feel connected to their birth family's milestones. If it's appropriate, caseworkers can arrange for the teen to be part of events such as birthdays, weddings and school graduations. Some cultures have rituals that should be honoured as a child grows up. Caseworkers and carers can work together to make sure those important moments are observed.

FOCUS ON LIFE STORY WORK. Caseworkers can use Life Story work to help kids take pride in their personal story and develop a sense of cultural identity.



USEFUL TIP

Talk up positive family traits

Help teens feel good about themselves by pointing out the positives in their family. You could say: "Your mum has the most wonderful laugh!" or "I think you'll be as tall as your dad one day".



MORE HELP

Aboriginal Statewide Foster Care Support Service (ASFCSS)

absec.org.au
1800 888 698

Free telephone advice and advocacy service for carers of Aboriginal children.

Multicultural NSW multicultural.nsw.gov.au

Lots of useful links to community organisations and cultural events.

Ethnic Community Services Co-operative ecsc.org.au

Workshops and resources supporting quality care for people from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds.



SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH

Wellbeing is built on physical, mental and emotional health. It's about having positive social relationships, being active, finding meaning in life and feeling that you're going well in areas that matter to you. Boost your teen's wellbeing by encouraging them to try new things, have goals, appreciate their strengths and focus on the good things in life.

Childhood experiences of trauma, grief and loss make it hard for some teens to feel 'well' on the inside. You may see a range of responses like anger, slamming doors, bullying, shyness and withdrawal. Teaching kids ways for coping with difficult feelings can help reduce the risk of depression and anxiety. Get in early with professional help from counsellors, psychologists and therapists if you think your child needs some support.



MORE HELP

Youth Beyond Blue
youthbeyondblue.com
1300 22 4636 (24 hour)

Resources, tools, online chat and a 24-hour help line for teens struggling with their wellbeing.

Kids Help Line
kidshelpline.com.au
1800 55 1800 (24 hour)

Free confidential counselling for kids, over the phone, through email or on web chat.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

GET SET FOR HAPPINESS. You can help set up your teen for the best possible chance of happiness and contentment just by encouraging some simple habits. Get them interested in a healthy lifestyle and show them the value of eating, exercising and sleeping well. Try to get them involved in some sort of volunteer work. Helping other people has been shown to have a big impact on mental health and wellbeing.

BE SENSITIVE TO SEPARATION. Kids who have been removed from their families can experience feelings of grief and loss, even if the environment they are leaving behind them was abusive, neglectful or dangerous. It may take weeks or months for your child to move past those feelings. If the grief continues over a long period, or if it seems very intense, get in touch with your caseworker. It might be useful to get some professional support.

UNDERSTAND THE IMPACTS OF TRAUMA. Experiences of abuse and neglect can make kids feel worthless and powerless. They can also find it hard to trust people or to feel safe. You can do a lot to help the child in your care feel safe, respected and valued just by listening to them, giving them lots of love and making sure they feel like they belong. Your caseworker can arrange professional support services with a psychologist or counsellor if that would help.

LOOK FOR HIDDEN SIGNS OF TROUBLES. Some signs of grief and trauma, like tears or anger, are easy to recognise. Others might not be so obvious. These include clinginess or withdrawal, sleep difficulties, aches and pains, risky behaviour or substance abuse. If you notice any of these things, talk to your child or seek some professional support to help them deal with their feelings.

RECOGNISE DEPRESSION. Everyone feels sad sometimes. Depression is different because it is more intense and lasts longer. Kids who are feeling depressed may be tearful a lot of the time, find it hard to concentrate, have bad sleep, get sick easily, suffer from stomach aches or headaches, and may stop doing the things they used to enjoy. If you think your teen is depressed, let them know that you've noticed a change in their behaviour and encourage them to talk about how they feel. If the depression is more than you or your teen can handle on your own, speak to your caseworker about professional support.

TAKE ACTION ON ANXIETY. If your teen is constantly irritable, upset by changes in routine, unusually argumentative or nervous, or is worrying a lot about certain places, people or events, they may have a problem with anxiety. You can help a child with anxiety by maintaining the regular routine, being tolerant of their behaviour without encouraging avoidance of people or situations, and showing lots of love. Speak to your caseworker if you think professional support would help.

ACT EARLY ON SELF-HARM. Sometimes teenagers cope with intense distress by deliberately hurting themselves through cutting, scratching, burning or biting. Some do it in less obvious ways, such as binge drinking or food refusal. These behaviours are called self-harm. Self-harm can quickly grow into an addiction and can lead to serious physical injury or accidental death, so it's important to tackle it early. If you think your teen is self-harming, or you see them doing it, stay calm and let them know you want to listen and help. Give wounds and injuries the treatment they need (this helps reinforce that your teen's body is important and should be looked after). Let your caseworker know what's happening. Support from a counsellor or psychologist could be really valuable.

TAKE QUICK ACTION ON SUICIDAL THOUGHTS. Teens in care are vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. If your teen says they feel hopeless, if they talk a lot about death or suicide, if their behaviour or mood takes a turn for the worse, or if they do more obvious things like writing farewell notes or gathering things they could use in a suicide attempt, then it's possible they are considering suicide. You should act quickly. Let your child know that you care, that you understand how bad they're feeling and that you will get them the help they need. Tell your caseworker as soon as possible so that professional support can be arranged. If you think that your teen is at immediate risk of a suicide attempt, ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide. If the answer is yes, stay with them. Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 for support, or emergency services on 000, if you need to.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

GET HELP EARLY. Without early attention and support, feelings of sadness, anger or anxiety can escalate into mental health issues. Caseworkers can talk to young people and carers about tapping into websites like Beyond Blue and Headspace, or getting involved in activities that help them feel good about themselves. Concerns about a child's emotional wellbeing or mental health must be taken seriously; connecting with a psychologist for professional support can be a good move.

CONNECT WITH PROFESSIONALS ON SERIOUS ISSUES. Self-harm and suicidal thoughts are a sign of serious mental health challenges. Usually, these are more than a carer or caseworker can deal with on their own. Caseworkers can check in with a psychologist to make plans for relevant support services. If there are concerns about the child's mental health or if counselling or psychologist services are arranged, the caseworker will need to update the Health Management Plan.



USEFUL TIP

Get to know your teen's triggers

Occasions like birthdays and Christmas can trigger memories that drive big emotional responses. Try to be aware of those dates so you are ready to respond with the patience and kindness needed.



MORE HELP

Headspace

headspace.org.au
1800 650 890

Young people and their families can get help online, over the phone or at a local Headspace centre.

Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS)

ahmrc.org.au

Find your local AMS on the 'members' page of the Aboriginal Health and Medicine Research Council website.

4

STAYING SAFE AROUND DRUGS & ALCOHOL



It is illegal for children to smoke or drink alcohol before the age of 18. The use of illicit drugs, or prescription drugs that haven't been subscribed by the person's doctor, is illegal at any age. However, most Australian teenagers have had some experience with alcohol and cigarettes before the age of 17, and many have used or been exposed to illegal drugs.

Drug and alcohol use can have serious short-term and long-term impacts for teens, and can lead to dependency in adulthood. It's important to encourage a responsible attitude, but also to help teens stay safe. One of the most influential things you can do is to model safe and healthy behaviour that your teen can learn from: drink responsibly, don't smoke and don't use illegal drugs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



MORE HELP

Quitline (24 hours)

icanquit.com.au
13 78 48

Clever online tools for people who want to stop smoking.

Youth Beyond Blue

youthbeyondblue.com
1300 22 4636 (24 hour)

Online chat and a 24-hour help line for teens who want to talk and ask questions about drug and alcohol use.

KEEP UP COMMUNICATION. Support your teen's friendships and growing independence, but make sure you still find time to catch up and talk one-on-one. Make sure your child understands your attitude to under-age drinking and drug use, and the boundaries you have set. Try to keep up to date about who your child hangs out with, where they are and what they do when they're not at home.

EXPLAIN WHY THE LEGAL AGE FOR DRINKING IS 18. Talk to your child about why there is a legal age limit on drinking. Explain that the parts of the brain that look after learning, planning and emotional stability are still developing during the teenage years and that alcohol interrupts that development. Using alcohol in adolescence can lead to memory loss, learning difficulties and mental health issues including anxiety and depression.

KEEP IT REAL. Be straight with kids about the scary side of taking drugs, drinking and smoking when they're under age. Let them know about the health impacts and criminal consequences in an age-appropriate way. Explain that smoking can give you cancer and other diseases; that drinking can make you take risks that might hurt or kill you; and that taking drugs, or even holding them for a friend, can mean a criminal charge.

BE AWARE OF WHAT DRIVES DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE. Kids in care may start using drugs and alcohol to ease the pain of trauma or the symptoms of mental health issues such as depression, or because they have grown up around drug and alcohol use. If your teen is using drugs or alcohol, try to find out more about how they're feeling. It could be they need professional help to cope with difficult emotions. Let your caseworker know what's happening so they can connect you with any services you need, and update the Case Plan.

TALK ABOUT RISK AND REGRET. Drugs and alcohol change the chemical balance of the brain and affect the way a person thinks, feels and makes decisions. Explain to your teen that they might do things under the influence of drugs or alcohol that they wouldn't do normally; things that are dangerous or that they may regret later. If they're using drugs or alcohol regularly, they may also find that they start feeling moody, anxious, panicked or unmotivated most of the time.

