



# Parentalk

THE TEENAGE YEARS



# Welcome to *Parentalk* – *The Teenage Years*

Being a parent is one of life's greatest joys, but it's also one of its biggest challenges.

There's hardly a mum or dad on the face of the earth who, at times, is not overawed by the task of parenting. And for many parents, the teenage years can be particularly challenging. They struggle to understand and keep up with the physical and emotional changes their teenagers are going through.



*Parentalk – The Teenage Years* covers topics that affect every family with children in the teenage years. As you go through each session you'll be able to talk to other parents in your group about the day-to-day challenges that you face, as well as the things that are going well.

This little booklet is yours to keep. You may want to jot down ideas of things you'd like to try at home or take some notes during the sessions to remind you of what you've talked about.

Thank you for taking the time to do *Parentalk – The Teenage Years*. We hope you'll discover that you're not on your own in some of the challenges that you face – other parents are in the same boat! And we hope you'll realise that you're already a fantastic mum or dad. Most of all, we hope you'll be reminded that while being a parent has its fair share of difficulties at times, it is also one of the greatest jobs in the world!

Rob Parsons OBE  
Founder and Chairman of Care for the Family

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Session 1:</b> Understanding your teenager    | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Session 2:</b> Staying connected              | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Session 3:</b> Identity                       | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Session 4:</b> Communication and conflict     | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Session 5:</b> Big pressures ... good choices | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Session 6:</b> Letting go                     | <b>19</b> |

## Group focus

It'll help with the running of *Parentalk – The Teenage Years*, and make it more enjoyable, if we can stick to a few ways of working together:

- Always be on time
- Remember that no one expects you always to have something to say
- As a general rule, let everyone have a first word before you have your second!
- Don't talk about things discussed during *Parentalk – The Teenage Years* with others outside the group
- Don't say, "If I were you ...!"
- Encourage others in the group. We need each other
- If you have concerns about anything that takes place or anything that you hear, talk to the group leader first before taking any other action
- Be kind to yourself. The very fact that you're doing the course says you care about being an even better parent

# Session 1:

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR TEENAGER

The teenage years can be a time of turmoil and transition for teenagers.

They are changing physically, emotionally and mentally and, as parents, we may struggle to understand them and their behaviour. We need to keep the lines of communication open and, most of all, make sure they know they are loved.

One mum said, "My 13-year-old son hates me. He treats me horribly. He won't go out with me unless I've got a black plastic bag over my head. When I drop him off at school he says, 'Park around the corner. Don't speak to me in front of my friends and don't wear that green coat out in public.'"

Your child may seem to change character overnight, but they're still the same person. They are trying to find their own identity as they begin to move from childhood to adulthood.

### Remember...

- As parents, we are all in the same boat!
- They're not just being difficult
- They don't really 'hate you'!
- It's tough for them too
- Just get them through

How well do you know your teenager?



## Spotlight on 'My story'

As our children enter the teenage years, their behaviour and attitudes will change. As parents, we may find that we don't know or understand them as well as we thought we did.



The teenage years are the time when young people are developing the ability to reason and debate. Your once compliant child may become confrontational, they will begin to question what their parents and teachers say and push the boundaries. This is normal.

The part of the brain to develop last is the part that helps them control their emotions and make sound judgements. That makes it hard for teenagers to see the possible consequences of their actions or to think beyond the immediate.

### How can we help get them through?

- Keep lines of communication open
- Don't take it personally
- Remember they're struggling with their emotions – the physical changes happen quickly, but it takes longer for their emotions to catch up
- If their behaviour is causing you real concern, you may need to seek outside help and advice

Whatever issue you're facing, you're almost certainly not the only one finding it difficult. Find someone you can talk to who can share your struggles. This is particularly important if you're parenting alone.

## Dave's top tip

*"There's a lot going on in teenage development. They may appear to be doing things that are chaotic – but remember, this is normal."*



## Final thoughts

It isn't all doom and gloom! There will be challenges, but good times too. Enjoy the journey as they mature into adulthood.

