

## Downloads: The Incredible Teen Brain – Time to Upgrade

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Teenager’s brains are going through a significant upgrade with enormous potential for high-impact learning. Their brains are highly sensitive to experience, so it’s important to get the environment right for them. Teen behaviour, motivations, priorities and internal drives change in adolescence, so once puberty kicks in, the same young person will act differently. The changes in the incredible teenage brain are an important part of a process and are a step towards becoming well-rounded and fully formed adults.

### Exercise

The next time the teen in your care behaves in a way that challenges you, puzzles you or makes you concerned, stop and take a moment to be curious. Might this event be explained by the changes happening in the teenage brain? First take the teen perspective. Understanding an event as a result of the changes in motivations and priorities that occur in adolescence can take the heat out of challenging behaviour or give meaning to behaviour that flummoxes you and help you think about the most efficient way to address it. Don’t mix up understanding with excusing behaviour. It’s always a good strategy to try and understand behaviour, but we don’t recommend that you allow disrespectful or self-destructive behaviour.

Note down three changes you have noticed in your teen’s behaviour, priorities or motivations since reaching this important stage of life. Which ones unsettle you?

### Change 1

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**Change 2**

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**Change 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of thinking this...	Try this...
If your teen sings night and day and dreams of being a singer...	She will never make any money if she becomes a singer, what a waste of her time...	I'm so glad she has found something she enjoys so much. It is building her confidence and it doesn't mean she is going to drop out of school.
		 Use a teen lens and appreciate teen passions
If your teen rushes to look at her phone as soon as she arrives home from school...	I wish she would just come home and start to revise instead of talking to her friends, she's got so much to do.	She seems so much more interested in friends than doing well at school, but that is expected as her brain is wired towards friendships right now and doesn't mean she will never be focused on her work. A catch-up with friends is important before she gets down to work.
		 Use a teen lens and notice teen natural attractors (e.g. friends)
If your teen is grouchy all through a family lunch...	Oh yes, here comes the grumpy teen. I am not going to tolerate this behaviour, it's plain rude. I will just ignore him until he pulls himself together.	I wonder what he felt so strongly about when he was grumpy? It's important I try to help him understand himself, so I must try to find a way to gently talk it through when he's calmer.
		 Use a teen lens – be empathetic to less-than-perfect behaviour. The changes the teen is going through are tough.

## Downloads: *The Teen Brain Thinks and Feels*

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### **Understand how the brain works and you will understand your teen's behaviour – and yours**

All brains, teenagers' included, prioritise safety before thinking. Of all the possible influences on the brain, the drive to stay safe will call the shots on brain activity. If the teen feels unsafe physically or emotionally, their brain is focused on dealing with threat and pushes activity to the emotional brain. A safe, calm and motivated brain works best for learning and making good choices, because the brain can allow resource into the areas that think and reason (the thinking brain).

Getting the teenage brain in the right 'zone' for learning is key to making the most of teen learning potential.

### **Exercise**

Sometimes fear or anxiety can 'look like' anger. Keep this in mind and note down three situations in which your teen appeared anxious or angry, when they seemed 'all over the place', possibly out of control. This is when your teen's brain is dominated by the emotional brain. Ask yourself: What were they doing? Who else was there? What happened just before? What else was significant that day/week/month for your teen? What did you say? How did you react?

### **Anxious or angry – Situation 1**

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### **Anxious or angry – Situation 2**

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**Anxious or angry – Situation 3**

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Now make a note of three situations in which your teen is best able to regulate their emotions and engage their thinking brain. Answer the same questions.

**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain – Situation 1**

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**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain – Situation 2**

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**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain – Situation 3**

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**Do the same exercise for yourself.**

**Anxious or angry – Situation 1**

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**Anxious or angry – Situation 2**

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**Anxious or angry – Situation 3**

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**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain –  
Situation 1**




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**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain –  
Situation 2**

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**Best able to regulate emotions and engage thinking brain –  
Situation 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen is avoiding studying for their exams due to start next week.	If you don't do well in that exam next week you can say goodbye to that party at the weekend. I need to see some commitment to your studies, now.	Your exams next week are important and I know you can do well. Focus is going to be key this week. What can we do to make sure you work well this week, so you can enjoy that party next weekend?
		 Motivate, don't threaten
Your teen gets his books out to study, then suddenly shouts, 'I'm dropping Chemistry. I'm done with this', and chucks his book on the floor.	That explosion came out of nowhere. What is his problem?	He must have been triggered by what happened last time we sat down to do chemistry homework together which, I must say, didn't go well. Let's see how we can change it, together.
		 Recognise triggered behaviour – feelings never come out of nowhere
Your teen failed a test despite having studied for it for many hours at home and school.	She seemed to revise for hours and still didn't do well in the test. She must be weak at that subject.	I wonder whether she spent all that revision time in her 'comfort' zone. If so, it would not have challenged her and stretched her learning sufficiently to do well. I want to go through her study techniques in detail.
		 Time on task is not the best predictor of success, it's what young people do in that time that counts

## Downloads: The Teen Brain Learns and Believes

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Brains learn by doing, and we develop skills by repetition and practice. Teenage brains are particularly primed to learn but, to make the most of this potential, they need to get into a positive cycle of learning. What we believe about learning and our belief about ourselves as learners predicts how we react in a learning experience and thus how much we will learn.

