



# A Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenagers



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Oxfordshire  
Children's  
Information  
Service



# CONTENTS

■ Introduction to this guide .....	3
■ What makes teenagers special .....	4
■ Communication, communication, communication .....	7
■ Relationships and sexuality .....	10
■ Different and equal .....	13
■ School .....	15
■ Further education, training and careers advice .....	18
■ Bullying .....	21
■ Involvement in anti-social and criminal behaviour .....	24
■ Physical, mental and sexual health .....	27
■ Alcohol and drugs .....	31
■ The internet, social networking, mobiles and other technology .....	35
■ How old do they have to be? A guide to legal age limits .....	39
■ Help for parents of teenagers .....	42
■ Parenting programmes .....	42
■ National and local contacts .....	44

# INTRODUCTION

**Being a parent or carer is one of the most fantastic and rewarding things that we ever do, but without a doubt it can also be one of the most difficult. Almost all parents will have times when they worry about their children and their own ability to support and guide their child. This is certainly the case for the parents of teenagers.**

As parents and carers, we have a huge influence on young people's lives and the ability to shape their values and aspirations. Our impact on young people and our ability to support and help them to develop, will be shaped by our own strengths, experiences and limitations.

Knowing how to respond to the needs of teenagers isn't always easy and there are no 'right' answers. Every teenager and every family is different from the next. Having said that, it can help all of us in our role as parents to find out more about teenagers, to reflect on how we interact with them, and where necessary to seek more information, advice and support. We hope that this guide will help.

This guide addresses the issues that parents have said they would like more information about and the issues that teenagers want their parents to understand. The guide won't answer all your questions but it will get you at least one step closer to understanding your teenager and the world he or she lives in. Fortunately there is a lot

of help available if you want further information, advice or support with parenting, or with wider family issues.

## USING THIS GUIDE

We have split the guide into chapters and included a contacts section in each, to highlight some relevant organisations and services. The contact details for these and many others are listed under the chapter headings in the National and Local Contacts section at the end – see page 44. There is also a general section on 'Help for parents of teenagers' on page 42.

## WHAT IS A 'PARENT'?

This guide is written for anybody who looks after and is a role model for teenagers. Throughout this guide we use the term 'parent' and we refer to 'your son/daughter' etc. In this guide, the term 'parent' means all carers of young people including foster carers and adoptive parents, step parents and grandparents. We use the terms 'son', 'daughter', 'child' and 'young person' to refer to the teenagers that you are caring for.

# WHAT MAKES TEENAGERS SPECIAL?

“ Give them responsibility... it's likely that they will rebel in one way or another – think about how important the issue is. Is it worth alienating your child over the clothes they wear? ”

Oxfordshire parent

**Between the ages of 13 and 19 young people are developing physical, emotional and sexual maturity. They are also establishing an individual identity separate from their family. Teenagers and their families are of course all different from each other depending on their background, ethnic origin, family culture etc, but there are some things that they have in common.**

## ALL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Young people may be juggling many pressures and at the same time they will be experimenting with relationships, behaviour, tastes and lifestyles. Often this is a time of increasing pressures at school and college, when decisions need to be made about work, careers or training. All of this can make teenagers anxious and stressed. Teenagers have entered a potentially exciting time of their life – with many new horizons opening up and personal choices to make – but it can also be frightening and confusing and may make them feel insecure.

During puberty many changes happen to a teenager's body. It grows rapidly in height and weight, sexual organs develop and the body's production of sexual hormones soars. These changes affect teenagers' behaviour and attitude, and can lead to wild mood swings. While this is normal, it can be very confusing and sometimes even frightening for both you and your teenager.

Important changes are also happening inside a teenager's brain. Throughout adolescence brains change in a way that involves the breaking and reforming of connections and pathways within the brain. During this period young people may find it hard to recognise emotions in other people. Other changes in the brain make it hard for teenagers to make mature judgements about the consequences of their actions.

Some typical behaviours and characteristics identified by teenagers about themselves include: 'know it all', increased interest in sex, rebellious, stressed, insecure, lazy, argumentative, challenging authority, mood swings.

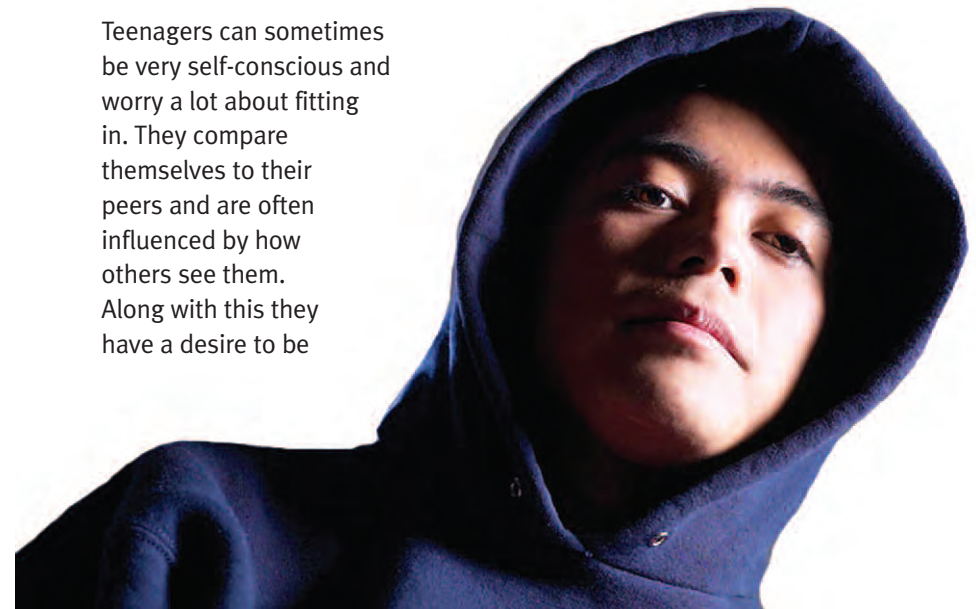
## PEER PRESSURE, RESPONSIBILITY AND INFLUENCE

Teenagers can sometimes be very self-conscious and worry a lot about fitting in. They compare themselves to their peers and are often influenced by how others see them. Along with this they have a desire to be

noticed and recognised. This can be perfectly acceptable or not depending on how they choose to get recognition.

Parents are extremely important too. Teenagers may seem to reject or dismiss your views and values, but your influence, interest and support continue to be crucial.