## Cathy's top tip

*"It's easy to find things wrong and be critical. But try to enjoy the good times and spend time having fun together."*



What's the one thing you want to remember from this session?



# Session 2:

## STAY CONNECTED

As parents of teenagers, we can feel like we're nothing more than private butlers with a taxi business on the side. We may think they only need us to do stuff for them, but the truth is, they need us to stay connected. We're their 'base camp', a secure place from which they can go out and explore the world.

What's the best way to show your teenager that you love them?

### Remember...

- Our teenagers still need us
- Stay connected with them and try to find shared interests
- Give them a secure base from which to explore the world
- Let them know they are loved unconditionally

If we want them to feel loved, it's important that we love them 'without strings'. They need to know there is somebody who accepts and loves them ... anyway



## Spotlight on 'My story'

Teenagers can sometimes withdraw from family life, but it's important to persevere and find ways to stay connected to them.



## Love languages

In his book *The 5 Love Languages*, Dr Gary Chapman shows five ways in which people commonly express and receive love. If we discover our teenager's main love language, we can use it to show them love in a way that they really understand.

**WORDS** Do remind your teenagers regularly that you love them, but more than that, praise and encourage them too.

**GIFTS** The value of the gift isn't as important as the thought and effort behind it. Small gifts given spontaneously can have a big impact.

**ACTIONS** Helping with homework, giving them a lift or repairing their bike all show love in action.

**TIME** Uninterrupted, quality time with you – whether it's little and often or a large chunk – will make a world of difference.

**TOUCH** This is an important way to express love, but be wise in picking your time – it may be better to hug them at home before they leave for school rather than in front of all their friends.



## Final thoughts

### Five ways to build a connection:

- Show interest in the things they enjoy, e.g. video games, music, sport
- Develop a shared interest, e.g. football, cooking or films
- Take them out for coffee or to play a game of pool – whatever works for you and your teenager
- Respond when they want to talk to you – even if it's inconvenient
- Take advantage of any time you spend together – even when you're the taxi service!

It can help to find a trusted person such as a godparent, grandparent or youth leader who can also invest time in them.



### Krish's top tip



*"Don't mourn what your children used to be – accept them as they are now. Find a way to express love in a way that they can receive it. Make it about them and not about your needs."*

### Sarah's top tip



*"Ask yourself, what can I do today to build a connection? If it doesn't seem to work, keep trying different things."*

What's the one thing you want to remember from this session?





# Session 3:

## IDENTITY

Our teenagers live in a fast-paced, high-stress world that has expectations of what they should achieve and how they should look.

They have a strong need to fit in and be accepted by their peers – their lives are defined by the number of ‘likes’ and followers they have on social media. As parents, we need to try to understand their world and the pressures they face so that we can help them to develop healthy self-esteem and discover who they are.

One expert said, “These days it’s not enough to be a great footballer. You have to be a great-looking great footballer.”

### Remember...

- They need to learn that who you are is more important than what you look like
- We must try to understand their world
- Help them to discover their strengths
- They need to be affirmed and encouraged

How well do you understand your teenager's world?

## Spotlight on 'My story'

Striving to be accepted by their peers, being victims of bullying, and uncertainty about where they fit in can all affect a teenager's relationships and devastate their self-esteem.



We can't teach them to resist society's pressure to be 'perfect' if we try to present ourselves as the perfect family. Be real – with them and with each other. Tell them about your own failures – they'll identify with you and it will help to build bridges.

We all want the very best for our children, but we mustn't try to fulfil our own dreams through them. Instead, get inside their world and find out what their dreams are.

As parents, we must help them answer the question, "Who am I?" At this stage, they just don't know who they are and their identity can change from day to day.

Don't only focus on the things you'd like them to be good at – encourage them in the things they are already doing well.

It's a confusing time for them. Just as you throw a power switch in a house and all the electricity comes on, suddenly a switch is thrown in their bodies. The hormones are flying and they're questioning their identity, while being bombarded by the values and images of society.

## Paul's top tip

*"Your teenager's a unique person. Encourage them for that, for who they are."*



## Carrie's top tip

*"Find out what they're truly good at and then nurture that in them."*



## Final thoughts

How can we help them reach their full potential without putting unhelpful pressure on them?