EXPLAIN THE DANGERS OF EXCESSIVE DRINKING. Explaining the difference between how teens and adults react to alcohol can be helpful. Teach kids that teenagers are less sensitive to the sedative effects of alcohol than adults. That means they're likely to keep on drinking long after most adults would have called it a night, making it easy for them to drink to excess and put themselves at risk of things like unsafe sex or violence.

TALK ABOUT DEPENDENCY AND ADDICTION. Teenagers can become dependent on drugs much more quickly than adults, and drinking in adolescence significantly increases the chance of a person becoming dependent on alcohol later in life. Help the child in your care to understand that their behaviour now puts them at risk of dependency and addiction in the future.

REMAIN SUPPORTIVE AND APPROACHABLE. If you think your child is using alcohol or drugs, let them know you're worried about them and that you're there to listen to them whenever they're ready to talk. When they do open up to you, listen to what they have to say and try to respond in a non-judgmental way. It's important you let your caseworker know what's going on, so they can keep an eye on it, too, and organise support services if that would be helpful. If you have talked to your teenager about their alcohol or drug use and they're open to getting some support, offer to help them find the right sort of information or services. You could suggest looking for advice online, calling a support service or speaking to a local doctor. Remember that being supportive isn't the same as approving of your child's drug or alcohol use.

KEEP THEM SAFE. If you know your teen is using alcohol or drugs, talk to them about staying safe. Tell them never to use drugs or alcohol if they don't know where they came from or what's in them. Never use them when they're alone. Don't mix drugs and alcohol. Remind them that their ability to make good judgments may be affected and they should try not to rush into taking a risk or doing something they wouldn't normally do. Most importantly, tell them to get in touch with you any time they feel scared or unsafe so you can get them out of that situation.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE RULES AROUND DRUGS AND ALCOHOL. Some families may believe it's alright to let teenagers drink, or even to use "soft drugs" such as marijuana. However, it is illegal for anyone to use drugs and for anyone under 18 to smoke or to consume alcohol. Caseworkers may have to remind carers that it is never okay for the under-18 in their care to be drinking, smoking or using drugs.

LOOK AT WHAT'S BEHIND THE DRINKING OR DRUG USE. Sometimes teens start using drugs and alcohol for fun, but sometimes they do it because it helps them deal with emotional pain. Carers and caseworkers should be looking for the stresses that may be causing the teen's behaviour, and getting some professional support from a counsellor or psychologist if that would help.



MORE HELP

Kids Help Line

kidshelpline.com.au

1800 55 1800 (24 hour)

Confidential support and counselling for kids by phone, through email or on web chat.

Reach Out

reachout.com.au

Practical tools and support around alcohol and drug issues for teens.



USEFUL TIP

Come up with strategies

Help your teen prepare for peer pressure. Get them ready with a few standard responses like "No thanks, I have to get up early". Suggest they hold on to a soft drink so they can say "I'm okay for now". Remind them they can always find a moment to put down a drink and walk away from it without making a scene.

5

BEING RESPONSIBLE WITH MONEY

In the early teen years, kids typically have money in their pocket – and they want to spend it. Having your own money, and saving for something you really want, are things that help teenagers prepare for life as an adult.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



MORE HELP

Money Smart

moneysmart.gov.au

Ideas and tips on pocket money and part-time jobs, plus online tools like budget planners and savings calculators.

LawStuff

lawstuff.org.au

Simple explanations of legal issues affecting children and young people.



USEFUL TIP

Use pre-paid cards

Pre-paid phone cards limit the amount that can be spent on calls and data. Pre-loaded debit cards can help keep online shopping purchases under control. You can buy them at supermarkets or post offices.

ORGANISE POCKET MONEY. Many families match pocket money to the age of the child, so a 13-year-old gets \$13 a week and so on. Pocket money should be covered by your care allowance. To kick-start the saving habit, encourage kids to pick something to save for (like a concert or a video game). Help them work out a savings plan that will get them to their goal. Carers with other kids at home should make sure that everyone gets pocket money according to the same scale, and everyone has the same guidelines for how they spend and save.

SET SOME LIMITS. For some kids, having access to large amounts of money might increase their risk of getting into trouble, including buying drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. You might want to set a limit on how much money they can access.

LET THEM MAKE MISTAKES. Letting your child manage their own money, within the guidelines you have set, is a confidence booster and shows you trust them. If you think your teen is doing something silly, like buying a product that is overpriced or poor quality, tell them what you think but don't stop them and don't offer to replace the money wasted. The best way to learn about money is to make mistakes.

BE CLEAR ABOUT LENDING AND BORROWING. Most adults borrow money at some stage, either from friends, family or from a financial institution. Teach teens a few rules around lending and borrowing money. It's always better not to borrow if you can avoid it, but if you do, you must be responsible about paying it back on time. The rules are the same whether your child borrows from you or from friends.

EXPLAIN THE COST OF TECHNOLOGY. Many teens own and use devices such as smartphones and laptops. Have a conversation about the value of these items, and who will cover the costs of phone calls, data, shopping and in-app purchases.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

SET UP A BANK ACCOUNT. Teens can save money in a personal bank account. Setting up an account may require identification documents such as a birth certificate. Caseworkers can help you and your teen access those documents.

DEVELOP A LEAVING CARE PLAN. Caseworkers will develop a Leaving Care Plan for your child after they turn 15, even if they are staying on in your home. It provides a focus for caseworkers and carers to consider whether the teen has the living skills they need for life as an independent adult, including managing money, looking after their health and wellbeing, and achieving education and employment goals.

THINKING ABOUT SEXUALITY

6

It's healthy for teenagers to develop a sense of their sexuality, learn how to express affection and have respectful relationships. Sexuality isn't just about sexual behaviour; it's about the way your child feels about their body, and their growing ability to have feelings of intimacy, attraction and affection for others.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

KEEP LISTENING AND TALKING. Lots of parents and carers find it difficult to get used to the idea that their teen is emotionally involved with a boyfriend or girlfriend, and may even be getting physically involved, too. Try to remember that it's all part of growing up. Resist the temptation to pry into your teen's affairs, but do take the opportunity to have conversations about the healthy and positive relationships you've had in your own life.

SET BOUNDARIES. The age of consent is 16. That means it is an offence for a child under the age of 16 to have sex, even if the other person is a similar age. Explain to your child that the age of consent is about ensuring both people are emotionally mature, have a strong and confident sense of themselves, and have the capacity to give their consent to sexual activity. If you believe the child in your care is sexually active under the age of 16, you must let your caseworker know.

BE REALISTIC. Sex at an early age isn't great for a young person's wellbeing, but the truth is many teens start having sex before they turn 16. Make sure your child knows how to stay safe, including using contraception to protect against pregnancy and avoiding sexually transmitted diseases. Be aware that kids over the age of 14 are legally allowed to give consent to their own medical treatment, including asking a doctor for a contraceptive or a termination. If your religious or moral beliefs make it hard for you to discuss these things with the teen in your care, ask a mentor or caseworker to have a talk to them.

UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES AROUND PREGNANCY. News that a teenager is pregnant will have a big emotional impact on both the teen and her carer. On a legal basis, the decision to continue or terminate the pregnancy rests solely with the young woman involved (although she may choose to include her male partner in this decision). Her options are to terminate the pregnancy, to have the child and raise it herself, or to continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted. The Family Planning Association can be a wonderful source of support in this situation.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR TEEN'S FEELINGS. Social attitudes have become more welcoming of people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual and some young people may feel a sense of relief when they share how they feel about their sexual identity. Others may feel nervous, scared, ashamed or angry. The best thing you can do is show respect, and validate and support their feelings.



MORE HELP

Family Planning NSW

fpnsw.org.au
1300 658 886

Providing information about contraception and sexual health.

Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS)

ahmrc.org.au

Find your local service on the 'members' page of the Aboriginal Health and Medicine Research Council website.

Families Like Mine

beyondblue.org.au
1300 22 4636

Beyond Blue supports the health of young LGBTI people. Their downloadable resource Families Like Mine is a great place to start.



USEFUL TIP

Keep doing what you always did!

If your teen talks to you about their sexual identity, make a special effort in the weeks that follow to spend time together doing things you've always loved to do. It shows your feelings haven't changed. And it creates comfortable moments that might help your child open up and share their thoughts.



MORE HELP

Minus 18

minus18.org.au

Youth-led organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth offering online resources and support services, social events for under-18s, and mentoring.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

pflagaustralia.org.au

A peer support group that helps keep families connected.

BE POSITIVE. You may have been expecting your teen to talk about their sexual identity, or you may be completely surprised. Most carers in this situation will need some time to reflect on how they feel about this information, but in the meantime it's important to let your child know you love them and want them to be happy. When children reach a point where they feel comfortable talking about their sexual identity, and when that is backed up by a positive response from the caregivers in their lives, it can result in a big boost to self-esteem.

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR CUES. Some young people will want to celebrate their sexual identity. Others will want to be more private about it. This is your teen's journey, first and foremost. Let the child in your care take the lead in relation to what they want to say or do, and when.

HELP MAKE HEALTHY CONNECTIONS. If your child is ready to make connections with other young people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, you can show your support by lending a hand. Help them research supportive local groups, assist with transport to a specific event or activity, and let them know that their new friends are always welcome at home. Being engaged in their life will help you make sure they are reaching out to people in safe and supportive environments.

THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND ACTIONS. Learning about your child's sexual identity can be confronting for some people. If you feel challenged by your child's sexual identity, it may help to speak to someone who has been through a similar experience, or to have some counselling. Your caseworker may be able to recommend some support services.



Try to understand what the other person is going through and try to give them the confidence to tell you anything.

15-year-old boy

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CREATE CONNECTIONS. Respecting and supporting a child's sexuality is essential for their self-esteem. Caseworkers can help both carers and kids in care to connect with the support services that can help them grow into this emerging sexual identity, safely and confidently.

ALWAYS PUT THE CHILD FIRST. Children have the right to grow up in an environment where their views and opinions are respected. Caseworkers will always support the rights of the child in care, but they can also offer support to a carer who is feeling uncomfortable around the issue of their child's sexuality. Some counselling could help the carer to understand what their teen is going through, and learn how to deal with the change.

DEVELOPING GENDER IDENTITY

7

Gender is about how a person sees themselves and chooses to express themselves, regardless of their physical characteristics. Community understanding of how we develop an identity around sex and gender is changing. As a result, there is greater acceptance of gender diversity.

However, teens who are exploring and questioning their identity in this way may feel scared or ashamed. They may face discrimination from those around them. They may be at risk of harm. As a carer, you are in a strong position to protect your child at a time when they are feeling very vulnerable.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

LET YOUR CHILD SET THE PACE. Your child may have been thinking about their gender identity for a long time before talking about it with you. They may take even longer to share their feelings with other people they know. Respect your child's right to confidentiality and allow them to decide who to share this with, and when.

RESPECT NAME CHANGES. Your child will feel supported and respected when you use their preferred name and refer to them as "he" or "she", according to their preference. Even though this is just an informal change, it's important to let your caseworker know so they can include it in the Case Plan. A legal name change is possible in some circumstances but will require an application to the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages; your caseworker can give you more information.

HELP WITH RESEARCH. Teens may want to know more about how to have their gender identity officially recognised. They may also want to know about their options for medical interventions in adolescence and adulthood. In partnership with your caseworker, you can help your child access the information and the services that will help them best.

GET SOME SUPPORT. You may struggle to know exactly what to say or how to support your child. If that's the case, you might find it useful to talk to a counsellor or to other people who have been through similar experiences. Some support services are listed on this page. If you're finding it hard to accept your child's new gender identity because of your own values or beliefs, have a talk to your caseworker. Remember that children in care have the right to their own beliefs and way of life, and to be treated with respect.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

KEEP COMMUNICATING. It's important for carers and caseworkers to keep each other up to date about what's going on for the teen. Sometimes, a caseworker may recognise a child's change in attitude, behaviour or self-identity before a carer does. It is important for the caseworker to raise this with the carer and support them to respond to the change in the most appropriate way.



MORE HELP

Reach Out Parents

parents.au.reachout.com

Information, resources and strategies for carers of teens who are questioning gender identity.

Twenty 10

Twenty10.org.au

02 8594 9555 (metropolitan areas)

1800 652 010 (rural freecall)

A community-based support service for young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex.



USEFUL TIP

Praise courage

Challenging your gender identity and then letting other people know about it takes an enormous amount of courage. Let your teen know that you respect and admire their bravery.

8

MANAGING SERIOUS BEHAVIOUR



From withdrawal to rage, the kind of behaviours you find confronting in your teen are likely to be based on whatever kept them safe in the past. The commitment you show during these rocky times can make a big difference.

When things get tough, step back and reflect. Ask yourself what has worked for this young person in the past, and what hasn't. Be proud of the small wins and take time out to recharge so you can handle behaviour more positively.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



MORE HELP

Kids Matter

kidsmatter.edu.au

Search for 'serious behaviour problems' to find a helpful fact sheet for parents and carers.

Triple P Positive Parenting Program

triplep-parenting.net.au

Seminars and discussion groups on parenting teenagers. You can look for similar parenting courses in your local area.

KNOW THAT WHAT YOU DO MATTERS. It's important to remember your teen is learning from you, even if they don't show it. Kids in care are often hyper-vigilant, which means they're intensely aware of what is going on around them. Their past experiences may have caused them to develop some really difficult behaviours, but every time they see you act calmly, constructively and supportively, they are slowly getting to know new ways of behaving.

SET RULES – AND UPDATE THEM. Routines and rules can be reassuring for kids from chaotic environments. Establish the "house rules" and the consequences for breaking them, but be prepared to review them. Show your teen that you respect their growing maturity by updating the rules as they begin to demonstrate greater responsibility. For example, you might push back their bedtime from 9pm to 10pm.

BE PROUD OF THE SMALL WINS. It may take a long time for your teen to start feeling safe and comfortable in your home, and even longer before they begin learning new ways to react and behave. Don't feel disheartened if things are moving slowly. Instead, look for small signs of progress: maybe your teen will sit down to watch TV with the family without being asked, or they'll say thank you for a nice meal, or share a laugh with you about something. Those things are proof that you're having a positive impact on your child's life.



Actually listen to what the kids say. I have had many issues with people not listening to what I have to say.

15-year-old girl

TRY TO FIND THE TRIGGERS. Look for patterns in your child's challenging behaviour (keeping a diary could help). You may notice that certain people or situations trigger difficult reactions. Encourage your child to talk about how those people or situations make them feel.

TALK ABOUT CHOICES. When your teen is upset or misbehaving, listen to what they have to say and acknowledge their feelings. Also point out that while they can't control how they feel, they do have control over how they respond. Help your child to think about different ways they can react to those feelings, and to consider more helpful choices in the future.

UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGE. The strategies typically used to deal with challenging teen behaviour are often less effective on teens in care. That's because these kids may have developed their behaviours as a way of surviving in an unsafe or abusive environment. Responding to the behaviour alone won't be productive. Thinking about the reasons behind the behaviour and understanding the triggers will help carers handle difficult behaviour more positively and effectively.

BE YOUR CHILD'S CHAMPION. Other adults in your teen's life, such as teachers or sports coaches, might have strong negative reactions to your child's bad behaviour. Your instinct might be to explain the reasons behind the behaviour, but it's important to respect your teen's privacy. Don't share their story with others. Instead, tell the other adult that you know your teen can be hard to handle, and share your insights on how to manage their more challenging moments.

CONNECT WITH OTHER CARERS. Talking to someone who understands – like another carer – can be a comfort, and might even provide some fresh ideas on how to manage your teen's behaviour. Connecting Carers NSW runs a telephone helpline and peer support programs. Find their contact details at the back of this book.

ACT ON VIOLENCE. When behaviour gets violent and the child is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else, you must contact your caseworker immediately and call emergency services if necessary.



USEFUL TIP

Encourage self-awareness

Your teen may find it hard to describe their feelings and emotions. Prompt them with simple words like “angry”, “sad” or “happy”. If you need to get a bit more specific, say something like “a little bit sad” or “very angry”. Keep the descriptions basic and avoid more complicated words like “distressed” or “infuriated”.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

TALK AND SHARE. Caseworkers and carers should always be communicating and sharing their thoughts on how the teen is going. If the challenging behaviour isn't improving, or if it's getting worse, they can work together to get things heading in the right direction. The caseworker might be able to organise some special training for the carer to help them deal with the teen's reactions, or arrange some respite so the carer can take a break. It's valuable for the caseworker to check in with the carer to make sure the solutions they put in place are genuinely helping.

STAY IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL. Carers and caseworkers can also support each other in making sure the school understands the child's behaviour and responds appropriately. Schools should be encouraged to support the child through counselling and other services, and to carefully consider their use of more severe consequences like expulsion.

LOOK AT THE OPTIONS. If the challenges continue to mount up, it could be helpful to get some professional support from a counsellor or psychologist. Your caseworker can update your teen's Case Plan to include those services.

CONSIDER A BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN. If a child is at risk of hurting themselves or someone around them, or if their behaviour is more than the carer can cope with, a caseworker may develop a Behaviour Support Plan. The Plan is developed collaboratively by the carer, the caseworker and a psychologist.

LATE TEENS

16–18

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BUILDING INDEPENDENCE

1

As your teen gets close to the end of school, they'll start thinking about their future plans. You'll probably have some conversations about whether they want to stay on in your home after they turn 18, or if they're thinking about moving out on their own, or moving back to live with their birth family.

Help your teen develop independent living skills that will set them up for life, no matter where they live. By giving your child age-appropriate jobs and responsibilities, you'll be teaching them confidence and self-respect.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

PROMOTE SELF-CARE. Some teens may have missed out on learning how to look after their own health and hygiene. Have conversations about keeping healthy and well, dressing and grooming themselves and treating minor injuries. Make sure they know how and when to get help from doctors, dentists, counsellors and other professional help.

WORK ON THE SOCIAL SKILLS. It's important for your teenager to speak respectfully and politely to people including teachers, employers and work colleagues, and to handle disagreements calmly and constructively. Teach kids good manners like saying *please* and *thank you* and encourage good conversation skills, including both listening and speaking. Even simple things like ordering food at a cafe can help develop your teen develop social skills and confidence.

START A BANK ACCOUNT. To be a good money manager, kids need to understand how to earn, save and spend money responsibly. Help your teenager open a bank account and make arrangements for part-time job earnings and even pocket money to be paid directly into the account. Doing this while the child is still living at home with you means you can support them when they make mistakes like underestimating bank fees, overspending or failing to keep up with payments. To open a bank account, you will need to present some identity documents. Your caseworker can help locate these if you don't have them at home.