Although they are always pushing the limits, teenagers need boundaries. When setting rules and boundaries try to involve your teenager in recognising the consequences of overstepping them. Remember, they are becoming young adults and as such should expect to take responsibility for their actions. One of the most difficult things about parenting teenagers is knowing when to allow them to make their own mistakes and when it is necessary to step in to avoid disaster.



Adolescence is a time when many young people are idealistic. Because of this they often find themselves impatient and at odds with the adult world. They also tend to believe that they have all the answers while most adults have none. While this can be very irritating, it will work better if you join in the discussion and explore each other's beliefs rather than ignore the teenager or put their ideas down. It's all part of finding out who they are and what they believe.

### HOW ARE TEENAGERS PORTRAYED?

The media and commercial world strongly influence all of us; many of us will be influenced by common views of young people and youth culture which portray teenagers in a negative light. Young people on the other hand may feel that society judges all teenagers to be 'trouble' – a judgement that they feel is unfair. As a parent you will have to take account of the wider social pressures that impact on your teenager and realise that these will influence all of your views.

## CONTACTS

- NSPCC
- Parentline Plus
- Parentscentre
- Parent-Talk
- Raising Kids
- spired.com
- thesite.org
- Talking Teens campaign
- Young People's Survival Guide

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Understanding what teenagers are going through can help us to understand their behaviour.
- ❖ Remember the things that teenagers say they need: 'acceptance', 'responsibility', 'respect', 'privacy', 'not to be stereotyped', 'to be listened to'.
- ❖ Don't assume that your son or daughter knows how you are feeling – you need to explain your feelings to them.
- ❖ Give young people a say in deciding rules and boundaries – the more investment they have in drawing up an agreement with you, the more likely they are to stick to it.
- ❖ Be patient and listen to your teenager's views – most of all be encouraging and show that you care unconditionally.

# COMMUNICATION. COMMUNICATION. COMMUNICATION

**Living with teenagers is all about communication and much of the information in this guide is about making the most of communication with teenagers. This is not always an easy task. However, if you talk with and listen to teenagers, they will at least know that you are interested in them and in what they have to say. This can be very important if they want to talk about something that is difficult for them, perhaps to ask for help with a health or relationship issue, or to tell you that they are being bullied.**

“ Don't try to be 'cool' and your teen's best friend – you'll embarrass yourself and them. It's OK to be a 'fogey'; that's what they see you as anyway – but do it with humour. Laugh at yourself.”

Oxfordshire parent

## WHAT MAKES A 'GOOD PARENT'?

Some of the things teenagers say about what makes a 'good parent' include:

- ❖ “someone who listens”
- ❖ “someone you can talk to”
- ❖ “someone who can talk to young people and other parents about setting limits”
- ❖ “patience”
- ❖ “someone who can compromise with the child and give reasons for setting limits”



## EXPRESSING THEMSELVES

At this time of physical and emotional change, teenagers often find it hard to express their feelings.

They may slam doors or pick fights because they don't know any other way to deal with a problem.

Sometimes they answer back because they feel that they aren't being heard. As a parent you can help by not taking things personally, and avoiding arguing back.

Describing what you see – e.g. “You look fed up” – can sometimes help to start a conversation. Talk to them about alternative ways to deal with their frustrations and don't be afraid to tell them that you still expect to be treated with respect.

Teenagers have said that the way that parents may know that they are “not OK” is if they:

- “didn't speak”
- “trashed the place”
- “shout”
- “got very drunk”
- “often cut my arms”
- “was quiet”
- “told you to leave me alone”
- “was being horrible to you or someone else”

Many of these don't involve words, but they may be signs that they need your attention and support.

## LISTENING

Listening can be a surprisingly difficult skill for parents to develop; it's easy to miss opportunities for communication. Young people may give up quickly if we are not receptive or if we frustrate them by not taking their views seriously. Try actively watching your behaviour. Are you talking over your teenager? Are you noticing when they want your attention? Try listening to what your teenager has to say without arguing with them. This shows that you respect what they have to say. You don't have to agree with their views; indeed it's important that teenagers know what your values are.

## BEING POSITIVE

Above all you will need to be positive about your teenager. This means spotting the good things about them and looking for the best in everything they do. Teenagers, like the rest of us, need to feel valued and cared for. Even if they have done something that they know you will disapprove of, the message that they need to hear is “I love you even if I don't like what you are doing”. Sometimes teenagers need to be able to say “I hate you”. This probably means that they're fed up with their lives, their friends, or something you've said or done. Try not to get hooked into this – they need the freedom to be able to express their frustrations and you may be the safest person to do this

with. Remember, in spite of how it may seem, young people want their parents to be happy too.

## OTHER IMPORTANT ADULTS

As your teenager grows older it is natural that there will be times when they choose to talk to someone else. This could be a peer, another parent or a worker. The important

thing is not how you feel about this, but that they have been able to talk things through with someone. Professionals working with young people will encourage them wherever possible to talk to their parents, but they will also need to respect the confidentiality of the young people that they work with.

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ It can be difficult for teenagers to express their feelings. You may learn more about how they feel from what they do rather than what they say.
- ❖ Talking to your teenager, even about difficult issues, will help them to be safer, feel less anxious and make up their own minds.
- ❖ Be open with your teenager – tell them what you think about things, and what is going on in your life.
- ❖ Offering choices or a compromise can work better than making demands, e.g. “If you tidy your room, I'll clear the kitchen”.
- ❖ Try not to judge, but to understand and show you care.

### Here are some tips for opening up communication:

- ❖ Spend time just being with or near your teenager as well as doing things together. Aim to give them your time rather than just your advice.
- ❖ Tell them things about themselves that you appreciate, e.g. “I like the way you...”
- ❖ Acknowledge their feelings without judging, by saying “You look as if you feel unhappy, upset, angry etc.”
- ❖ Ask questions that can't be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but be careful that it doesn't come across as an interrogation.

## CONTACTS

- NSPCC
- Oxfordshire Family Mediation Service
- Parentline Plus
- Parentscentre
- Parent-Talk
- Raising Kids
- spired.com
- thesite.org
- Talking Teens campaign
- Young People's Survival Guide

# RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

“ Get to know their friends, make them welcome, they are the most important people in your child’s life right now... just show an interest.”