- Remember that the greatest A-star is emotional health
- Don't read their school reports as though they're a prophecy of their future lives
- Help them to discover their strengths and don't buy into society's criteria of success

What's the one thing you want to remember from this session?



# Session 4:

## COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT

During the teenage years (sometimes called 'the grunt years') we must try to keep the lines of communication open.

One mum said: "I ask my 14-year-old what he did in school today. He says, 'Nothing.' I ask him what he's doing later and he says, 'Nothing.' His friends come around and they talk about 'nothing much'. When he asks me what's for tea I might try saying, 'Nothing.'"

Adopting an 'assertive' parenting style will help as we seek to understand our teenager's point of view and negotiate rather than dictate their boundaries.

### Remember...

- It's normal for parents and teenagers to find it hard to talk to each other
- An 'assertive' parenting style is best
- Where possible, negotiate boundaries
- Decide what's important to you, and let everything else go – you can't fight all the battles
- Set realistic consequences and follow through on sanctions

Why do you think that teenagers need boundaries?



## Spotlight on 'My story'

"I was talking to a duvet for 30 minutes with my cup of coffee."

Trying to communicate with our teenagers can be frustrating, but we have to keep trying. Create opportunities to talk, but also be open and ready for the times when they want to talk. This might be in the car, in the supermarket, over dinner and especially late at night when you really want to go to bed!



## There are three styles of parenting:



### Authoritarian

*"Do as you are told and don't argue."*

#### Authoritarian parents:

- Have strict ideas about discipline and behaviour
- Tend to be heavy-handed
- Don't seek to listen to the teen's view

This style can lead to conflict as teenagers hate it when we're constantly telling them what to do and it will often lead them to rebel.



### Permissive

*"Do whatever you want."*

#### Permissive parents:

- Are relaxed about behaviour and discipline
- Find it difficult to lay down boundaries or enforce them

Teenagers may feel that their parents don't care.



### Assertive

*"Yes, you can do that if..."*

*"No, you can't do that because..."*

#### Assertive parents:

- Have as few rules as possible
- Say yes to as much as possible
- Carefully choose the things they say no to, negotiate and enforce boundaries and follow through

If boundaries are negotiated, reasonable and explained, teenagers will understand them and feel secure and confident (although they'll still test the boundaries – that's their job!).



Don't be afraid to apologise to your teenager if you get something wrong. It's good to show them that we're willing to admit our own mistakes.

## Wendy's top tip

*"Don't have too many rules and pick your battles. You can't fight them all."*



## Final thoughts

It can be easy to find fault with our teenagers, but it's important to praise them too. Catch them doing something right every day. When the ear never hears praise, the heart loses the will to try.

## Philip's top tip

*"Try not to react in the heat of the moment; sometimes you just need to pause before you respond."*



What's the one thing you want to remember from this session?



# Session 5:

## BIG PRESSURES ... GOOD CHOICES

Teenagers face all sorts of different and difficult issues and we need to find a way to help them make good lifestyle choices.

We may think they take no notice of us – they may even say as much – but research shows that they value and trust their parents' views. Nothing out-impacts a parent.

What kind of pressures does your teenager face?

Only by beginning to understand their world can we begin to talk to them about it, and to help them successfully navigate their way through.

### Remember...

- Try to understand the 'big pressures' your teen faces (e.g. sex, alcohol, the digital world, pornography, drugs, bullying)
- There is a lot of pressure on young people to grow up fast
- Teenagers can appear to take no notice of us, but they do want to know what we think
- Share your values and help your teenagers to make good choices

## Spotlight on 'My story'

So many of the issues our teens face are related to seeking peer approval. Don't underestimate this. Sometimes it leads them to engage in risky behaviour because they think that's what their peers expect of them.