Pay attention to your language to support a growth mindset and teach young people that mistakes are an inherent part of the learning process. Your mindset about your own learning and about your teen's learning capacity will influence their mindset about learning.

### Exercise

Note three situations when things didn't go so well for your teen. Think about academic tasks and life skills. Are you triggered into a fixed mindset such as 'They are no good at this and never will be? They might as well stop trying'?

#### It didn't go so well – Situation 1

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#### It didn't go so well – Situation 2

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#### It didn't go so well – Situation 3

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When are your teens in the best positive learning cycle? (Think broadly about any activity – it might be programming the games console.) Is your mindset still fixed? What is different in comparison to the learning experience that didn't go well?

**It went well – Situation 1**

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**It went well – Situation 2**

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**It went well – Situation 3**

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When your teen tries something for the first time, do they seem upset when they are not instantly successful? It might indicate a fixed mindset about their own learning. What is your response?

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**Now do this exercise with yourself in mind.**

**It didn't go so well – Situation 1**

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**It didn't go so well – Situation 2**

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**It didn't go so well – Situation 3**

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**It went well – Situation 1**

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**It went well – Situation 2**

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**It went well – Situation 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Your teen tried to wash his clothes for the first time. He put his new blue shirt in with his whites and now everything is tinted blue.</p>	<p>He is never going to cope alone. He is 18 and can't even wash his clothes without ruining them.</p>	<p>New skills don't just appear from nowhere. He is learning something new where we expect mistakes to be made. He'll get there – brain circuits take time to build.</p>
		 <p>Remember, <b>mistakes</b> are an important part of learning</p>
<p>Your teen aces an English assessment.</p>	<p>Wow, you did so well in your English test. You are just really good at that subject, the same as me.</p>	<p>Wow, you did so well in your English test. You must have worked really hard at that.</p>
		 <p>Consider your language carefully to support a growth mindset about <b>performance</b></p>
<p>Your teen has stopped following her study timetable, saying it is totally useless.</p>	<p>You'll never pass your exams with that attitude of 'I can't'.</p>	<p>Your workload is so big right now, it must feel overwhelming and make you think you can't do it. Remember, the brain learns by repetition, so the more you practise, the better you will become.</p>
		 <p>Be careful to reinforce a growth mindset about the approach to <b>task preparation</b></p>

## Downloads: The Teen Brain Connects, Watches and Absorbs

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There are many different ways to learn. It takes thousands of hours of practice to learn skills and develop competence, but some other learning processes happen quickly, passively and unconsciously. Adults play an important role in all types of young people's learning.

Events can become linked in our minds, even if we don't want them to be (e.g. being bullied at school can lead to a fear of school). When one thing follows another, it increases or decreases the chances of it happening again (e.g. if parents give in when their teen demands more gaming time it means the teen is more likely to ask again in the future). Modelling behaviour is very powerful (e.g. a teacher who shouts and bangs the desk when feeling irritated is demonstrating an apparently appropriate way to express irritation). Teens' brains are ready for self-reflection and 'metacognition' (thinking about thinking) and now is the time to help them learn to self-regulate. Help them learn good habits and become aware of their learning patterns.

### Exercise

Note three situations where your teen has associated one event with another (e.g. waking up and immediately checking phone now always seem to go together, when they were not related before).

#### Situation 1

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#### Situation 2

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**Situation 3**

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Note three situations where your teen’s behaviour has been reinforced by what followed the behaviour (with a positive or negative outcome).

**Situation 1**

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**Situation 2**

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**Situation 3**

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Note three situations where you have modelled behaviour you don't like in your teen (be honest, it's OK, we all do it).

**Situation 1**



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**Situation 2**

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**Situation 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen has said she has to 'check something' the last few times she's due to do her Japanese homework, and disappears.	Why does my daughter disappear when doing Japanese homework? I have been calling her for ages and she is simply ignoring me. She knows it's got to be done, so why avoid it?	She finds languages hard. In the past, I have been impatient when she seemed to be slow on the uptake, resulting in tears. No wonder she avoids Japanese homework.
		 <p>Be mindful of associations that come from <b>past experience</b></p>
Your teen is so disruptive in your Physics class he is sent out of most lessons.	He is such a bad influence. I have to send him out of the classroom or the others can't learn. He doesn't want to try, he won't listen even when he is in the lab.	Maybe sending him out of class when he messes around is inadvertently reinforcing his bad behaviour – he escapes the situation he struggles with. Perhaps I should check his level of understanding and get him support.
		 <p>Make sure you are not <b>inadvertently reinforcing</b> behaviour that is unhelpful to learning</p>
The internet goes offline again. Your teen sets it up for you – again.	I can't remember how to do it, but the kids can. It's just easier, they are better at these things.	I struggle with technology but I must model persistence to my teen, not give up and find a way to remember the set-up (and have a growth mindset).
		 <p>Model behaviour that you <b>would like to see</b> in your teen</p>

## Downloads: *The Teen Brain Loves Other People*

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Social connections are fundamental for our survival. Social understanding is key to making these connections. These crucial social brain networks are developing during adolescence, so much of a teenager's attention is focused on the social world. Teens experience social pain if they are isolated, particularly by their peer group, whereas strong relationships help teenagers to thrive. Social pain and reward are felt more acutely during adolescence than at any other time.

Tapping into this 'social power' is essential for learning. A crucial task in facilitating the incredible brain is to understand teens' need for social connection and fear of social pain.