Oxfordshire parent

**Relating to other people is important to teenagers. Although you are still very important in your teenager’s life, he or she is probably trying to alter the relationship you once had into one that is more adult to adult. At the same time, young people will be starting to relate with other significant adults, such as teachers and youth workers, as well as their peers. Teenagers will also start to seek and explore sexual relationships.**

## CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

There’s a lot going on for teenagers in terms of relationships and inevitably things will go wrong from time to time. All of this can cause stress for parents, as well as the teenagers themselves. As parents our role in modelling positive relationships with friends, family, and our partners is vital.

If your teenager feels able to talk to you about what is happening in his or her life, you stand a chance of being kept informed about their various relationships. Remember that however much you may want to protect them, one of the lessons they’ll probably learn during this stage of life is that some relationships don’t work out. Try not to be judgmental – it’s not going to help your own relationship if you say “I told you so” when things go wrong. Just allow them some freedom and let them know that through your unconditional love for them you are there to support them.

## PEER PRESSURE

Belonging to a group is often really important to teenagers. Friendship groups help teenagers to form an identity. They can provide support, and they are important for learning about new experiences. For teenagers the pressure to act in certain ways can be very powerful. Teenagers may want to be part of a group because their friends are, even if they feel uncomfortable with some of the things the group are doing.

You will probably prefer some of your teenager’s friends to others. Your teenager will sense this and part of their desire to experiment and push boundaries may attract them to the very friends you like least. If you can, try to make their friends welcome in your home. That way you can get to know who your teenager is having relationships with and keep some influence on what’s going on.

## SEXUALITY

Teenagers are discovering their own sexuality which means they will be experiencing strong feelings and emotions, which can be both exciting and daunting. It is during the teenage years that they may discover and identify their own sexual orientation and learn to develop meaningful

relationships, even though many of these will be short lived.

It is important, as a parent, to recognise that every new relationship will be very important to your teenager, even though you may not approve of their choice of partner. It is very difficult for some teenagers to cope with these new sensations, especially if they feel they may be different in some way from others in their peer group. They may be experimenting with different types of relationships to see what feels comfortable for them.

Sexual orientation is who we are attracted to and is not a choice we make. Your teenager may be heterosexual and attracted to people of the other sex, or she/he may be bisexual and attracted to people of both sexes. She/he may be homosexual (often called lesbian or gay) and attracted to people of their own sex. Whatever sexual orientation they are, they all deserve acceptance and respect for their feelings.



## INFORMATION ABOUT CONTRACEPTION AND SEX

It's easy to assume that teenagers know all about sex and contraception. Schools do have certain responsibilities to inform young people about sex and relationships, but parents also have responsibilities to ensure that young people are as well informed as they can be to cope with the adult world. As parents, we may need to offer appropriate practical support such as access to contraceptive and sexual health services. Be open about the subject and offer your support, so that they feel more able to include you in this part of their lives.

### CONTACTS

- Acceptance UK for parents of gay people
- After Adoption
- British Pregnancy Advisory service
- Brook
- Family Friends of Lesbian and Gays
- Family Planning Association
- Family Planning Service
- National Domestic Violence Helpline
- NHS Direct
- Oxford Friend Lesbian & Gay Helpline
- Oxfordshire Family Mediation Service
- Parentline Plus
- Parent-Talk
- RU Thinking About It?
- Youth Access

### SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Family support and relationships are important, but don't expect teenagers to come to you first.
- ❖ Teenagers will experience deeper and more complex relationships and will want to have relationships with a wider range of people as they grow older.
- ❖ As they become sexually aware and active, teenagers need to be well informed in order to make responsible choices. There is plenty of help, information and advice out there. Offer them your help and support in accessing it.

#### Here are some tips for talking to your teenager about sex:

- ❖ Talk about feelings and relationships, not just the physical facts.
- ❖ Use everyday media (such as adverts, soaps, magazines) to start a conversation.
- ❖ Ask your child what they think about specific issues.
- ❖ Find out what they are learning about sex and relationships at school, and use this as a basis for wider discussion.

## DIFFERENT AND EQUAL

**Whatever your culture, whether you are a Christian, Muslim, Hindu, of any other or even no religion, your experience of other cultures may be quite limited. It is sometimes easier to ignore what you don't know, but it is important in today's multicultural society that you try to instil in your child a sense of equality and understanding.**

Your teenager will be learning at school about other cultures and mixing with others from different backgrounds from their own. You can help them in their understanding of others by encouraging them to take an interest in those people who don't always look or behave as they do.

We are all judged by what we are, sometimes in a positive way and other times in a negative way. We are judged for our similarities and differences, for example according to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, ability or disability, levels of income and politics. For young people, when belonging to a peer group is extremely important to them, these differences or similarities become more basic. They can be part of, or excluded from a group because of



the length of their hair, their choice of clothing or by music they listen to. It isn't easy for them to understand that it is okay to be different. Therefore it is important in everyday home life that parents can talk about differences and what makes people special and lead by example in celebrating diversity and equality.

### EXPERIENCING PREJUDICE

If your teenager is experiencing some form of prejudice, such as racism, then do talk to social services or the police. If they are facing prejudice at school, talk to their teacher or headteacher to try to sort out the problem. Ask your teenager to log down the incidents so that these can add weight to their statements.

### CONTACTS

- Acceptance UK for parents of gay people
- Bullying UK
- Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Family Friends of Lesbian and Gays
- Oxford Friend Lesbian & Gay Helpline
- Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council
- Starlight Enterprise Limited

### SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Lead by example. Show your teenager that just because somebody looks or behaves differently from them, it doesn't mean that they are worse or better than themselves. Encourage learning and development as a family activity.
- ❖ Try to make sure your views and opinions are unbiased and non-judgmental. Always explain that these are your personal beliefs and try to give the other side of the story too.
- ❖ Give your teenager opportunities to spend time with others who may not be part of their normal social mix. This will encourage them to understand that being different should not be a barrier.

## SCHOOL

**School plays a very important part in your teenager's life, both socially and educationally. For most teenagers, time at school is happy and rewarding. For parents too, involvement in school life can be fun and rewarding. However many teenagers are likely to have some problems at school from time to time. Many parents find school to be a source of tension and concern.**

You may worry about your teenager's attitude to school, their willingness to attend and the demands that school places on them, or the quality of the education or other provision. There may also be social issues to deal with, such as bullying and troublesome friendship groups. School remains one of the most emotive subjects between parents and teenagers. Whatever the problem, remember you are probably not alone. Talking to other parents can be a great support.