GET INTO THE KITCHEN. Learning to cook isn't just about putting food on the table. It's also about shopping within a budget, and preparing nutritious meals to stay healthy. There are lots of things you can do, including getting your teen involved in shopping, encouraging them to make their own school lunches or having them regularly cook an easy family meal like hamburgers or pasta.

SET SOME REGULAR CHORES. Involving your teen in household cleaning duties such as washing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming and mowing the lawn will teach them the skills they need to one day keep their own place tidy. It will give you a bit of a break, too!



USEFUL TIP

Get into it!

Encourage your teen to get active in the local community by doing some volunteer work, joining a club or doing some public speaking. Let them see the benefits of being part of a community and having their opinions heard.



USEFUL TIP

Download the Resolve app

An app for careleavers to help them on their journey to independence. Download via Windows, Google Play or the Apple App store.



MORE HELP

FACS Careleavers Line

1800 994 686

A dedicated hotline for young people who have left care.

YOU

you.childstory.nsw.gov.au

All about what kids have the right to ask for, before and after leaving care.

CREATE Foundation

create.org.au

1800 655 105

Mentoring, events, workshops and forums for careleavers.

Australian Electoral Commission

aec.gov.au/enrol

13 23 26

Information on how to enrol to vote online or through the mail.

Money Smart

moneysmart.gov.au

Loads of financial management tips for young people.

SHARE YOUR PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE. Trust your teenager with simple maintenance tasks. Teach them to do things like change a light bulb, test a smoke detector and reset an electrical safety switch. They're handy skills to have, and they'll help your teen feel like they can solve problems and handle responsibility.

ENCOURAGE MOBILITY. It's important your teen knows how to get from one place to another on public transport. Teach them how to use bus and train timetables so that they arrive at their destination on time.

SET UP A TAX FILE NUMBER. Young people who are employed or eligible for Centrelink payments need a Tax File Number. This is something you can help your child organise, but contact your caseworker if you need some help.

TALK ABOUT ENROLLING TO VOTE – AND WHY. Young people aged 16 and above can enrol now so they are ready to vote in federal, state and local elections when they turn 18. This is a good opportunity to remind your teen that their experience and views are important, and that they deserve to have their opinions heard even at a political level. Voting is compulsory in Australia.



We should have a bit of freedom and learn how to look after ourselves without everyone panicking.

16-year-old boy

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

START TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE. Throughout the teenage years, carers and caseworkers can use Life Story work to prompt conversations with the teen about how they're feeling and what they want from their future. Use these conversations to check that the child is getting the right kind of support now, and to start making plans for things like further education and job choices in the future.

DEVELOP A LEAVING CARE PLAN. Stability helps young people transition to adulthood so, where possible, it's incredibly valuable for teens to stay on with their carer even after they've finished school. Whether or not your teen is staying on, a Leaving Care Plan will help address key topics including access to education and training, family contact support, cultural contact support and employment and income support.

EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. It's important to talk about the future and make sure the young person has a clear understanding of what will happen next and who they can go to for different kinds of support, such as housing or study payments. These things should be discussed, and documented in the Leaving Care Plan.

MAKE SURE IDENTITY DOCUMENTS ARE IN ORDER. From the age of 16, it's important that your teen has enough proof of identity to pass a 100-point identity check. These checks are required for all sorts of government payments and services, including things like applying for a passport and getting a driving licence. Your caseworker can help you and your teen get those documents organised.

DEVELOPING HEALTHY INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

2



Relationships in the teenage years can be highly emotional or strangely detached, loud-and-proud or secretive – and often involve exploring physical intimacy and sexual feelings.

You might not feel ready for this, but you have a big role to play in guiding your teen through this important developmental stage. Through your behaviour and your conversations you can help your teen understand that they can and should have all the love, friendship and happiness in the world.

Teenage relationships may come with additional challenges for kids who have experienced trauma or been exposed to domestic violence. These kids may be at risk of ending up in violent or disrespectful relationships. Sometimes they may be the ones being abused; sometimes they are the ones being abusive. In both cases, teens need support to recognise the choices they have and learn about ways to build relationships.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.

REMINDE TEENS THEY'RE BOSS OF THEIR OWN BODIES. Let your teen know that no-one can touch their body unless they are ready and happy for it to happen. If they're doing something because they think they should, or because everyone else is doing it, then they're not really ready to give their consent and should think again before they go any further.

DEFINE DEAL BREAKERS. Encourage kids to think about what is and isn't okay in a relationship. Tell them that they don't have to put up with being disrespected, disregarded, lied to, verbally abused, emotionally abused or physically hurt by anyone. Any one of these things is a good reason to re-evaluate the relationship. Pointing out good things in your own relationship can sometimes help: *John is a great husband. We're a team when it comes to raising you and your brother.*

BE SENSITIVE TO BREAK-UP TRIGGERS. The end of a teen relationship can be devastating. For kids in care, it may trigger deep feelings around being unwanted or unloved. It's normal for teenagers to be upset after a break-up, but if your child's feelings seem very intense, or go on for a long time, or you think they are at risk of self-harm, get some support from your caseworker or family doctor.

TALK ABOUT STAYING SAFE. Not all teenage relationships involve sex, but this is the time when many young people start to become sexually active – and your teen is legally able to consent to sex after the age of 16. It's sensible to make sure your child knows how to stay safe when sexually active. This includes talking about contraception and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. If this conflicts with your religious or moral beliefs, ask a mentor or caseworker to have this discussion with your teen.



USEFUL TIP

Be your teen's back-up

Remind your teen they can say “no” to anything, from going on a date, to leaving a party or ending a relationship. Let them know they can always call on you to help them get out of any situation that makes them feel uncomfortable, unsafe or pressured.



MORE HELP

1800 Respect

1800respect.org.au
1800 737 732

Online and telephone counselling for people experiencing sexual assault or domestic violence.

Family Planning NSW

fpnsw.org.au
1300 658 886

Providing information about contraception and sexual health.



USEFUL TIP

Make a report

If your teen tells you something about past abuse, contact your caseworker immediately. Disclosure of abuse may lead to investigation and criminal charges. In an emergency, contact the 24-hour Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 or the police.



MORE HELP

The Line

theline.org.au

Ideas on keeping relationships healthy and respectful, and avoiding behaviour that makes someone feel frightened, intimidated or humiliated.

Raising Children Network

raisingchildren.net.au

Practical ideas on managing the ups and downs of teen relationships.

TALK ABOUT MUTUAL CONSENT. Sexual activity is only okay when those involved are not being threatened, pressured or tricked into their decision and when they are clearly capable of giving their consent (in other words, they're not drunk or unconscious). Also explain that consent can be withdrawn at any time if a person changes their mind about what's going on. Let your child know that they can always talk to you if they are uncertain about any of this, without getting in trouble.

EXPLAIN THE LAW AROUND SEXTING UNDER AGE 18. Sexting is using the internet or a phone to share nude or sexual images. A lot of teenagers use sexting as a way to flirt, but it's considered a crime when it involves anyone under the age of 18. Sexting can lead to serious penalties including being listed on the sex offender register. Make sure your teenager understands that it's not okay to send, receive or share a nude or sexual image, or to ask someone to take an image of that kind. If your child receives an image, they should delete it and not forward it on. If it came from someone they know, they can tell them they don't want to receive anymore. Otherwise they can unfriend the sender, or block that number from their phone. You may also need to let the school or police know.

EXPLAIN PRIVACY AND HARASSMENT. It is wrong to take naked, revealing or sexual images of someone without their permission, for example when they're in the shower or getting changed. It is also against the law to use sexting to make someone feel humiliated or threatened. Penalties can be serious. If you believe your teen has had inappropriate images taken, or they're being harassed, contact your caseworker and make a report to the police. If the harassment is ongoing, your caseworker may consider getting a protection order against the person, such as an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO).

GET HELP FOR ACTING-OUT. Teens who have been abused, especially sexually abused, may begin to act out their trauma. This could involve repeating the behaviour, either by doing it to other kids or encouraging kids to do it to them. Or it could involve making themselves sexually available to adults. This is risky behaviour and is a sign that the child in your care needs professional help to deal with their trauma. Speak to your caseworker to get some support organised.

IF YOU'RE WORRIED, DO SOMETHING. If you believe the child in your care is having under-age sex, being exposed to pornography, being abused or exploited, or if you think something is triggering memories of past abuse, you must tell your caseworker immediately. Together you can provide the support your child needs.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

BE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE. In NSW, carers and caseworkers share responsibility for making sure that children in care are treated fairly and with respect and that they feel safe at all times. Caseworkers can support carers to provide balanced messages around respect for culture and respect for the safety and dignity of the individual.

ACT QUICKLY ON ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR. Keeping teens safe is a top priority. If the teen is involved in under-age sex, under-age sexting or a violent or sexual assault, the carer must inform the caseworker so they can respond promptly, arrange support, and make official reports as necessary. Always call 000 if it's an emergency.

GET PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT. If the behaviour is putting the teen or others at risk, and the carer feels like they can't handle it on their own, the caseworker can arrange professional support. It might be necessary to develop a Behaviour Support Plan with input from the carer, the caseworker and a psychologist.