### **Exercise**

Note down a social situation your teen was in that caused them to feel upset, left out and overwhelmed.

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Consider ways you could help your teen if they were in that same situation again and use these ways in the future.




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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
All the class are talking about a party on Snapchat. Your teen hasn't been invited.	She's making such a fuss over not being invited to that party. For goodness sake, there will be hundreds more parties.	She is really in social pain over not being invited to that party. I know she will recover, but right now I need to support her. It is real distress even if it is short term.
		 <p>Recognise that <b>social pain is real pain</b> and teens feel this more acutely</p>
The first thing your teen does when she gets home from school is to reach for her phone and call her best friend.	How is it even possible for them to have anything more to say to each other on the phone all evening? They have been together all day.	It's important for her to feel connected with her friends – maybe to make sense of what's happened in the group today. She is learning all about the social world.
		 <p>Remember that <b>it takes a long time</b> to be socially competent, and teen gossiping is how they build those circuits</p>
There are two teens who talk incessantly in class. They catch each other's eye even if they are separated.	I am so irritated by these two. Yes, it's great to have friends but save it for break-time. I need them to be silent and listen to me or how can they learn?	I wonder if I can use their social connection and brain power to help them understand this topic by getting them to 'teach' each other one of the concepts?
		 <p><b>Tap into the social bias</b> in classroom tasks</p>

## Downloads: Teen Brains Overwhelmed

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Strong emotions are common in adolescence, but persistent emotional distress which impacts on day-to-day activities might mean a mental health problem. Mental health difficulties can interfere with learning and how your teenager copes with challenges in their future.

The way teens express their emotional needs is less easily interpreted compared to younger children, so they may need you to decode it. As an adult supporting a young person, it is important to help teens develop good emotional regulation and mental health habits.

### Exercise

Note down the ways in which your teen expresses the following emotions: anger, sadness, anxiety, excitement, guilt and disappointment

#### Anger

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#### Sadness

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#### Anxiety

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**Excitement**

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**Guilt**

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**Disappointment**

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What everyday habits or rituals do you have to support your teen’s mental robustness? A daily or weekly check-in? Given that teens may not always be ready to talk things through, do you have a code word so they could signal they are feeling down but aren’t yet ready to talk about it?

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How do you help your teen differentiate emotions experienced and emotions expressed? Can you help them to see that noticing emotions is a good daily goal, although acting on all of them may not be appropriate or helpful?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen tripped over in school in front of her class. She is crying and upset, feeling so embarrassed.	She needs to just get over it. She only tripped up. What's the big deal? Gosh, she makes such a fuss!	It is horrible to feel embarrassed. I will put myself in her shoes and spend some time talking it through with her. Afterwards, and when she feels ready, we can move on.
		 Allow teens to express emotions
Your teen doesn't want to go on the school trip. He's not sleeping and tearful.	You don't have to go on the school trip if you are that scared. Stay home with me.	I can see you are really worried. It's important to go and not let worry be in the driving seat. What's the worst that could happen on the trip? Avoidance is never the answer and you might get into a habit where you only feel OK at home. Let's think of ways to make you feel more comfortable about going.
		 Don't be scared of teen emotions
Your teen is rude to you in front of your friends.	(Shouting) How dare you speak to me like that? No more screens for you for the month.	It is absolutely not OK to speak to me like that. I feel really cross right now. Before I say something I regret, I'm going to take some time to feel calmer and <b>use my thinking brain.</b>
		 Teach and model emotional regulation
Your teen seems to be in a really bad place and you have been increasingly concerned about what he might do to himself because he has been so unhappy for the last month or so.	Maybe it's nothing. I'll leave it and see if things get better. He seems OK today.	He seems able to cope some days, but the pattern is more often bad days than good. I'm concerned about him. As his distress is recurring, I am going to seek help from a professional.
		 If you are concerned, <b>speak to your doctor</b>

## Downloads: Thriving with Neurodiversity

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Young people with neurodiverse brains and learning profiles need special consideration. The impact of a significant learning difference may be mild or significant and will be life-long. Teens may re-evaluate what having the learning challenge means to them as part of their self-image development and ability to thrive. Now is your chance to frame their abilities in a positive way to build resilience and teach them to own their learning profile, get out there and access support that belongs to them.

### Exercise

Note three main challenges your teen faces at home and at school because of their neurodiverse brain.

#### Challenge 1

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#### Challenge 2

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#### Challenge 3

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Name three strengths your teen has to help them to cope with their specific challenges.

**Strength 1**

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**Strength 2**

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**Strength 3**

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If you have traits of that neurodiversity, do the same exercise for yourself.

**Challenge 1**

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**Challenge 2**

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**Challenge 3**

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**Strength 1**

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**Strength 2**

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**Strength 3**

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How does your neurodiverse teen cope with executive functions, such as being able to plan, divide attention, think strategically or be persistent until a task is finished? What systems could you put in place to help them do these tasks independently?