### How can we help our teens deal with the big pressures?

- Share our experience and failures with them
- Make sure they know that home is a safe place
- Work hard to find ways to talk to them
- Let them know you're always there for them and what that means, e.g. "I'll always listen, no matter what you have to tell me"
- Take an interest in their world so you can help them make sense of it
- Give them a 'power mentality' – they need to know they always have a choice
- Give them an exit strategy out of a situation that makes them uncomfortable, "I'll always come and pick you up if you need me to"
- Share your values with them

Find some trusted adults to share their journey – often teens will talk to other adults about things they don't feel they can talk to their parents about.

You may need to seek professional help if your teenager is involved in very risky behaviour. No one will judge you if you ask for help – it's a sign that you care.



## Final thoughts

We must share our values with them, but remember that values are more easily caught than taught. We think our teenagers don't listen to us, but sometimes the problem is the opposite – not a word is lost. If we say that honesty is important to us, we need to be honest with them. If we want them to treat others with respect, we need to treat not only others but them with respect.

## Jason's top tip



*"The best time to start having these big conversations is right now. Don't let your fear of getting it wrong stop you. You don't have to get everything perfectly right."*

## Rachel's top tip



*"Find as many ways as possible to keep reminding your teenagers that you are here for them – spell out what that might mean."*

What's *the one* thing you want to remember from this session?



# Session 6:

## LETTING GO

As parents, our job is to get our teenagers ready for the day we're not there.

That means letting them go. It can be hard, but it's essential because they need to learn to make good choices and develop the capacity to cope with whatever life may throw at them. There comes a point when we have to accept that all we can do is counsel them and trust that the foundation we have built will stand them in good stead.

Do you think it's important to give your teenager freedom?

### Remember...

- As parents, we must begin to move from 'controller' to 'consultant'
- Hand over control bit by bit
- Allow them to start making their own decisions
- All young people need to experience challenge or adventure
- We have to allow them to make mistakes and learn from them



# Spotlight on 'My story'

It's natural to feel anxious about giving our teenagers freedom. Our gut instinct is to want to protect them and keep them safe. But we shouldn't be 'helicopter parents', hovering over them, always diving in with advice and interference.

While we'd prefer life to be easy for them, we don't do them any favours in the long-term if we always step in and fix things. We have to allow them to make mistakes – this will help them to learn valuable lessons that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.

Letting go is a gradual process. Over time, our relationship with them will change and mature.



## Caroline's top tip

*"Remember you're trying to work yourself out of a job. You're trying to create healthy, confident, happy and independent adults, who can make their way in the world and thrive without you at their side."*



## Final thoughts

There are no guarantees, but despite the ups and downs and challenges, most of our teenagers do get through. The teenage years can be a rewarding time for us as parents, to watch their character develop and flourish as they head down the road to becoming independent adults.



## Mark's top tip

*"Parenting teenagers can be a lonely business. If possible, meet up with other parents of teenagers. Be open and honest with them and support one another."*



And finally, a word of advice from Rob Parsons:

***"Don't take all the credit, don't take all the blame."***

What's the one thing you want to remember from this session?



# Thank you

If you found this course helpful, you may want to explore some of the topics in a little more depth by going on our popular *Time Out for Parents – The Teenage Years* course.

If you have younger children, you might want to consider *Parentalk – The Primary Years*, or another course in the *Time Out for Parents* range. To find out more, visit [www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses).

If you would like further help in your parenting, you can find a list of parent-support organisations on our website at [www.careforthefamily.org.uk/parenting](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/parenting).

Care for the Family has a range of resources for parents including books, events, DVDs, articles and newsletters. We also provide support for couples and for those who have been bereaved.

We'd love to hear what you thought of *Parentalk – The Teenage Years*. You can let us know by completing a 5-minute survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/parentalk-teens](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/parentalk-teens). This will help us to make sure that the course remains a useful resource for all parents.

## For more information:

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## About Care for the Family

Care for the Family is a registered charity and has been working to strengthen family life since 1988. Our aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties. Working throughout the UK and the Isle of Man, we provide parenting, relationship and bereavement support through our events, resources, courses, training and volunteer networks. Our work is motivated by Christian compassion, and our resources and support are available to everyone, of any faith or none.

Notes:







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