



Welcome to Edition 4

Introduction

This month's newsletter looks at what help is offered to parents with teenagers. We run a variety of groups for teenagers, but we also think parents often need support. Here is one of the courses we have been offering for parents that we have been running for some years—"A Survival Course for Parents of Teenagers".

"While parenting is not rocket science, it is probably the most overwhelming and important endeavour many of us undertake in our lifetime" (Hoghugh and Long). And yet a lot of us try on our own. We believe parents are experts on their own children, and we can share this expertise to support each other to get through the hassles teenagers bring.

Getting Through The Day: a Survival Course For Parents Of Teenagers What is it?

It is a 10 week course for parents of teenagers. The course aims to provide a forum where parents can help each other, because parents are the experts on their own children.

Being a parent of a teenager is hard work, and so parents can get worn down, especially if they get few opportunities to meet other parents. Whatever happened to the chats at the school gate, where parents used to be able to share ideas about the children?

Parents often worry about the sort of friends their teenagers have, drugs, sex, fashions and loud music plus the feeling that they are losing control over their child who seems to have changed such a lot.

Courses are run all over West Lothian and are free, each session last 2 hours..

We have been able, on occasion, to run the group in the evening.

The course aims to:

- Provide a place where parents can meet up, share ideas and get support from each other.
- To help parents understand how teenagers are growing, especially in their minds, and why they behave the way they do.
- To help parents to make sure their teenagers have the support to make something of their lives.
- To help make the relationship between parent and teenager better.
- To build on skills at listening to our teenagers.
- To feel more confident in being able to say "No", and to be firm and fair in setting boundaries and to be better able to negotiate those limits.
- To enable parents to draw on an "internal toolkit" of ideas on managing their teenager's behaviour.
- To help parents deal with professionals they might meet.

The programme looks like this:

Week 1	Introductions
Week 2	Communication and Listening
Week 3	Then and Now
Week 4	How Teenagers Grow and Develop
Week 5	Why Teenagers Behave the Way they Do
Week 6	Listening and Communicating
Week 7	Getting Co-operation
Week 8	Negotiations without Hassle
Week 9	Assertion--Being Firm and Fair
Week 10	What Have We Learned +What Next

John Rogers, Parenting Co-ordinator,
West Lothian Council

What parents have said about “A Survival Course For Parents Of Teenagers”

- “My son’s behaviour has been completely transformed and he no longer has behaviour issues at school”. (This was done by) “Gained confidence and stood up for myself more”.
- “(I learned that) “I am not a bad mum, just a stressed one”. “Thank you for changing my life with my kids”.
- “I can talk to my son and he can come and speak to me without getting in an argument because I had the help and advice from the workers and the people who went to the group”.
- (The handouts) “were useful. Didn’t just leave and forget about what the issues were. I could go back to the handouts for support and remind myself what my goals were, make myself stronger with the info. Finally I had the answers to my problems”.
- “Didn’t think I would get out as much as I did. I didn’t believe my situation could be helped. It was”.
- “It was nice to know I was not alone”.
- “I’m using a different tone in voice. Explaining things properly instead of rushing around. Listening more instead of half-listening”.
- (It is) “A happier household all round”
- “I didn’t expect the course to be such a support for all kinds of parents. Highly recommended”.
- “I have totally enjoyed coming to this group, it has helped me enormously”.
- “It’s fantastic! Helped my confidence, made me realise I am important too and it’s OK to say, “No”! Every parent needs to know”.

Recent developments

In some of our courses workers in the Children and Young People teams have been filming parents with their teenagers and offering feedback on how the parent and teenager get on together, using ideas from Video Interaction Guidance (VIG). Both teenager and parents have enjoyed this and more importantly, it seems, to have helped them improve their relationship and their communication style and well as promote parent-child interactions. A collaborative review highlights the positive interactions. Workers say that everyone learns from this and it acts so as to promote peer support within the group. Parents feel encouraged and their confidence increases, as shown by VIG evaluation measures.

Another thing we have tried is Mindfulness. This might sound strange, but parents can get so stressed at times and they need to find ways of de-stressing, so they can be calmer when teenagers are testing them. The exercises act as a way of relaxing, and being able to re-charge batteries. Parents find that shouting really does not work, but that being calm and firm DOES work. In a way it is about being able to take a step back and find helpful ways forward, rather than get into arguments. Workers feel it is gratifying to see the way parents’ confidence improves so much.

Although parents have found the course very useful, some have asked us about how to get through to our teenagers. Often we are aware that teenagers can be troubled about things—sometimes these things are trivial, but at other times it really feels serious, at least to the teenager. But teenagers are not always good at sharing how they feel. We are developing a course that we hope will help parents feel they can get through to their teenagers. This should be available soon.

We have been learning a lot more about the teenager brain over the last 15 years or so.

For more information on The Teenage Brain we enclose an attachment.

This will also be available on the website www.parentingwestlothian.org.uk /How Children Grow (from 1.5.12)