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What do you do or say that helps your teen frame their neurodiversity as a positive?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen has Dyslexia.	He's never going to be good at English because his Dyslexia means he can't write well.	He's going to have to work harder than others, and we will need some support and accommodations in place. He has strength in oral skills. How can we use that to develop his writing?
		 <b>Keep a growth mindset</b> – whatever the learning profile
Your teen with Autism Spectrum Disorder says he doesn't get most of the jokes at school. He got the funny stuff in primary school, but not now.	There's nothing wrong with you. Other kids are mean.	Autism Spectrum Disorder means some types of conversation are harder to understand. It's annoying but it's OK. Don't ever think it's because you are not smart.
		 <b>Name the condition</b> to empower your teen
Your teen has ADHD. She doesn't have her notes to do her assessment.	School knows you have got ADHD. Why hasn't the teacher given you the notes? It's hard enough for you to learn without these other things to do.	Your teacher will try to always give you notes from the lesson, but if they forget, make sure you remind them. She is there to help, but it is your responsibility to make sure you have them all.
		 <b>Teach your teen to self-advocate</b> to get the support they need
Your teen has Tourette Syndrome. He has forgotten homework twice this week.	He has such a hard time trying to manage his tics. I'm letting him off again, I know, but he's got such a lot on his plate.	Tics take up a lot of his resources when they happen so often, but they are a bit lower this week. He's bright, so I'm doing him no favours if I don't expect him to complete tasks all the time. Part of academic success means finding a reliable system for homework.
		 <b>Have (appropriately) high expectations</b> – don't allow a neurodiverse condition to be an excuse day to day

## Downloads: Cracking the Social Code

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Social motivation changes over our lifetime. While younger children focus on caregivers, teenagers turn their attention towards their friends. Teenagers are programmed to orientate towards their peers, learning as much as possible before independence and adulthood. This means that peer influence is considered crucial by the teenage brain and peer acceptance is likely to underpin many decisions and actions.

### Exercise

Note three instances that illustrate how much your teen is focused on peers.

#### Instance 1

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#### Instance 2

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#### Instance 3

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Judging by their reaction to social invitations – or exclusion from them – do you think your teen has a fixed or growth mindset about their own or their peers’ social standing?

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What do you do to facilitate your teen’s social experience and ensure they are working to strengthen peer relationships?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen knows there is a party tonight from Snapchat. They don't get an invite.	Oh no, you didn't get invited to the party. That's terrible. Those boys are really horrible people – stay away from people like that.	Sorry to hear you didn't get invited this time. I'm sure there was a good reason – maybe there was a limit on numbers? Why don't you invite a friend for a sleepover?
		 Support a growth mindset around social standing
Your teen doesn't want to stand up in class and talk in a group exercise.	Everyone else has done it in the class. Why not you? If I make exceptions for one, it will invite chaos. Everyone has to stand up and talk.	If you would rather not give your answer verbally, just stand up and write it down on a piece of paper. We will work towards you giving verbal answers in the future.
		 Protect them from unnecessary social pain and embarrassment
Your teen is cheeky and answers back to you when his friends are round. His friends laugh at his jokes but you feel embarrassed.	My son is embarrassing me in front of his friends. He isn't usually like this and I don't like it. I am not going to let him get away with this, even if my shouting at him embarrasses him.	My son is never cheeky like this usually. I won't confront him while his friends are here as it might embarrass him but I will make sure to speak to him about it later, as that is not OK.
		 Don't confront a teen when their social status is on the line as peer admiration is hard to resist

## Downloads: Risk Taking and Resilience Making

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Teens are biologically driven to take risks. It's not simply a lack of control – their brains are optimised for risk taking because the outcome may be a significant gain. Teens take the greatest risks in the presence of peers.

Risks afford learning opportunities and build resilience. Helping your teen to engage with positive risk is an important part of their development.

### Exercise

Note three negative and three positive risks your teen has taken in the last few months.

#### Negative risk 1

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#### Negative risk 2

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#### Negative risk 3

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**Positive risk 1**

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**Positive risk 2**

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**Positive risk 3**

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What types of positive risk could you encourage your teen to take?

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What makes your teen more likely to take on negative risks? Who? Where? When? How could you change the context to mitigate the risk while still supporting them to explore and have fun?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen wants to run for the school pupil president representative.	What if you don't get it? The past president is running again and they did so well last year. If you don't win, you would feel rejected afterwards. Don't risk it.	You might not get elected, and don't worry if you don't this time. It gives you experience for next time. It's good practice.
		 Encourage positive risks
Your teen has been invited to a friend's house. There will be adults around for some of the day but they will be out all evening. Some older peers will join later in the evening.	He is not going to anyone's house unless the parents are there at all times. Who knows what they will get up to?	He and one friend at home when adults are in and out of the house periodically is OK. Late evening, in a larger group and parents out for several hours is a high-risk situation and unacceptable for young teens.
		 Think carefully about context when assessing risk
The formal exams are coming up. In the mock tests your teen knows this topic very well and you have covered it several times previously.	I want you to get full marks in this test. We covered it last week, and if you don't do well I know you weren't listening.	We've worked hard on this topic, but the point of a mock test is to figure out areas that might have been missed or need review. Mistakes will give us information, so just give it a go.
		 Cultivate a safe environment to allow for vulnerability in a learning task



## Downloads: Powerful Feelings and Mighty Motivations

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The teen years are full of intense, passionate, emotional highs and lows. Feelings help us learn about events and are intense for good reason in the teen years. Healthy emotional regulation can help set teens on a path of life-long well-being. Now is the time to help them understand their emotions by acknowledging, listening and helping them label their emotions so they can manage them and use them to achieve their passions and talents.

### Exercise

Note two 'heartfelt' interests your teen has (e.g. a cause such as animal welfare, a hobby such as dance or bicycle design).