The law requires that you, as a parent or guardian, ensure that your child is educated either at school or by other means acceptable to your local authority. This requirement ends on the last Friday of June in the school year in which your child becomes 16.

“ Maintaining a good relationship with the school can really help... school becomes an extension of home and vice versa ”  
Oxfordshire parent





## ADVICE ON EDUCATIONAL CHOICES

There are educational choices to be made all the way through the teenager years. It is helpful to talk these through with your teenager at every stage. Schools are now introducing a more flexible, relevant and personalised curriculum for young people aged 14 and over. The careers coordinator at your teenager's school or college is a good source of further information and help, as is Connexions which offers each young person support from a personal adviser. For details of courses available for 14-19 year olds in Oxfordshire see the Oxfordshire Prospectus website.

## SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

Schools want the best for their students, and they should always encourage parent and student involvement. Having said this, the relationship between school and parents can also be tense. If you have a concern about your child at school you should talk to school staff, and also look for alternative sources of help. Parents often say that it is difficult for them to get the help that they need early enough to prevent problems from getting worse.

Through the 'Extended Services in and around Schools' programme, schools are now responsible for

providing access to a range of services, including information, referral to specialist sources of help and parenting support.

If you do approach the school there may be counselling or other health related services for example; school health nurses may be a good starting point. If the school has a peer mentoring system you could encourage your teenager to use that. Teenagers can sometimes feel comfortable with the most unlikely people and if they can use a mentor to begin the process of talking about the things that are bothering them, this may prevent the need for further help. Alternatively you can start by making direct contact with the school via the form tutor or year head. After that you may choose to speak to the Head teacher or a school parent governor.

## SEEKING OTHER HELP

It is also worth bearing in mind that the solution to the problem may not lie with the school; there may be a range of issues that could be impacting on your child's experience at school such as peer pressure, family problems or parenting issues.

If your teenager's behaviour is causing concern to the school, the staff will contact you to discuss the problem. The school may offer support, including referral to an education social worker or an

educational psychologist. If the situation doesn't improve the school may consider other measures such as a parenting contract, a parenting order, or temporary suspension or exclusion. In these situations you will need all the information and support you can get in protecting your child's interests. Find out what support is available through the Children, Young People & Families Directorate (formerly the Education Department) and seek independent help.

## MANAGING CHANGE

Just as the teenage years are a time of growing independence at home, at school more and more emphasis is placed on taking responsibility for oneself and one's own learning. This means that just when you may be anxious about your teenager's school work and progress, they may want to make their own choices about homework, revision, free time and part-time jobs. As a parent it can be a difficult balance to make.

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Help your child to be happy at school by letting them know that you think education and school life are important. Take an active interest in your teenager's school work and activities.
- ❖ Talk to the school about education and career choices and how you can best support your teenager.
- ❖ If you have a concern about your child at school, talk about it with the school as soon as possible. Involve your teenager in these discussions if you can.
- ❖ Remember there can be many reasons why your child seems to be unhappy at school which may or may not be related to their school life – seek help to find out about the range of support and services that are available.

## CONTACTS

- Advisory Centre for Education
- Connexions
- Education Otherwise
- OCIS
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Oxfordshire Parent Partnership
- Parent-Talk
- Social Inclusion Unit
- The Coach Yourself Company
- The Oxford Brain Gym

# FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CAREERS ADVICE

“ These are important decisions for school leavers, so I found out as much as I could about the options, so that I could help my daughter to make the right choice for her. ”  
Oxfordshire parent

**Until fairly recently, most teenagers in the UK left school at 16 to go directly into employment. Now, competition in the global market has changed that trend as employers need workers who are more highly trained. In Oxfordshire 78% of young people stay on at school or college to study for more qualifications, while a further 10% continue learning at their workplace, or through an apprenticeship, usually gaining National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).**

After 16 the options for full-time education include a school sixth form or a college of further education. Students can opt for academic or vocational courses or both – see the [www.oxfordshireprospectus.com](http://www.oxfordshireprospectus.com) website for information on what is on offer.

## ADVICE AND FUNDING FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Information and advice about courses and career pathways is available from your teenager’s form tutor, subject teachers, the school’s careers coordinator and the Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) based in the school/college and at the local Connexions Centre. There are also good websites available – see Contacts. There



are various funding initiatives available to support teenagers to remain in post-16 education or training, in particular the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). EMA is an allowance paid directly to young people who continue their education or undertake unwaged training beyond 16. There are some restrictions on the level of household income, and the type of learning undertaken, but EMA doesn’t affect other benefits or income teenagers or their families receive. Young parents and care leavers may be entitled to additional financial support to cover study related costs. For more information see contacts overleaf.

Another incentive to encourage young people to continue learning is the Time Off for Study or Training. This entitles young workers aged 16 and 17 to paid time off to study towards a Level 2 qualification (e.g. BTEC First Diploma or NVQ Level 2) if they do not have one already.

Because of the importance of continued learning, the government has introduced a “September Guarantee” where all young people are promised an appropriate free place in learning (school, college or work-based learning) if they want it, by the end of the September following Year 11.

One of the main forms of training for young people is through an apprenticeship. There are different types ranging from pre-apprenticeships such as Entry to Employment (e2e) for those needing to build their confidence and brush up on their basic skills, to Advanced Apprenticeships that normally require four GCSEs at grade C or above and lead to NVQs at Level 3, key skills and technical certificates.

“ My EMA helped me to buy stuff for my art and design course at college. I got a bonus too as my attendance was good. ”

16 year old student at an Oxfordshire college

## CONTACTS

- Apprenticeships
- Connexions
- Connexions Direct (jobs)
- Learning & Skills Council
- Skills for Life Unit
- Education Maintenance Allowance
- Time Off for Study Training

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

Research shows that parents/carers are a major influence on the career choices young people make. Deciding what to do next can be very difficult for all of us. Here are some tips on how you can support your teenager.

- ❖ It's important for young people to continue their learning and gain as many qualifications and skills as they can.
- ❖ Encourage them to think about what they like doing and what they are good at when thinking about training and careers. Discuss ideas and explore careers information with them.
- ❖ Attend parents' evenings and careers events with your child.
- ❖ Suggest they ask for an interview with the Connexions PA. Help them draw up a list of questions to ask. If your teenager is happy with this, you are very welcome to attend with them.
- ❖ Connexions provide information, advice and support for teenagers on a wide range of issues from courses and careers to health, housing, money and relationships. It can help you to support your teenager too.
- ❖ If your teenager has special needs, contact the special needs personal adviser at your local Connexions Centre who can provide specialist information and advice.