BEING A BETTER DRIVER

Learning to drive is a big milestone for many teenagers. Most parents feel some anxiety when teens start driving, and with good reason. Young drivers make up around 15 per cent of all drivers in NSW, but account for more than a third of all road fatalities. Lack of experience is a factor, but accidents involving teenage drivers are often linked to risky behaviours such as speeding, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, getting distracted, and driving when tired.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

BE A DRIVING ROLE MODEL. Drive safely and follow the rules of the road at all times, including drinking responsibly when you're driving. Kids are more likely to be involved in car accidents or break road laws when the adults around them have a history of crashes or traffic violations.

ORGANISE LESSONS. Teenagers can apply for a licence to drive a car at the age of 16 (for motorbikes, the age is 16 and nine months). Most agencies are prepared to cover the cost of a set of driving lessons. Before you make any arrangements, check with your caseworker to confirm you will be reimbursed.

GET OUT ON THE ROAD WITH THEM. Professional driving courses are valuable, but your teen can also get experience driving with you. Try to stay calm. If you feel like they're not listening or making mistakes, ask them to pull over and stop, and then talk to them calmly about what they need to be doing.

THINK ABOUT A SAFE DRIVING COURSE. Safe driving has a lot to do with good decision-making. All teenagers, but especially those still inclined to risky behaviour, should be encouraged to do a Safe Drivers Course, run by Roads and Maritime Services. The course teaches young drivers how to reduce road risks and cope with distractions. Talk to your caseworker to see if you can be reimbursed.

LAY DOWN THE LAW. Teens must make sure everyone is wearing a seatbelt, music is at a reasonable volume, and that they don't use phones or other electronic devices, even hands-free. In NSW, L-plate and P-plate drivers must have a zero blood alcohol reading. Other restrictions also apply: check details with Roads and Maritime Services.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

SUPPORT INDEPENDENCE. The freedom and independence that comes with being a licensed driver makes it easier for teenagers to do important things like go to school, TAFE or university, get to jobs or job interviews, and see family and friends. Caseworkers should be ready with the necessary identity documents so the teen can easily apply for a learner's permit.

FACILITATE LESSONS. Caseworkers may also be able to update a teenager's Case Plan to include driving lessons. In most cases, the cost of driving lessons will be covered.



USEFUL TIP

Check your insurance

Even good drivers have accidents. If your child will be using your car, make sure that your insurance covers teenage drivers. If it doesn't, and something goes wrong, you could end up with a very large bill.



MORE HELP

Roads and Maritime Services

rms.nsw.gov.au

Overseeing licences, managing driving tests and running Safe Driver Courses across NSW.

4

GETTING ON TOP OF RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Thrill-seeking is normal among teenagers. They do it to explore their own abilities, test their limits, and express themselves as individuals. Prepare yourself for mistakes and slip-ups, and help your teen to learn from them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

Choose the challenge

Try to direct your teen to structured activities like rock climbing, parkour or BMX bike-riding. Some of the more risky activities may need approval from your caseworker.



MORE HELP

Kids Help Line

kidshelpline.com.au

1800 55 1800 (24 hours)

Information for parents about risk taking and how to help kids to cope with peer pressure.

Parent Line NSW

parentline.org.au

1300 1300 52

A support service for parents. Browse the website or make use of online or phone counselling.

BE YOUR CHILD'S BACK-UP. Stay in touch with what your child is doing and who they're seeing. Welcome friends over and know who they are. Let your child know you can always help them get out of tricky situations, whether it's picking them up from a party early or helping them work out how to deal with peer pressure.

ENGAGE WITH SCHOOL. Kids who are actively involved in school are less likely to get into risk-taking behaviour. Get kids to try out for sports and school plays, go to camps, join the debating team, the band or the choir, or help out at fundraising days.

LEARN ABOUT BOYS. Chemical changes in the brain during adolescence mean boys are more likely to take risks than girls. The dopamine lift they get is similar to the pleasure of things like sport, achievement, reward, and the reassurance they are loved. Think about how you can make these things part of everyday life for your teen, so they feel less of a need to look for that feeling elsewhere.

HAVE A BREAK FROM FRIENDS. Kids with low self-esteem are more easily influenced by their peers – and teenagers are more than twice as likely to take a risk in the company of friends. If you are concerned about the influence of friends, create an opportunity for your child to spend time away from them. Encourage them to take up a new sport or social activity. Or take a few days off and head out of town. If you go on holiday, make sure you let your caseworker know.

GET SUPPORT FOR EXTREME MOODS OR BEHAVIOUR. When behaviour is dangerous, violent or there is self-harm or sadness that lasts more than a few days, it's vital you seek help from the caseworker or school, as well as professional support. The first priority is to keep the teenager safe. In serious cases, where there is a threat to the safety of the child or others, you may need to contact police.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

CONSIDER HOW TO HELP THE TEEN. Carers need to keep caseworkers up to date about their teen's behaviour, especially if the behaviour is getting worse. Caseworkers will be able to look into local support services and professional help. If troubles continue to escalate, caseworkers can develop a Behaviour Support Plan with input from the carer and a psychologist.

SUPPORT THE CARER. Sometimes a teen's behaviour gets very challenging or upsetting, and carers find they are struggling to cope. A caseworker can help by thinking about ways to support the carer. Sometimes, a fresh approach or some extra training is useful. Even a few days of respite can help a carer get back on track.

5

FINISHING SCHOOL

Encouraging education and keeping kids at school is one of the best ways to get set for a happy, healthy and productive life as an adult.

Give your teen the message that education is important and that you value learning, even if you didn't finish school yourself. Let them know that completing school and going on to an apprenticeship, traineeship or a degree will give them their best chance of success and independence.

Kids who leave school early are more likely to struggle with unemployment and less likely to come back to study later in life. They will also earn less money over their lifetime than their peers who do finish school.



WHAT YOU CAN DO.

MAKE STUDY A PRIORITY IN YOUR HOME. Help your teen set up a pleasant, comfortable and quiet study space. Make sure they get healthy meals and snacks. Encourage them to exercise regularly. All these things can improve their ability to cope with schoolwork.

FOCUS ON SLEEP. Teenagers with poor sleep struggle to concentrate in class or retain the new things they learn. Do what you can to help your teen get into a healthy sleep routine, including having a regular bedtime. If you think emotional or psychological issues are causing sleep loss, speak to your caseworker to get professional support.

UNDERSTAND THE PRESSURE. The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is a stressful time for all families, and all teenagers are likely to explode every now and then. Try not to overreact. Show your child that you have faith in them by tolerating their mood swings as much as possible and keeping up the love and support. Be especially mindful of things that can trigger emotional reactions from your child, including family contact visits.



It is hard to make friends when you are continuously moving. Also I never get to complete a whole year at one school.

17-year-old girl

ACT EARLY ON LEARNING CHALLENGES. Teenagers who find it hard to learn and feel like they're not doing as well as their classmates are at risk of leaving school early. Keep talking to your child about school so you can pick up on any learning gaps. Stay in contact with the school at parent-teacher interviews or whenever you feel there might be a problem. Ask the school about learning support and other resources that may help your teen. You can also look into tutoring. Your caseworker can help you track down a homework club at a local library or community centre.



MORE HELP

My Future

myfuture.edu.au

Identifies a student's interests and strengths, and gives them insights into suitable careers.

My Skills

myskills.gov.au

Information about different vocational education and training organisations and courses.

Skills One TV

skillsone.com.au

Video case studies on career pathways across traditional trades and emerging skills areas.

Ace Day Jobs

abc.net.au/acedayjobs

Video case studies about people in a variety of roles from sports photographer to reptile keeper.



USEFUL TIP

Visit unis and TAFEs

A number of universities and TAFEs run programs specifically for kids in care to introduce them to the world of tertiary education. Your caseworker can find out what's suitable for you and your teen, and help you apply for a place.

THINK ABOUT SOCIAL CHALLENGES. Kids who feel comfortable with their classmates are more likely to stay on to the end of Year 12. Support your teen by getting to know their friends and making it clear they're welcome in your home. Be alert to problems such as bullying or peer pressure around drugs, alcohol and sexual activity. If things get challenging, talk to the school or your caseworker about strategies that can help. Schools also have counsellors and anti-bullying policies.

KNOW THE RULES. In NSW, all students must stay at school to the end of Year 10. After Year 10 and until they turn 17, they have options. They can leave school to work a minimum of 25 hours a week. They can start an apprenticeship or traineeship. They can do a combination of paid work and school-based training called a Vocational Education and Training (VET) course. Or they can stay on at high school to complete their HSC and perhaps go on to university. Your child's strengths and interests will be the best guide to whether full-time work, a traineeship, an apprenticeship or university education is the best choice for them.

ACCESS THE TEENAGE EDUCATION PAYMENT. Assistance with fees and scholarships can make uni or TAFE possible. Family and Community Services (FACS) provides a special payment for carers with children aged 16 or 17 who are still in part-time or full-time training or education. The payment covers education-related expenses including tuition, school holiday programs, sports registration fees and camps. Your caseworker can help you with your application.

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS. If your child is overwhelmed or stressed by talk of careers and further education, refocus the conversation on their strengths and help them see what sort of roles need those strengths. A great tool for helping kids and carers understand what level of education is required for different jobs is a booklet called *School Subjects You Like and Jobs They Can Lead To* by the Department of Education. See contact details on the opposite page.

HAVE A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. Further education isn't for everyone, but leaving school and suddenly having nothing to do can be a blow to a teenager's self-esteem, especially if they lose contact with friends or can't find a job. If your child has a strong view about leaving school, talk to them about developing a plan. Help them to assess their options and set themselves up for a happy and successful future as an adult.