#### Interest 1

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#### Interest 2

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How do you respond in those moments when your teen is feeling strongly emotional, and support emotional regulation? What do you say? What do you do? What are you thinking?

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What do you say or do to let them know you understand their emotional experience (even if you feel their emotions outweigh the significance of the event)?

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What do you say or do to show that you accept all sorts of emotions whether they are good or bad?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen has become vegan.	Veganism is ridiculous and you are putting your health at risk. Please stop it now before you become ill.	I can see how passionately you feel about the environment and that is admirable. We must also make sure your health doesn't suffer for the cause.
		 Accept their passions and don't judge them
Your teen spends three times as long on her art homework as she does on her geography homework.	How come you can be so focused when you are doing art? Why won't you put the same effort into a 'real' science subject like geography?	Your focus on your art is amazing. It's a real passion. I wonder how you could tap into those skills in other subjects too to support your all-round learning.
		 Understand that a motivated brain fires on all cylinders
Your teen asks if you ever get angry after he has had a major meltdown.	I don't think I ever get angry. I have learnt that there is no point.	I get angry sometimes but I have worked hard over the years to try to find ways so I don't explode and do or say things that I will later regret.
		 Talk to your teens about all their emotions and yours

## Downloads: Self-reflection

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Teenagers are developing a complex self-concept, and while they work out who they are and how they fit into the world, they are highly sensitive to personal comments made by significant adults in their lives. Even in a short space of time their identity can be pushed high or low, neither of which is helpful.

Critical feedback could cause long-lasting damage and may cut off possibilities. Positive feedback opens people up and expands possibilities.

### Exercise

Note the kind of feedback you give to young people. Do you give negative feedback ('you never clean up properly', 'you don't try hard with your studies', 'you aren't a good mathematician') that could be damaging to them, believing it will motivate them?

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Write down five feedback statements you have given your teen lately. If they are negative, try and rephrase them so that they are positive. Tell the teen what you want to aim for, rather than your concern.

**Feedback statement 1**

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**Feedback statement 2**

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**Feedback statement 3**

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**Feedback statement 4**

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**Feedback statement 5**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Your teen has left tea cups in his room. There is mould growing in some of them because they have been left so long.</p>	<p>You never clean up properly. How are you going to live with a partner if you leave a mess like this?</p>	<p>Cleaning up is dull but it's got to be done. What's your idea for a system so it is done and over with quickly? Now put the cups in the dishwasher.</p>
		 <p>Build them up, don't knock them down</p>
<p>Your teen is sitting looking sullen at a family lunch party.</p>	<p>I'm such a bad parent. No other teen is as rude as mine. I must have done something wrong.</p>	<p>I feel really irritated. He's usually a social kid but it's not going to be perfect every day and we all have off days. I must look after myself and stay calm so I can help him figure out what's going on and avoid this sort of difficulty in the future.</p>
		 <p>Look after yourself as you adjust to your teen's needs</p>
<p>Your teen has spent all morning playing a video game.</p>	<p>You do nothing but go on your video game and have no motivation in life. How are you going to get a job playing video games? Wasters play video games all day.</p>	<p>You love that video game so much. I get that it's hard to stop doing something you love. It's important to do other things as well, so let's make a plan for the day.</p>
		 <p>Link behaviour to emotional experiences, not a character trait that is set in stone</p>

## Downloads: Ready to Launch (with Your Support)

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Adults need to make changes in how they relate and talk to teens as their role transitions from being sole pilot to being co-pilot, travelling alongside their teen.

Teens need parents, teachers and important people to look up to in their lives. Support for teen behaviour requires communication using collaboration, problem solving and discussion, acknowledging their need for respect and status. Even though they will sometimes push you away, they need close adults in their lives now more than ever.

### Exercise

Think about you and your teen's top two moments of communication around difficult topics. How did you do that?

#### Moment 1

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#### Moment 2

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Note three situations when you and your teen come into conflict and how you tend to resolve the situation.

#### Situation 1

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**Situation 2**

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**Situation 3**

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What are the behaviours, ethics and values that you use in your school or home? These will be your teen’s reference point.

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen has hardly said a word to you all week – it's hard to get anything out of her about how she is.	She doesn't need me any more and she doesn't even seem to care about me, she's so cold towards me.	She's not communicating very well but she's under stress. She might not know how she's feeling yet. I am going to check in every day, let her know I am there; even if she doesn't talk I will be there so she knows I'm alongside her at this difficult time.
		 Never underestimate the importance of your relationship with your teen
Your teen loses his football match. He missed the bus and shouts at you that he needs a lift to his friend's house or he'll miss the meet-up.	I won't change my mind however much you shout at me, I am not taking you in the car. You need to learn to talk to me in a civil way. I am not a member of your staff.	Your team lost. I know that is a big deal but it is not OK to speak to me in that tone. I can't take you in the car right now. Let's talk about this later when you are feeling calmer.
		 Don't let them be rude, but let them be angry
Your step-daughter is putting her college application together following a discussion and plan. The limit of 500 words means that she has to choose which of her many hobbies and activities she can include and she is getting overwhelmed and upset.	Give it to me and I'll do it. You're too upset to think straight.	This is a toughie. Let's take the dog for a walk and come back with fresh eyes. Then let's brainstorm all your ideas. That will be enough for one day and tomorrow you can have another go at writing it.
		 Help them develop strong problem solving skills

## Downloads: Sleepy Teens

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Sleep is a wonder-drug for the brain, and a lack of sleep is endemic among teenagers. Teen biological sleep cycles shift, but the social context is primarily responsible for teens' sleep deficit. Sufficient and regular sleep aids learning, whereas poor sleep is detrimental to well-being. Adults need to support young people to have regular and sufficient sleep to help reach their potential.