## BULLYING

Although many teenagers will not be directly affected by serious bullying, they may be victims or perpetrators of bullying and they are likely to be aware of bullying going on around them in one form or another. Unfortunately bullying is common, and it causes a huge amount of unhappiness for teenagers. One in twelve children is badly bullied to the point that it affects their education, relationships, and even their work life later on.

### WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is any deliberate aggressive behaviour that is carried out to hurt another person. It can take many forms such as:

**Physical** – e.g. pushing, kicking,

**Verbal** – e.g. rumours, threats, name calling, sarcasm

**Emotional** – e.g. humiliation, ridicule, exclusion from others

**Racial** – e.g. gestures, taunts, graffiti

**Sexual** – e.g. homophobic abuse, unwanted physical contact etc.

**Online/cyber** – e.g. misusing photos, sending hate texts etc.

Bullying reduces the victim's self-confidence, and leaves people feeling alone, guilty and vulnerable. Victims of bullying may feel that they are to blame, they may not

“ People need to take bullying seriously and act on issues quickly. ”

Oxfordshire teenager



understand what is happening to them, and if they do, they may not be able to express it. Your teenager may be ashamed of admitting to being bullied, or afraid that if he or she does talk about it, they will not be taken seriously. Teenagers say that they have often had a negative reaction from adults when they have tried to talk about it.

## SIGNS OF BULLYING

The signs that your teenager is being bullied can be wide ranging. They could include withdrawal from friends and family, being very secretive on the subject of friends, disliking an activity that has previously been enjoyed, not wanting to go to school or work. There may also be physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches, under achievement and loss of interest in school work. Victims of bullying may become anxious or insecure and they may experience nightmares or have problems sleeping. In addition to the above, missing or damaged belongings or unexplained cuts and bruises could be the result of bullying.

## TAKING ACTION

You can help your teenager most by recognising bullying, and believing what they tell you if they do admit there is a problem. Always treat allegations of bullying seriously.

In the first place talk with your

teenager about ways that they can deal with the bullying themselves. If this does not work you may want to encourage your teenager to keep a diary of incidents to take to the school. Make the school aware of the bullying as soon as you can.

By law schools must have an anti-bullying policy – this should include cyber bullying. Most schools do put a lot of effort into preventing and dealing with bullying. Schools should make their bullying policies public, and welcome suggestions from parents for improving the way that bullying is dealt with. Having said this, parents often feel that schools are in denial when bullying occurs.

Parents whose teenagers have experienced bullying have found the following things helpful in reducing the problem:

- Support from other parents;
- Peer support/mentoring schemes at school;
- The establishment of safe places at school, and confidential systems to report bullying;
- Lots of communication between schools and parents when the bullying is happening;
- Help from schools for bystanders to condemn the behaviour and isolate the bully;
- Strong leadership from school Heads to deal with bullying in school.

If your teenager is being bullied at school and they are not able to deal with it without your intervention, arrange to meet the staff concerned and make it very clear that you want the bullying to stop and that you are prepared to work with them to help stop it. Try to get a commitment from them to review the situation regularly with you and your teenager.

## WHAT ABOUT THE BULLIES?

While victims of bullying deserve our full attention, so do the bullies

themselves. Some parents will have to face up to the uncomfortable reality that their own children are bullying others. Sometimes people bully because of their own insecurities or anger. They may be being bullied themselves or their behaviour may be due to problems at home, or peer pressure. This too will require open communication and support as well as firm boundaries. Staff at the school or workplace will need to be involved in helping to stop the bullying.

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Let your child know how he/she should treat other people. You are your teenager's best teacher, so set an example through your own behaviour. Let your child see you be kind, speak well of others, solve problems without getting angry, be accepting of differences between people such as race, religion, attitudes and so on.
- ❖ Talk about bullying at home. Look out for signs of bullying. Treat allegations of bullying seriously.
- ❖ Teenagers will probably need help admitting that they are being bullied. If you suspect that there is a problem try asking them if they know of anyone being bullied or what happens if bullying is discovered at their school.
- ❖ Bullies need help too – let them know that what they are doing is harmful, discuss ways that they can change their behaviour and ask the school for guidance.

## CONTACTS

- Advisory Centre for Education
- Beatbullying
- Bullying UK
- Childline
- Kidscape
- Parent Partnership
- Parent-Talk

# INVOLVEMENT IN ANTISOCIAL AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

“ If your teenager gets into trouble, don’t jump to conclusions... talk to them and find out their side of the story.”

Oxfordshire parent

**As they become independent and spend more time out and about, young people will have increasing contact with other adults in authority and they are likely to encounter the police in one way or another. While teenagers may feel antagonistic towards adults in authority, adults can be intolerant and judgemental of young people. Teenagers often feel “criminalised” by the adult world. At the very least, young people will often say that they don’t feel their parents trust them.**

Although young people from the age of 10 are broadly considered responsible for their own behaviour, teenagers may get caught up in negative, antagonistic or antisocial behaviour when they are part of a group. The events going on around them may well feel out of their control.

Discovering that your son or daughter has been arrested for committing a crime can be upsetting and scary for a parent. But if it happens to you, you’re not alone. Nationally, one in three men under the age of 30 has a criminal record. Teenagers are also much more likely to be the victims of crime than any other age group.

## ARREST AND DETENTION

If your teenager is arrested and detained they are likely to be very daunted by the experience. Young people have rights designed to protect them from unreasonable treatment. If he or she is under the age of 17 you, another adult, or an ‘appropriate adult’ such as a social worker, must be present at the police station before any questioning can take place. It is Oxfordshire County Council policy that all young people who have a Youth Offending Service worker acting as an appropriate adult should be interviewed with a solicitor present. You are entitled to receive free legal advice from a solicitor. This can be the 24-hour duty solicitor or a solicitor of your choice. Wait to see the solicitor before talking to the police, and neither you nor your teenager should sign anything until you have spoken to the solicitor.

If your teenager is detained, he or she should be offered a copy of the Code of Practice to read. This explains the procedures the police should follow when questioning. Suspects must give their name and address, but do not need to answer other questions. However, the court will be told of this if the case goes to trial and it may strengthen the case against them. During questioning the police should not put unreasonable pressure on the

suspect. Someone who is deaf or has difficulty in understanding English should be given a signer or an interpreter. While in detention, it is likely that your teenager will be held in a cell. He or she should be offered food at mealtimes and drinks as reasonably requested. Suspects are normally not held for more than 24 hours without being charged.