GET INVOLVED IN SCHOOLIES WEEK PLANNING. Many kids who get to the end of Year 12 celebrate with a Schoolies Week holiday after their exams are over. Schoolies can be a fun time for teenagers after a year of hard work, but there are dangers. Check in with your child about staying safe and standing up to peer pressure when it comes to things such as under-age drinking, excessive drinking, drug-taking or risky sexual behaviour.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

KNOW THE CHILD'S STRENGTHS. Sometimes carers have unrealistically high or unnecessarily low expectations for their child's education and future career. Caseworkers can help by getting to know the child's strengths and providing information about what sort of career pathways are available to them.

WORK CLOSELY WITH THE SCHOOL. Caseworkers and carers need to work together to help kids get to school every day and complete their education through to the end of Year 12. Both caseworkers and carers should work with the school to identify what sort of support a teen needs and then connect with the relevant services. Caseworkers should also be reviewing the Education Plan to make sure the teen has the best chance of success.

LOOK FOR UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS.

The teen in care should be given every opportunity to go on to further education. Most colleges and universities have fee-free and part scholarships to assist with the cost of studying and accommodation. These include Institution Equity Scholarships and Commonwealth Scholarships such as the Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarship. Caseworkers can help carers track down the support programs and payments that could help the child continue their education after Year 12.

TAP INTO FEE-FREE TAFE SCHOLARSHIPS. Smart and Skilled Fee-Free Scholarships cover the fees of certain vocational education and training qualifications in NSW and are available to students who are in, or have been in, out-of-home care.



So many things have happened in my life. My caseworker explains to me what she can do for me. For example, if I need a laptop, she explains to me what she can organise. She is really great and makes things happen. She is really supportive and helpful.

16-year-old boy

FOCUS ON 17. Starting a traineeship or apprenticeship or doing a VET course through school are all great options for kids who are not interested in university education. The main area of concern is around kids who stay on after Year 10, but drop out of school as soon as they turn 17. Kids who don't complete their HSC or engage in any other sort of training will struggle to find work in the future. If the child is determined to leave school at 17, help them see the value in being part of the workforce and becoming financially independent. Work with them to ensure they have a plan for finding work and the confidence to apply for jobs. Let them know they can try TAFE or other studies at any time in the future.

GET SUPPORT STRATEGIES IN PLACE. You and your caseworker might have many conversations with your teen about what they plan to do after high school. Once the teen has turned 15, these plans should be recorded in the young person's Case Plan so the appropriate support and strategies can be put in place. For example, if the young person is expected to turn 18 before they finish Year 12, the caseworker can make sure you have the financial support you need for the placement to continue until high school studies are complete.



MORE HELP

School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships in NSW

sbatinnsw.info

A program that allows high school students to start their training while still at school.

School Subjects You Like and Jobs They Can Lead To

education.gov.au/career-bullseye-posters

Helps kids see the pathways between favourite subjects and the jobs they could have one day.

Schoolies Survival Guide

reachout.com/schoolies-survival-guide

Smart and practical advice for teenagers including how to stay safe at parties and in big crowds.

Western Sydney University

westernsydney.edu.au
02 9678 7603

The Lodestar Program at Western Sydney University runs Taster Days for school-aged kids in care, and the Care, Advice and Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) for careleavers currently attending uni.

Newcastle University

newcastle.edu.au
02 9678 7603

Newcastle University runs on-campus residential experiences for Year 9 students (LIVE IT! for boys and Girls' Choices for girls) and is establishing Live, Learn, Grow, a support program for careleavers studying at the university.

6

FINDING CAREER PATHWAYS



The teen in your care deserves to find work that makes them happy and that supports a decent standard of living. To get there, they'll need your help to think clearly about their strengths and interests and about the sort of career that suits them best. And they'll have to get the necessary experience or education to make it all happen.

Growing up and finding work is tough for everyone, but may be tougher still for kids in care, especially those that have grown up in families where employment was unstable, erratic or just not a priority. You can help your teen to see the benefits of working hard for the future they want, and encourage them not to give up when things aren't going their way.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



USEFUL TIP

See the upside of missing out

It can take a while to find a job. Try to help your teen see that even writing job applications and going to job interviews contributes to the skills that will one day get them the job they want. It can help to think of setbacks as "opportunities to learn" instead of "failures".

MAKE A LIST. This is a great opportunity to reflect on strengths and interests. What do they love doing? What do they find easy? What sort of lifestyle do they enjoy? What makes them happy? Write a list, then work with your teenager to find out more about the sort of jobs that match up with their ideas. Also talk about what you see as your teen's strengths and the sorts of jobs you think they would enjoy; you might have some suggestions your teen has never considered.

GET PRACTICAL. Once you have identified the jobs that interest your teen, do the research to find out what sort of education, training or experience they will need. The booklet called *School Subjects You Like and Jobs They Can Lead To* mentioned on page 41 can be a good place to start.

TALK ABOUT JOB-SEEKING SUPPORT. There are services your teen can access to get some help in preparing for work and finding a job. Government agencies that provide free services for job-seekers include Centrelink, JobAccess and Job Active. Contact details are listed on the opposite page.

CHAMPION CREATIVE CAREER PATHWAYS. If the job your teen craves is out of their reach for now, help them think of creative ways to get there. They could offer to do some unpaid work experience (take care to see they are not exploited by an employer), do some volunteering in a related field, or start working in a more junior job so they can get to know an industry or an employer. Encourage them not to be disappointed by setbacks or delays. If they stay patient, passionate and committed, they will give themselves the best chance of reaching their goal.

TALK ABOUT PERSONAL SKILLS. Employers look for skills and experience, but they also look for people who are good communicators and show a willingness to learn. Help your teen understand the difference between how they talk with friends and how they should speak to employers, colleagues or customers. Reassure them that no-one knows all they need to know on the first day, and that their employer will expect them to ask questions and show an interest in finding out more.

THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT CONTROL. For some kids who have been through trauma, being told what to do by a boss or a manager may be an emotional trigger. Have a talk with your teen about what is and isn't okay in the workplace. Explain that when someone gives them instructions or corrects what they're doing, it doesn't mean they're being criticised or controlled. Let them know they're allowed to stick up for themselves or disagree if they need to, but they should do it calmly and constructively. And make it clear that if they argue loudly or get physically violent, they will probably lose their job.

LESSONS IN BEING A TEAM PLAYER. Help your teen understand they're part of a team in the workplace, and that their actions will have consequences for the people they work with. For example, if they have a fight with their boss and decide to walk out, it means that one of their co-workers will have to pick up the extra work.



I like to think my foster family treats me equally, like their own family, and does their best to give me the support I need, but they let me be independent where I can be as well. Free will is the one thing that makes me feel safe in a placement.

17-year-old girl

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

SUPPORT THE TEEN TO APPLY FOR A YOUTH ALLOWANCE. Once teens turn 16, they may be entitled to a Youth Allowance payment. The full Youth Allowance is only available for teens who are still at school or who are in full-time training or further education. If the teen is in part-time work or part-time training, they may have to do some extra activities such as volunteer work or youth programs to be eligible. Caseworkers can help teens to make the appropriate enquiries with Centrelink.

EXPLAIN THE FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF THE YOUTH ALLOWANCE. Caseworkers should make sure carers understand that their allowance will be reduced by the amount of the Youth Allowance once it is being paid. The Youth Allowance lets the teen in care access money independently of their carer so they can start to cover some of their own expenses.

ENCOURAGE TEENS TO BE RESPONSIBLE WITH THEIR MONEY. The Youth Allowance is a substantial independent income that comes direct to the teen from Centrelink. Caseworkers should support carers to encourage young people to get into good financial habits. For example, it's better to save for goals like a new car or computer, than to use it up on video games or big nights out. Carers may also want to talk to their teen about using some of their Youth Allowance to cover personal expenses like clothing and transport.



MORE HELP

JobActive

jobactive.gov.au

13 62 68

Support services available to those receiving the Youth Allowance.

Centrelink

humanservices.gov.au

The agency that delivers a range of payments and services for Australians, including job seekers.

JobAccess

jobaccess.gov.au

1800 464 800

Information and advice for job seekers with disabilities.

Leaving School

schools.nsw.edu.au/leavingschool

A practical guide to leaving school and pursuing a career.

Young People at Work

youngpeopleatwork.nsw.gov.au

Covering the rights and responsibilities of young job seekers and employees.

7

BELONGING FOR LIFE



Some kids will be excited about turning 18; others may worry about what's going to happen next. Your teen doesn't have to leave your home just because they've turned 18 – but some kids are keen to spread their wings.

You may feel sad and even angry if your child decides to leave. Just let them know they're a big part of your life, you love them and you'll miss them. Keep the door open, offer support and plenty of friendly, practical advice ... it all helps.

WHAT YOU CAN DO.



MORE HELP

CREATE Foundation

create.org.au
1800 655 105

*Mentoring, events, workshops
and forums for kids in care
and those leaving care.*

FACS Careleavers Line

1800 994 686

*A dedicated hotline to
answer questions and provide
support to young careleavers.*



USEFUL TIP

Be kind to yourself

You may feel a sense of loss after the child you have cared for leaves your home. Those feelings are real and valid. Don't ignore your grief or push it away. If the grief feels overwhelming, contact your caseworker for some extra support.