### Exercise

Write down your teen's sleep pattern every day this week, including the amount of time asleep and social jetlag (i.e. shifting time zone by significant margins at weekends or holidays).

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#### Tuesday

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#### Wednesday

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#### Thursday

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**Friday**

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**Saturday**

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**Sunday**

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Are there particular times when your teen worries? Do you notice that their behaviour becomes harder to manage when they are tired? Do they notice that their thoughts become negative and they ruminate at night time? Keep a diary of sleep hours and ask your teen to keep a diary of their mood, worries and thoughts. Working with them, put the diaries together and look at the patterns.

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Does your teen have such a high workload that they have little down-time and this reduces their sleep? What could you do to help them change to find a better balance?




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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen rarely puts his light out before 1am.	You are never going to get to university if you go to sleep so late. Your school work will suffer. You will get facial spots. You have got to pass the exams well.	I can see how tempting it is to stay up late but having too little sleep really isn't healthy. How can we ensure you get to talk to your friends and get enough sleep in the week? Try getting eight hours' sleep every night for a week and let's see how differently you feel.
		 Help find <b>internal motivations</b> for them to sleep more
Your teen uses her phone as her alarm clock but the social media alerts seem to ping all night.	It's too much of a fight to get her phone off her at bedtime. All her friends are on the phone – she's going to miss the chat and be left out.	It is going to be a fight to get her to leave her phone downstairs at bedtime. It is worth it to protect her brain development and mental health. I will keep talking to her about this and need to keep this boundary firm.
		 Protect sleep by having <b>clear rules around technology</b> at night time
Another sleepover with your teen up all night means the next day is a wash-out. She's monosyllabic, pale and seems to doubt all that she says.	She can have sleepovers at the weekend. She can catch up on Sunday night. She's only tired, it won't kill her. Anyway, I've got to let her have some fun because she works so hard in the week.	I want her to have fun and so a sleepover every now and then is fine. Weekly sleepovers will be to her detriment and it may affect learning and well-being. I need to talk to her and make a plan when we are all in a good place and in our thinking brains.
		 Try to <b>reduce social jetlag</b>

## Downloads: Creating Healthy Habits

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The teenage years are an important time for establishing healthy routines including good eating and regular exercise habits. Poor nutrition can impact on brain development and cognitive skills. Similarly, exercise is highly beneficial for learning. Disrupted eating patterns can emerge in adolescence, so getting it right at this time is likely to protect against future difficulties. As always, your behaviour sets the tone for the teens in your life, so ensure you model behaviour that establishes healthy diet and lifestyle choices.

### Exercise

Where is your teen excelling at looking after themselves? Find three areas.

#### Area 1

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#### Area 2

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#### Area 3

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Note down any self-care habits that concern you about your teen. Can you find a time to talk to them about what you notice? Keep the focus on habits rather than personal comments – remember, a teen’s self-identity can be influenced by your thoughts.

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Are there meals your teen avoids regularly or food choices that have changed? What can you do in the home or school setting to model regular healthy eating habits?

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Does your teen get regular exercise and have a positive body image?  
If they are not exercising regularly, why is that ? Note down three  
barriers to exercise. Could you change these?

**Barrier 1**

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**Barrier 2**

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**Barrier 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen is avoiding PE lessons and has stopped her gymnastics class after school.	I know I don't exercise, but I was never built for that, but my daughter really needs to get up and do something or she will never lose that puppy fat.	Exercise has always been hard for me but I need to model some form of exercise if I am to expect my daughter to learn how important fitness is in life. We'll start with a regular evening walk with the dog.
		 Model good habit-forming behaviour
The teens in your year group have started a habit of eating the carbs but leaving the vegetables.	You are not leaving the lunch hall until you have eaten all those greens on your plate.	Those greens are full of goodness. It would be great to see you eat at least some of them before you leave the table – either have the broccoli or the cabbage.
		 Have boundaries but offer choices where you can
Over the past six months your daughter has started to avoid meals with the family and exercise every evening. She has steadily lost weight and her behaviour seems extreme.	You feel terrified and start to lay down firm boundaries about finishing meals and banning her from exercise.	Your daughter's behaviour is scary but going in too strong with rigid rules may alienate her. Make an appointment with your doctor to get advice this week.
		 If you are concerned about your teen's habits, ask for help

## Downloads: Good Stress, Bad Stress

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Getting just the right amount of stress is important. It can provide energy that aids performance, although too much is damaging and is likely to impact negatively on their learning. Short-term stress can be managed, but long-term stress is usually detrimental.

Stress is part of every teenager's life, but how they understand it and how adults around them support stressed teens makes a difference to how they respond. Having a growth mindset about stress helps teens use stress as a useful energy resource.

### Exercise

Note down three situations that your teen finds excessively stressful.

#### Situation 1

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#### Situation 2

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#### Situation 3

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What could you do or say to help your teen read the body signals of high arousal as a form of energy?