After your teenager has been interviewed, the police will decide whether they have enough evidence to charge him or her with an offence. They will also decide whether they are going to bail your teenager or to charge him or her straightaway. They may also ask the Youth Offending Service to make an assessment to help them reach a decision. If this is the first or second time your teenager has been in trouble, the police may decide to issue a caution called a Reprimand or a Final Warning. If the crime is more serious or your teenager has had a Final Warning already, then it is likely that they will be charged and have to go to the Youth Court. If your teenager hasn’t admitted the offence and the police have enough evidence, your teenager cannot be cautioned and will most likely go to court. The courts have various options open to them in passing a sentence that directly affects the parents of teenagers, e.g. they can make parents responsible for paying any fines.



## THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND PARENTING

Parents are not held directly responsible for crimes committed by their children, but these days there is a belief that parenting has an important role to play in the behaviour of teenagers. If a young person is involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour it is important that they are supported. Feelings are likely to be running high all round; it can be a frightening time for everyone. It is important to remember that young people who are supported by their parents are less likely to re-offend. Having said that, it is important that the whole family gets support. Services for young people who are offending will not want to look at the young person's behaviour in isolation.

Parenting programmes are available to provide help to parents who are concerned about their young person's behaviour, particularly those whose children are in the criminal justice system. These programmes give parents a chance to explore, in confidence, difficulties they may be experiencing with their children and to look at ways of managing their teenagers positively. The Youth Offending Service has parent workers who run groups for parents and who also offer one-to-one support by phone or home visit. Parents who are concerned should contact the YOS directly. Where the courts believe that parents would benefit from this support to help stop their children from offending, they may either recommend that parents attend on a voluntary basis or make it a requirement by making a Parenting Order, which requires the parents to attend parenting provision.

## CONTACTS

- Oxfordshire Youth Offending Service
- Oxfordshire Youth Support Services
- Citizen's Advice Bureaux
- Nomad
- Thames Valley Police
- Underzone
- Youth Justice Board

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Teenagers experience crime both as offenders and victims, but most offenders don't get caught up in a life of crime.
- ❖ Watch out for warning signs such as stealing, having unexplained amounts of money, truancy and substance misuse.
- ❖ Get help to explain to your teenager the consequences of future criminal behaviour.
- ❖ Work with the Youth Offending Service and other agencies to support the young person and yourself.

# PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SEXUAL HEALTH

**Age 13-19 is a time of major physical, mental and sexual change that can be a great source of interest, pride and excitement for all! All this change takes place in its own time, which can be earlier or later, faster or slower than you or your teenager expect. In spite of all the fun, changing body shapes, periods, pubic and facial hair and all the rest can be a source of concern or even embarrassment for teenagers.**

On top of the physical change, teenagers have all the pressures of growing up, experimentation, sexual development and exploration. All of this can at times feel overwhelming for young people – causing stress and sometimes more serious mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, self-harm and eating disorders.

Many teenagers worry greatly about aspects of their physical and mental health and development. A certain amount of concern may encourage them to take good care of themselves, but as their parent, you will need to be involved too. Young people will need you to help them understand what is happening

“It's hard to like healthy stuff if you've come to like junk – parents should get their kids to like the right things early on.”

Oxfordshire teenager



to their bodies and to keep a sense of perspective about their physical and mental health concerns. Teenagers also need help from adults to access information about physical, mental and sexual health. They may need your support to access services such as contraception, sexual health services, and counselling. Some schools and youth centres run Bodyzones which are drop-in health services for young people. School health nurses are available for students in most secondary schools, and health visitors (at most local health centres) provide an excellent resource for anything to do with children and young people's health.

## MOOD AND MIND

Mood swings and behaviour changes are inevitable – stay in touch with your teenager and don't overreact. Occasionally these can be symptoms of more serious problems. At least 1 in 10 young people is affected by mental health issues which can vary from mild to severe. As with all problems, the warning signs are wide ranging. You may be concerned if your teenager shows signs of severe tension, irritability, aggression, hopelessness, and withdrawal from family and friends. Other signs are an inability to concentrate, changes in sleep patterns, and either a lack of appetite or bingeing. Some young people may self-harm or use alcohol or drugs as a way of dealing with

their feelings, or get into dangerous situations. Many young people blame themselves for emotional or mental health problems, but the causes can be wide ranging and they may need help to deal with the underlying problem.

## MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

More common mental health problems include depression and anxiety, obsession, compulsion and eating disorders. Depression is not always easy to spot; it occurs when difficult emotions become overwhelming. It can be triggered by a number of things such as conflict at home, stress or not being listened to. Depression commonly appears for the first time in people aged 15-19. The good news is that whilst depression is a serious illness, it can be treated with medication and/or counselling.

**Anxiety** is excessive fear and worry. Teenagers may demonstrate this by having panic attacks or being frightened of leaving home for example. Obsessions are intrusive thoughts or ideas that often feel silly or unpleasant. Obsessive compulsive disorder occurs as a result of deep anxiety, when young people feel compelled to do something even when they don't want to do it (for example repeatedly checking that a door is locked). Often people try to stop themselves from doing these things, but feel frustrated or worried unless they can carry them out.

**Eating disorders** such as binge eating, anorexia and bulimia are becoming more common, and they affect young people of both sexes and of every age and background. In anorexia the sufferers have a distorted image of their own bodies and constantly attempt to get thinner, sometimes to the point of starvation. Symptoms include cessation of menstrual periods, lethargy, depression, mood swings and intense fear of becoming fat. Between 4 and 10 per cent of women are afflicted by bulimia. Bulimics may be about average in weight and in public appear to eat normally, so the disorder can be difficult to spot. The fear of gaining weight leads to a cycle of binge eating followed by vomiting and/or the use of laxatives.

**Self-harm** may be very hard to understand, but it is much more common than we think. One in ten children undertakes some form of self-harm. Often the behaviour will be hidden and secretive. Self-harm can take many forms including cutting the arms or legs with a knife or razor, burning, biting, hitting or taking overdoses. Luckily most people who self-harm do not want to kill themselves, or even do lasting damage to their bodies. Teenagers may hurt themselves to help with negative feelings, to punish themselves or to feel more in charge. Self-harm can be a way of relieving overwhelming feelings when they

feel alone, angry, guilty or desperate. Some teenagers self-harm over a period of years, while others do it just once or a few times.