STAYING PUT. Encourage kids to stay on and enjoy the stability of your home and family. You might want to consider other options including guardianship or adoption; talk to your caseworker to find out more. Be aware that the practice of adoption was not known in traditional Aboriginal communities and that adoption of an Aboriginal child cannot happen unless the Court is satisfied that it is in the child's interests and preferable to any other order which could be taken by law.

STAY CONNECTED. If your teen is preparing to leave your home and care, tell them you want to keep in contact and stay in touch. Depending on your relationship, this might mean visiting their new place, inviting them over for Sunday lunch regularly, phone calls or simply 'staying connected' just as any parent would when their child leaves the nest. Help them build a support network of caring adults they can turn to as they learn to live independently, including your extended family, trusted members of the community, or even the family GP.

KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN. It is not unusual for teens to grab the opportunity to move out of their carer's home, and then want to return a year or so later. Let your child know you would welcome their return, whenever they are ready.

STAY POSITIVE. You might disagree with your teen's decision and worry about how it will affect their wellbeing or their prospects for the future. If that's the case, raise your concerns with your caseworker. Otherwise, focus on the positive and try to make the transition as easy as possible for everyone concerned.

WHAT YOUR CASEWORKER CAN DO.

ENCOURAGE STABILITY. Caseworkers play a role in encouraging kids to stay with their carers in a stable, family environment. They can also explain the different sorts of financial support that are available after a teenager finishes school.

ARRANGE ONGOING CONTACT. Kids in care need stable, positive relationships with adults they can trust. Ongoing connections and contact reassure the teen they are loved and valued, and they have someone they can call on when they need help. The caseworker can support and record these arrangements.

PULL TOGETHER THE DOCUMENTS. Kids leaving care need copies of important documents including their birth certificate, health care card, Medicare card, student card, driving licence and Tax File Number. The caseworker should gather the documents and make sure the teenager can satisfy a 100-point identity check.

CARER TOOLKIT

Most young people and their families experience some ups and downs during the teen years. It's completely normal for tweens and teens to be moody and uncommunicative at times, and more inclined to hang out with their friends than their families.

But some kids who have experienced trauma may have particular challenges to overcome. They may have a deep sense of fear, a mistrust of adults, and a belief that they have to look out for themselves. It's important to understand they're not trying to make life hard for you. For now, they're just behaving the only way they know how.



Look beyond the behaviour of a teen to what is really going on in their mind and heart by listening to them. Pick your battles wisely. And don't sweat the small stuff!

Jo-Anne, Blakehurst

Kids who have been through tough times are often acutely aware of what's going on around them, even if they don't show it. That means that your caring, kind and consistent manner will, over time, have an impact.

Stay patient, try to look at troubles as learning opportunities, and give yourself credit for the small successes like an unexpected smile from your child, or some encouraging comments from a teacher.

And be kind to yourself! If you take care of your own health and wellbeing, you'll be less likely to get stressed and burn out. Make time to do things you enjoy. And keep connected with friends and other carers who know what you're going through and will support you.



USEFUL TIP

Look after yourself

The work you are doing is emotionally and physically demanding. Take a break from time to time, and ask for help when you need it.



TIPS FOR:

TEENAGE PRIVACY

Teens need their own personal space, and their own mental space, too. Privacy gives them the room they need to forge a sense of identity and develop their independence. But they're not on their own yet! Your teen may be pushing for independence, but you know they still need your guidance. Here are some ideas about how to show your teen that you trust and respect them, while also keeping them supported and protected.

KEEP TALKING AND LISTENING. Be around. Be attentive. Be interested in what your child has to say. If the conversations keep flowing, then you'll have a good sense of what's going on in your teen's life and how they're feeling, without ever having to pry. If your teen starts a conversation with you, stop what you're doing and give them your full attention. Your child wants to know that what they say matters to you.

RESPECT PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES. Get in the habit of knocking before you enter your child's room, and checking with them before you look for something in their school bag or borrow their phone or computer.

BE UPFRONT ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW. Tell your teen there are things you need to know so you can be sure they're safe, and that you expect them to share that information with you. For example, you need to know where they are when they go out, who they're with and how they're going to get there and back.

RELAX ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW. There are things about your teen's life that you may want to know, but you don't really *need* to know. For example, you probably don't need to know who your teen has a crush on or why they fell out with a friend. If communication is good between the two of you, you can certainly ask those questions – but don't take it personally if your teen doesn't want to answer.

STAY INVOLVED IN YOUNGER TEENS' ONLINE LIVES. In the early years, it's smart to be very actively involved in what your child is doing online. Talk about how to use the internet safely, insist that devices are used in public areas of the house, and perhaps consider using settings or software that limit what your child can do online.

DON'T SPY ON OLDER TEENS. As your teen gets older, keep up the conversations about what they're doing online, but think long and hard before undermining their privacy by demanding passwords, logging on to their devices or using software to track their activity. It's better to make it clear what your expectations are, and ensure that your teen knows they can always come to you with any worries around what they encounter online.

LOOK DEEPER. If the teen in your care repeatedly breaks your trust and shows no signs of being sorry, or if their behaviour is getting risky or self-destructive, it could be a sign that they are struggling to deal with the trauma and disruption in their past. Talk to your caseworker; it might be time to get help from a counsellor or psychologist.

TAKE ACTION. If you have urgent concerns for your child, or if you don't know where they are, call your caseworker or the 24-hour Child Protection Hotline on 132 111. If you believe your child is in immediate danger, contact the police straight away.



TIPS FOR:

BETTER NEGOTIATING

When you negotiate with your teen, you're supporting their growing independence but also teaching them how to look ahead, think about other people, consider consequences, learn from mistakes and make good decisions. You're also avoiding stress and conflict by setting up situations that both of you can feel good about.



THINK FIRST. If your teen surprises you with a demand, don't feel like you have to respond immediately. Let them know it's something the two of you will have to talk about, and set aside a time for that conversation. Remember to follow through with the conversation as soon as possible so your teen knows you aren't just putting them off, and that you're serious about sharing the decision-making.

LISTEN FIRST. Let your teen start the conversation and listen closely, without interruption. Try to focus on what they're saying instead of thinking ahead to what you're going to say next. Your teen might tell you something that completely challenges your assumptions about what's going on.

CHECK THAT YOU HAVE UNDERSTOOD. Show you are making a genuine effort to understand your teen's point of view by telling them in your own words what you have heard. You could say something like, *Okay, so what I'm hearing is... Is that right?*

STICK TO THE FACTS. When you're negotiating, try to avoid judgmental language. Focus on the facts without letting your opinions take over the conversation. For example, don't say, *I can't believe you want to wear that trashy outfit*; instead say, *You want to wear that skirt, but I don't think it's appropriate.*

USE YOUR AUTHORITY WISELY. Your teen is growing up, but you are still responsible for their safety and wellbeing. Stand firm on things you know will put them at risk of harm, but make it clear that, within those boundaries, you'll support them to do what they want to do.

PROBLEM-SOLVE TOGETHER. If you haven't found common ground yet, ask your teen some more questions about what they want and why. For example, if you have asked your teen not to use social media during the school week and they refuse, you might say, *What I'm worried about is that it's distracting you from getting your homework done. How much time do you think you need for social media, and then how much time do you need for your homework?* Use your teen's answers to push on with negotiations.

TAKE A BREAK. If things are getting heated, it's a good idea to take a break. Let your teen know that you need to cool down for a moment and agree on a good time to restart the conversation.

DON'T SUGAR-COAT IT. It could be that the final decision is very different from what your teen was originally asking for. Stay as neutral as you can. Don't try to convince them that the agreed course of action will be better for them or that they'll appreciate it later. Give your teen space to come to terms with it in their own time, and make their own conclusions.

DON'T SAY "I TOLD YOU SO". Sometimes a negotiation leads to a decision that you're not entirely happy with. For example, your teen may end up spending money on something you're sure they won't use much in the future. If it turns out you were right, don't make a big deal about it. Learning from your mistakes as a teenager is part of becoming a good decision-maker as an adult.



TIPS FOR:

SOLVING PROBLEMS



Carers play an important role in helping kids solve problems. Problem-solving skills are something tweens and teens will need to navigate the adult world. Learning how to cope with challenges and solve problems doesn't come easily. At the beginning, you'll need to help your teen work through their problems, using some of the tools and strategies described here. Eventually, you'll be able to pull back and let them work through problems on their own. Being able to sort things out for themselves will be a big confidence-booster.

TAKE THE FEAR OUT OF FAILURE. Sometimes kids with a poor sense of self-worth may take failure very hard, or might be too scared to look for a solution in case they fail. Help your child understand that making mistakes is one of the best ways to learn. Tell them about the times you made mistakes or failed, and talk positively about what you learned and how you feel about it now.

COMFORT THE WORRIER. Reassure your teen that their brain is forever learning new skills and that they will get better at things the more they practise them. Finding answers and solving problems might seem hard now – but it will get easier.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM. Problems are often wrapped up in a lot of emotion. It helps to put aside the arguments and focus on the facts. So instead of the problem being *Why don't you care more about your school work?* it becomes *What needs to change so that you start getting your school assignments done on time?* Factual problems are easier to solve than emotional ones.

LOOK FOR REASONS. Talk together about why this problem has developed. Listen without interrupting – you might discover something about the situation that you didn't know.

MAKE A LIST OF SOLUTIONS. Write down all the possible solutions that you and your teen can think of. These could be realistic or crazy – it doesn't matter at this stage and the more open you are to ideas, the more comfortable your teen will feel. Don't offer any judgments or opinions while the ideas are being collected.