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How can you come alongside your teen in times of stress?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Your teen is applying for an academic scholarship at a prestigious school. She is conscientious and very aware of the financial benefits of getting it. Money is tight in the family. She hasn't been out to see her friends for a month.</p>	<p>Life is competitive. She needs to learn to cope with pressure. I did and that's what made me who I am today.</p>	<p>She is young and her brain is particularly susceptible to excess stress. While it's important for her to take on challenges, achieving this scholarship needs to be put in perspective. The financial worries of the family are not her responsibility. It's important she has a well-rounded balance of activities in her life.</p>
		 <p><b>Protect against chronic stress</b></p>
<p>The school netball team need to win this match or they will lose the championship by a point. Your teen is the captain. She is tearful before the match.</p>	<p>Calm down. It's not that bad – the worst thing is that you will come second for goodness sake!</p>	<p>I can see you are very wound up about this. What is the thing that worries you the most? What can we do about that? Remember, you can use that amazing energy to help you focus your game.</p>
		 <p><b>Support a growth mindset about stress</b></p>
<p>A band audition went badly wrong. Your teen is slamming doors and shouting.</p>	<p>Why don't you go to your room until you feel better?</p>	<p>Stay with me, even if you don't feel like talking, and we can watch TV together. When you feel ready we can talk it through.</p>
		 <p><b>Come alongside your teen when they are stressed</b></p>

## Downloads: #Social Media and Technology

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Panic surrounds social media and technology use in teenagers, but there is little evidence for social media causing mental health problems in teenagers. Access to social media means connecting with peers (which is a developmental drive in teens), so it needs to be managed thoughtfully. The way you communicate with your teen is key. Have clear technology boundaries but also make time for discussion to help them reflect on the pros and cons of social media and technology.

### Exercise

Think about the last week. What are your teen's habits with technology? What are the boundaries in your house concerning its use? Are there specific hours of use and areas in the house or school where it is used and where it is not allowed? Where is the phone charger kept? Do you follow the same rules?

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What are the pros and cons of social media and technology? Have you discussed these with your teen? What is your reaction if they hold a different view?

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How could your teen let you know if they'd made a mistake with social media (such as posting a picture that they regret)? How would you react? What ways do you support your teen to make good choices around their technology use?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>School camp is coming up and phones are banned. Your teen thinks she'll be homesick without being able to call you.</p>	<p>I don't care if your teachers say don't take your phone on the school trip. I want to be able to contact you, so sneak it in your bag. If you need me, call me and I'll take you home.</p>	<p>I'm going to miss you so much this trip – but I'll get all the news from the teachers every day. You are going to find out some amazing things that you can do by yourself. You'll feel so proud you did it.</p>
		 <p>Try to <b>give consistent messages</b> to teens in different environments</p>
<p>Your teens are not allowed to use their phones in class. You're in the middle of teaching, but you need to check something quickly.</p>	<p>It's my class and I've got to have different rules because I often need to respond quickly to my messages.</p>	<p>If I want my teen to have good habits, I need to model that behaviour by doing it myself.</p>
		 <p><b>Model</b> good technology use</p>
<p>Your teen gets very wound up when the games console is turned off, even when you've warned him 10 minutes before the time.</p>	<p>You always get angry when you come off your console. If you have a tantrum next time, I'm throwing that thing in the bin.</p>	<p>After he has calmed down, ask: have you noticed you often get angry when it's time to turn off the console? What can we do to change this? Can you come up with a plan? We'll try your idea for two weeks, then review.</p>
		 <p>Encourage <b>reflection, debate and conversation</b></p>

## Downloads: *May The Force Be With You, Luke*

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Drawing on brain science and psychological research we have developed a seven step plan which guides you through what to do 'in the moment', when your teen is emotional and you want to provide the best support for them. This is a masterclass in emotional regulation. Here we give you more information and top tips for implementing the plan.

### ***MAY*be this situation pushed your buttons?**

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Previous experiences have an impact on how we communicate and manage our children's emotions and behaviour, sometimes consciously but often unconsciously. It is important to be aware of your patterns.

#### **Exercise**

Note down three occasions when a situation with your teen triggered a strong physical or emotional reaction in you (e.g. when they got angry, when they were left out by their friend, when they didn't study hard).

#### **Occasion 1**

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#### **Occasion 2**

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### Occasion 3

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Can you think of how this might be related to an experience you had in your childhood or the history of your family?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen is going out with his friends but you find yourself trying to dissuade him – even though, your friend points out, it is not a risky situation.	Why is he so insistent on going out with his friends? It is affecting the whole family as none of us can sleep until he is home.	I wonder why I have such a strong reaction? My stomach turns at the thought and I can't sleep. There were times at night when I felt unsafe as a child and this might be getting in the way of what my teen needs to grow and develop.
		 Tune into situations that push your buttons

# **THE behaviour needs decoding, what are they really telling you?**

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All behaviour is communication. The behaviour is the tip of the iceberg – the bit we can see – whilst what is actually going on is hidden underneath. Teen behaviour is often hard to read and needs decoding. If you take the time to decode the behaviour, you have more chance of helping your teen understand what is going on for them and the behaviour can be dropped.

## **Exercise**

Note down three situations this week when your teen acted differently to usual and in an extreme manner. What do you think might have been going on under the behaviour?

### **Situation 1**

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### **Situation 2**

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### **Situation 3**

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Can you think of how you might react next time to help them reflect on their experience?