It can be very difficult for parents to come to terms with the fact that there may be a problem with their child's mental health. It's important to remember that, even though it must be taken seriously, many teenagers overcome mental illness. As parents we need to encourage teenagers to use the information and services that are available to help them. You may want to talk to the school to find out if they have noticed any changes in behaviour. Let your teenager know what your concerns are and if you feel that it's appropriate, try to get their cooperation in asking your GP to take a more detailed look at what's happening. Look for other counselling services. Getting agreement to seek solutions together may take some time, so don't delay raising your concerns if you are worried.

## SEXUAL HEALTH

In terms of sex, teenagers are becoming sexually active at a younger and younger age. You shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that this does not apply to your teenager – one third of young people under the age of 16 are sexually active, and the UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate

in Europe. In terms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), one in nine people in the UK has an STI – often without symptoms. The most common STIs are HIV, chlamydia, herpes, and gonorrhoea. Chlamydia affects teenage girls more than any other age group and like gonorrhoea, if untreated it can lead to infertility.

You can help your teenager by making sure that she/he is well informed before they hit puberty and keep talking about sex as they grow older. The range of things that your teenager will need information and advice about may seem daunting – apart from information on physical changes and facts

about sex, they will need to explore issues around feelings and relationships, homosexuality, STIs, contraception, “saying no”, pregnancy and abortion. Teenagers may also need your help to access contraceptive and sexual health services (CASH).

In spite of the fact that teenagers nationally say that they want their parents to be the main source of information about sex, it can be difficult to get them to talk about it or take notice of the information that you provide.

The websites listed below provide a wealth of information for parents and young people.

## CONTACTS

- Brook
- Beat – beating eating disorders
- British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas)
- Face 2 Face Youth Counselling
- Family Planning Association
- Family Planning Service
- NHS Direct
- Oxfordshire Health Information Service
- Oxfordshire Mind
- Parent-Talk
- PCHAMS (Primary Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- RU Thinking About It? (including Sexwise Helpline)
- YoungMinds
- Youth Health Talk

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Teenagers need information about all aspects of their health, and they rely on adults to access it.
- ❖ If you think your child is becoming mentally stressed, listen to them and find out if there is any way you can help. Be patient and understanding – what may seem like a minor problem for you may be overwhelming to them.
- ❖ Some anxiety states can become dangerous. Consult your GP or seek alternative professional help if you are worried.
- ❖ Young people who are well informed wait longer before trying sex, and are likely to be safer once they do become sexually active.

# ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

**Most teenagers are exposed to drugs in one way or another and many young people will experiment with drugs. With all the risks involved, it is not surprising that most parents worry about teenagers using drugs. It's worth remembering that in spite of the exposure that young people have to drugs and alcohol, most of them do not become problem users.**

One in three 14 year olds has tried drugs, and by the age of 16, four out of ten young people will have tried at least one type of drug. Young people take drugs for many different reasons. Although illegal, drugs are widely available, but only a very small percentage of young people end up as problematic users. You may think that experimenting with cannabis is bound to lead down the path of being addicted to heroin, but the evidence just does not back this up.

## GET INFORMED

As a parent, you can help yourself by finding out about drugs – what they are called, the effects and the risks. If you can do this with your teenager so much the better, you can learn together and you can also see what information they already have. Don't jump to conclusions if your child seems to know a lot about drugs, it doesn't necessarily mean that they have been using them. From your point of view, knowing more about drugs will make it easier for you to recognise the signs if there is a problem.

“Cigarettes and alcohol shouldn't be sold to under-age young people.”

Oxfordshire teenager





“ There should be more to do for teenagers – less boredom would reduce drug and alcohol misuse. ”

Oxfordshire teenager

Talk openly about drugs with your teenager. Talking about drugs does not encourage young people to use them, but it will help them to make safer choices. Discuss the risks and the effects of different drugs. You also need to talk about the illegal nature of drugs, and what it would mean to your teenager if they got caught – their police record, the impact this would have on school, jobs and careers. Research shows that those who are well informed about sensible use and the potential dangers of drugs are less likely to develop a serious problem. You can get more information about drugs by using the contacts listed below.

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Encourage your teenager to discuss their experiences of drugs with you. Be careful not to judge them. It's natural for a parent to want to protect their child, but you can't watch them

24 hours a day. Don't over react if they tell you, or if you find out, that some of their friends have tried illegal substances. Whilst their use of drugs may be a problem for you, most teenagers will not see drinking or occasional drug use as a problem. Remember, teenagers are constantly testing boundaries, experimenting, and responding to peer pressure.

As always, communication is important. Your child needs to know that you are there for them no matter what. If the police are involved you will need to support your child through the process whilst continuing to point out the seriousness and consequences of the situation.

### HOW SERIOUS IS THIS DRUG USE?

Oxfordshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team provide the following four categories of illegal drugs use:

1. The majority of young people who try illegal substances (usually cannabis), do it three or four times and stop.
2. "Social users" are the next largest group. For these young people using drugs is part of their social lives. They do it with friends at a weekend and function relatively normally during the week. Apart from the immediate effects, there may be some longer term risks.
3. The next group is where drug use becomes problematic.

It starts affecting social function and personality. Here substance misuse becomes compulsive and addictive. Drugs start playing a more important role than anything else.

4. Injecting drug users are at the greatest risk. Injecting can lead to serious injuries and infections. This level of self-harm is very dangerous. There are, however, ways of reducing harm to injecting users – by seeking medical advice and using needle exchanges.

### SPOTTING THE SIGNS AND GETTING HELP

Often parents ask "How can I tell if my teenager is using drugs?" Spotting the signs will be easier once you know more about drugs, but look out for these possible signs:

- Mood swings
- Being confused, irritable, or aggressive
- Showing anxiety
- Lots of energy, or no energy at all
- Secretiveness
- Loss of appetite

All of these can be usual teenage behaviours, and this can make drug use difficult to spot. If your teenager's drinking or drug use is becoming more serious, there may be more worrying symptoms such as stealing, truanting and changes

in behaviour where the teenager becomes more aggressive or agitated.

If your teenager is using drugs, there are many helplines and information websites available for both you as a parent, and for your teenager. Counselling, health services, treatment and support are all available. Remember, you may need to be patient; it may take your teenager a while to seek help.