EVALUATE THE SOLUTIONS. Go through the solutions and make notes about the positives for each one, and then the negatives. Solutions where the negatives really outweigh the positives can be crossed off the list. Then it's a matter of going through the remaining solutions to decide which one is really the best one. It might help to give each solution a mark out of 10 to guide the discussion.

MAKE A PLAN. Once you've decided on a solution, you'll need to work out how to make it happen. Talk with your teen about who needs to do what and when. If the solution requires having a conversation with someone, for example if your teen needs to ask a teacher for more time on a school assignment, then it might help to practise the conversation.

LOOK BACK ON THE SOLUTION. Deciding on a course of action doesn't mean the problem has been solved. Check back in with your teen to see how things are going. If everything has gone well, then it's worth stopping to talk about how problem-solving together helped. If it didn't, then you might need to come up with a better solution.



TIPS FOR:

DEALING WITH ANGER



Reactions that are angry or violent may be deeply instinctive for kids who have been through trauma, either because it's the only kind of conflict resolution they've ever been exposed to, or because they developed those responses as children to keep themselves safe. Being loved and cared for by you will help your child learn better ways of coping. Support your teen by being calm, reassuring and understanding what their triggers might be.

BE CALM IN THE FACE OF THE ANGER. It's very likely you will be the focus of your child's anger at some point. Stay calm, make it clear you're listening, and state your own point of view clearly and simply. If there is a problem, look for a solution both of you can be satisfied with. If a compromise is not possible, try to help your child understand your decisions are based on what is best for them.

NEVER LET IT GET NASTY. As the adult, you must be a role model of good behaviour. Don't mock or ridicule. Don't be sarcastic. Try not to swear. Never be intimidating or threatening. Kids who have experienced trauma are usually highly sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues, so your positive role modelling will have a big influence.

BE READY TO APOLOGISE. Nobody's perfect. If you did or said something you shouldn't have, take responsibility for it, apologise, and repair the harm done if you can. The child in your care will feel respected and cared for, and they'll also be seeing you model responsible behaviour.

CARVE OUT CONFLICT-FREE TIME. You might go through patches when it seems like all you ever do is fight with your child. It's important that not every discussion is a negative one, especially for kids in care who can really battle with negative feelings about themselves. Make a point of starting up conversations when you're both feeling relaxed and there's nothing to argue about.

UNDERSTAND WHERE THE ANGER COMES FROM.

For some kids, thoughts and feelings are so big and painful that self-control seems impossible, and anger management becomes a problem. If you're finding it hard to cope with your child's anger, ask your caseworker for some support. Some specialised training, extra help around the house or a short break from caring duties might help you get back on top of things. It may also be valuable to organise some counselling or psychological support for your teen.

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT DISCIPLINE. Look for consequences that won't trigger bad memories or raise anxiety. Don't punish a socially anxious child by excluding them from an activity; or confiscate a treasured belonging from a child who has suffered neglect. Having your child do some extra work alongside you, such as washing the car or doing the laundry, can be a good alternative.

TAKE ONE CONFLICT AT A TIME. You might be tempted to bring up old arguments, but that's likely to make your child defensive and even less inclined to find a solution. Just focus on the issue at hand.

VIOLENCE IS NEVER OKAY. If your child gets physical, make it clear that violence is not okay and that you will work things out with them later, after they've calmed down. If the threat of violence is ongoing, it's important to let your caseworker know. If you're ever concerned that someone in your house is at immediate risk of harm, call the police.

CARER SUPPORT

Aboriginal Statewide Foster Care Support Service (ASFCS)

absec.org.au
1800 888 698

Centrelink

humanservices.gov.au
136 150

Centrelink

Indigenous Call Centre
humanservices.gov.au
1800 136 380

Child Protection Helpline

132 111 (24 hours)
1800 212 936 (TTY for
hearing or speech impaired)

Connecting Carers NSW

connectingcarersnsw.com.au
1300 794 653 (Mon–Fri)

Parent Line NSW

parentline.org.au
1300 1300 52

Raising Children Network

raisingchildren.net.au

Reach Out Parents

parents.au.reachout.com

Translating and Interpreting Service

tisnational.gov.au
131 450

KIDS & CARE LEAVERS SUPPORT

Create Foundation

create.org.au
1800 655 105

FACS Careleavers Line

1800 994 686

Kids Helpline

kidshelpline.com.au
1800 55 1800 (24 hours)

Lifeline

lifeline.org.au
13 11 14 (24 hour)

Resolve

An app for careleavers.
Download via Windows, Google
Play or Apple's App store.

YOU

you.childstory.nsw.gov.au
Talking to kids about their rights,
before and after leaving care.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (AECG)

aecg.nsw.edu.au
02 9550 5666

Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs)

Contact your school or call
the Department of Education
on 1300 679 332.

Ace Day Jobs

abc.net.au/acedayjobs

Department of Education

dec.nsw.gov.au
1300 679 332 or 131 536

Fair Work Ombudsman

fairwork.gov.au

Home School Liaison Officers

Contact your school or
call the Department of
Education on 1300 679 332.

JobAccess

jobaccess.gov.au
1800 464 800

JobActive

jobactive.gov.au
13 62 68

Kids in Care (KiC) Club, UWS

westernsydney.edu.au
02 9678 7603
An out-of-school-hours club
for kids in Western Sydney.

Kids Matter

kidsmatter.edu.au

Leaving School

schools.nsw.edu.au/leavingschool

My Future

myfuture.edu.au

My Skills

myskills.gov.au

NAPLAN

nap.edu.au

Newcastle University

newcastle.edu.au
02 9678 7603
On-campus residential
experiences for Year 9
students plus a support
program for careleavers.

Public School Locator

online.det.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/
locator

Reading Eggs

readingeggs.com.au

Reading Writing Hotline

readingwritinghotline.edu.au
1300 6 555 06

School A to Z, Practical Help for Parents

schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au

School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships in NSW

sbatinnsw.info
School Subjects You Like
& Jobs They Can Lead To
education.gov.au/
career-bullseye-posters

Schoolies Survival Guide

reachout.com/
schoolies-survival-guide

Skills One TV

skillsone.com.au

SPELD NSW

speldnsw.org.au
02 9739 6277

Western Sydney University

westernsydney.edu.au
02 9678 7603
'Taster' days for school kids in
care and a support program for
careleavers currently at uni.

Young People at Work

youngpeopleatwork.nsw.gov.au

Your Tutor

yourtutor.edu.au
02 9906 2700

CULTURE & IDENTITY

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

absec.org.au
1800 888 698

Aboriginal Statewide Foster Care Support Service (ASFCS)

absec.org.au
1800 888 698

Ethnic Community Services Co-operative

ecsc.org.au

Families Like Mine

beyondblue.org.au 1300 22 4636
This downloadable resource
helps families support LGBTI
kids and young people.

Minus 18

minus18.org.au

Multicultural NSW

multicultural.nsw.gov.au

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

snaicc.org.au
(03) 9489 8099

QLife Australia

qlife.org.au
1800 184 527

Twenty 10

Twenty10.org.au
02 8594 9555 (metro areas)
1800 652 010 (rural freecall)

HEALTH & WELLBEING

1800 Respect

1800respect.org.au
1800 737 732

Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS)

ahmrc.org.au
Find your local service on the
'members' page of the Aboriginal
Health and Medical Research
Council website.

Alcoholics Anonymous

aa.org.au
1300 222 222

Bullying. No Way.

bullyingnoway.gov.au

The Butterfly Foundation

thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
1800 33 4673

Completely Gorgeous

completelygorgeous.com.au

Family Planning NSW

fpnsw.org.au
1300 658 886

Gambling Help

gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au
1800 858 858

Headspace

headspace.org.au
1800 650 890

Positive Body Image – A Weight Off My Mind

www.cyh.com/healthtopics/
library/WOMM_bb.pdf

Quitline & NSW Aboriginal Quitline

icanquit.com.au
13 78 48

Reach Out

reachout.com

Relationships Australia, NSW

nsw.relationships.com.au
1300 364 277

The Line

theline.org.au

Youth Beyond Blue

youthbeyondblue.com
1300 22 4636 (24 hour)

LIFE SKILLS

Australian Electoral Commission

aec.gov.au/enrol
13 23 26

LawStuff

lawstuff.org.au

Money Smart

moneysmart.gov.au

Money Smart Under 25s

moneysmart.gov.au/life-events-
and-you/under-25s

Safe Driver Courses

rms.nsw.gov.au
Find out about Safe Driver
Courses at the Roads and
Maritime Services website.

TECHNOLOGY

Cyber Smart Kids Quiz

esafety.gov.au/kids-quiz

Digital Citizenship

digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au

Office of Children's eSafety Commissioner

esafety.gov.au

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Available online at facs.nsw.gov.au



Family &
Community
Services

FOSTERING NSW
Growing together



facs.nsw.gov.au
caring.childstory.nsw.gov.au

fosteringnsw.com.au



BUILDING INDEPENDENCE



I started out fostering in the hope of changing children's lives. In the end, it was my life that was changed by fostering.

Vikki, Southern Highlands

Carers make a huge contribution to the lives of kids who have had a tough start. But looking after tweens and teens can sometimes be a challenge.

This guidebook offers tips and ideas to support carers in being a positive and protective influence on the kids they nurture and love.



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fosteringnsw.com.au