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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen is stropky and rude, it's unusual.	I'm not putting up with this. I'm giving her a detention or grounding her for rude behaviour.	I wonder what has gone on as this is quite unlike her. I wonder if she's struggling with something. I'll start the conversation so she knows I'm there.
		 Read the need

## **FORCE** yourself to wait while the emotion settles

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Emotions are felt in the teen years more intensely than at any other time. While the emotional brain is in charge we all find it hard to be reflective and rational. Allow time for the snowflakes to settle while your teen's brain calms. Wait before you talk it through.

### **Exercise**

Note down three situations this week when your teen had an extreme emotional reaction and how long it took before they were ready to talk (it might be minutes, hours or even days sometimes).

#### **Situation 1**


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#### **Situation 2**

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#### **Situation 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen's exam grade was very much lower than she hoped. She's upset and not talking.	I know that's because she didn't work hard enough. She's got to hear that even though it's a hard thing to hear – otherwise how will she learn?	I know that's because she didn't work hard enough but now is <i>not</i> the time to talk about that. I might let her sleep on it and discuss it after school tomorrow.
		 Allow emotions to settle

## ***BE alongside, be with your teen***

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Our brains are highly social. We literally use another person's brain to reduce stress because we feel things less intensely when another person is alongside us. Though it may feel like you are doing nothing, just being with your teen, without speaking, will help them cope with stressful experiences.

### **Exercise**

Every teen is different. What does your teen respond to when they are feeling stressed? How can you come alongside them in a way that will offer them support? When everyone is in their thinking brain, can you ask your teen what you could say or do at times of high stress and get some ideas from them about what they would find most helpful?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Your 15-year-old son storms in the door from school. He goes straight to the biscuit tin and shouts at you that there are no Jaffa cakes. Why has his little sister eaten them all?</p>	<p>If you talk to me in that tone of voice again you will be grounded for the week.</p>	<p>I wonder if something has happened in school. It's not about the Jaffa cakes. What's really going on? I'll remind him shouting is not OK, then wait while the snowflakes settle. When he's ready (and his thinking brain is switched on) I'll try to find out what happened to upset him. I'll help him find another way to manage his upset in the moment next time.</p>
		 <p>Be with them at times of stress</p>

## WITHhold your advice for now and just listen

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Truly listening is harder than it sounds, particularly when someone we care for is in pain or very emotional – particularly when we think we know the answer. As teens are working out what they think and care about, they need time to process their emotions and reactions themselves. Stop and listen – don't jump in with what you think too quickly.

### Exercise

What are the ways in which you show your teen you are really listening to what they have to say? Focus on what you say and your body language and how you reflect back what they are saying.

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
Your teen leaves her old friend off her party list after looking at a text she got from her.	I think you've been unkind to your friend by not inviting her. You need to learn to treat your friends better in the future.	I think you are saying that you felt upset by your friend's text and that's why you decided not to invite her to your house, but now you feel bad that you didn't include her. Is that right?
		 Listen first, don't jump in with your theory or advice



## ***YOU describe the emotion if your teen can't***

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Neuroscience shows us that the act of simply labelling the emotion has a calming effect on the emotional brain, which may help a person to get into their thinking brain. Don't jump in too quickly (see above), but if they are struggling to work out what is going on you might offer a comment tentatively.

### **Exercise**

Consciously name three emotions every day with your teen around – the good and the bad, as they happen. Try to get as specific as you can. Encourage your teen to do the same, though when emotions are high they may find this hard.

#### **Emotion 1**


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#### **Emotion 2**

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#### **Emotion 3**

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Your teen says he has a stomach ache and so says he's not going over to his friend's house after all.</p>	<p>I don't think you have an illness. Your stomach ache is just because you are scared. There's nothing physically wrong with you.</p>	<p>I wonder what's going on with your stomach. You could have a little bug but I also wonder if it might be a sign that you are worried about going to your friend's house. You didn't enjoy it last time I seem to remember as you felt pressurised into doing things you weren't comfortable with.</p>
		 <p>Tentatively name the emotion if they can't – but it's all in the timing</p>

## ***LUKE (LOOK) for a suitable time to talk it out later, think about solutions and learning points***

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Your teen might take a while before they are ready to talk things through and consider solutions and the learning opportunities from the experience. It is not up to adults to determine when this happens – you will need to read your teen’s signs to get the most from the discussion – but it is important that reflection happens at some time after an event. The lessons to learn are invaluable and teens need to take part in a conversation and problem solve together.

### **Exercise**

Think of when you were younger and when you felt most ready to talk through solutions after a difficult emotional time. Was it immediately or after some hours or days? We are all different in this respect. What about your teen? What have you noticed about what works for them?

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When you were younger, who were the people who you opened up to the most and how did they enable you to do this? Were they the adults who listened and responded in a timely manner to your needs?

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When this happens...	Instead of this...	Try this...
<p>Last week your teen drank too much alcohol with her friends and ended up vomiting on the floor. You had to pick her up and the next morning she was really ashamed. She had written to the friend's parents to apologise but didn't want to talk about it.</p>	<p>It's going to be awful to go back to that night. That conversation is going to be too hard for her. I'll leave it and hope she has learnt her lesson.</p>	<p>That was a tough night and a conversation about it is going to be hard but I must find a time to talk it through. She will be embarrassed and won't be keen. I'll start by giving her a choice about when we talk it through. We need to problem solve together so it doesn't happen again.</p>
		 <p>Talk a situation through later</p>