### COMMUNICATION

You might find the following advice helpful to start with:

- Try not to accuse your child as this will probably start a row; and if you are wrong, your child may lose trust in you. Ask them to talk about their views and try to listen with respect to what they say.
- Don't try to discuss their drug use with them while you believe they are under the influence of a drug.
- Decide in advance how you want to react if your child tells you that they have used drugs.
- Make sure they know that you will be there to help them through any difficulties they come across and show that your main concern is their health and well-being.
- Make clear to them what behaviour is acceptable to you, and what is not. Young people need to understand that they are responsible for their actions and the consequences that follow.

- Try not to threaten them with punishment – this might seem to offer a quick solution, but it’s unlikely to give the results you are looking for.

## LEGAL DRUGS

Although we tend to concentrate on illegal drugs, legal drugs are more common. Both alcohol and tobacco are used to experiment, to relax or to be seen as part of the group. Excessive use of alcohol may well be a greater threat to the health than illegal drugs.

Alcohol is the most commonly abused drug. Drinking by young people tends to increase between the ages of 15 and 17, but binge drinking reduces as young people become more mature. Young people are more likely to be in danger when they are drunk. The likelihood of them being involved in risky sex and violence, for example, increases significantly. Make sure your teenager understands the risks involved in misusing alcohol. You can help by recognising that as a role model you need to show them how to use alcohol responsibly.

## CONTACTS

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- ADFAM – Families Drugs and Alcohol
- Drinkline
- Evolve
- Families Anonymous
- FRANK (National Drugs Helpline)
- National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA)
- Oxfordshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)
- Oxfordshire Smoking Advice Service – NHS (OSAS)
- Parent-Talk
- There4Me

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ❖ Many young people will experiment with drugs and tobacco as part of the process of growing up. In most cases this will not lead to long term problems. Having said this, a person who decides to take an illegal drug (or to abuse alcohol) is taking some very serious risks. The risks include: prosecution and a criminal record, immediate health issues, overdose, accidents and dangerous behaviour, mental distress.
- ❖ You can help yourself and your teenager by being informed about drugs, looking out for the signs, talking to your teenager, being supportive and keeping the communication open between you and them.
- ❖ Parents of substance abusers will need help and support from professionals and other parents who understand. There are many sources of information, confidential advice, and support for you and your teenager.

# THE INTERNET, SOCIAL NETWORKING, MOBILES AND OTHER TECHNOLOGY

**The Internet has a lot going for it. It’s fun, creative and informative. Nowadays it plays an increasingly important part of teenagers’ educational and social lives. It’s a resource where teenagers can broaden their knowledge, share information and communicate with friends.**

Young people conduct an increasingly large part of their social life using technology through different formats such as texting, communicating in chat rooms, blogs, email and multi-user online games. The Internet has many attractions for teenagers including the fact that they can use it without involving adults. In addition, communication is instantaneous, and the anonymity that it allows enables them to communicate more freely than perhaps they could face to face.

One of the great things about the Internet is that it’s very creative – all young people should be able to use it in ways that suit them. In spite of this, some



young teenagers in Oxfordshire say that they don't have sufficient access to the Internet, particularly at school. Young people who do not have access to computers at home may feel very disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.

## WE ALL USE THE INTERNET...BUT

It's worth remembering that use of online Information Communication Technology (ICT) tends to be different for adults and teenagers. For a start, adults often consider themselves to be inexperienced at using ICT, while teenagers are much more likely to be confident. Teenagers' use of the Internet tends to be more inter-active, makes use of a variety of different media and involves more uploading of information than it does for adults.

As a parent you need to understand as much as possible about how your teenager is using the Internet so that you can support them to use it safely, and avoid some of the risks associated with online activity.

## MOBILES

As with computers, parents need to learn about how their teenager uses their mobile. Phones can include equipment such as – camera, video, online chat facilities, mob logs, MP3 player, TV, radio, email, and downloads. Teenagers tend to have their phones on all the time and they are usually used away from supervision. As a parent, you will need to

encourage balanced use and set rules around bills and appropriate use of the online facilities.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking sites focus on building communities of people who share interests and activities. Most social networking services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging and so on. In general, social networking services, such as MySpace and Facebook, allow users to create a profile for themselves on their own mini-website. They can then become 'friends' with other users. It is worth remembering that chatrooms can be accessed on mobile phones as well as computers and other online devices.

## SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH TECHNOLOGY?

Overuse of the Internet can be a problem. The Internet provides 24/7 entertainment, interaction and communication and it can become addictive. Teenagers can become immersed in their online world so that it takes over their lives. Hours spent on the Internet may mean that your teenager leads an unbalanced lifestyle. It may make it harder for you to communicate with them and inevitably it will become a distraction from other activities or aspects of their life. As parents we need to

set clear rules with our teenagers about the amount of time that they spend online.

Most use of the Internet by young people is unsupervised. You need to know what your teenager is using the Internet for and they need to know about the dangers of viewing inappropriate websites. The Internet may blur the distinction between advertising and information; young people can suffer from invasion of privacy, unwanted contact, extreme views, and pornography. While 57% of 9-19 year olds come into contact with online pornography, only 16% of parents think their children have seen porn on the Internet.

Although you can apply filters which block access to websites with a sexual content, it may be more effective for you to take an active interest in the sites that your teenager is browsing and discuss with them the type of websites that are appropriate for their age.

Teenagers, like other Internet users, may be vulnerable to people who use shared personal information for fraudulent use. Remind your teenager that they must never give out any personal details such as contacts, school name, passwords.

If they are using social networking sites, or creating their own websites, teenagers need to be careful about what they put on their web spaces and they need to be aware about the whole concept of their cyber footprint – it may be difficult or

impossible to ever remove things that they upload to the Internet. Websites, including social networks are not private and they are increasingly being used by the police in criminal investigations, by college and school administrators, and by future employers in order to find out more about individuals who post information about themselves on the Internet. Teenagers need to think carefully about how they portray themselves online. They also need to be aware of cyber bullying and ensure that information that they are sending out is not damaging to anybody else. Teenagers also need to be warned about getting involved in creating and distributing potentially illegal images on their mobile phone.

Many young people will experience bullying through mobiles and the Internet at some time. As many as 1 in 5 young people report being the target of cyber bullying. Cyber bullying is very powerful as it potentially intrudes 24/7 into home and other spaces that may have previously been considered safe by a young person. In addition the audience can be very large and reached quickly. The impact of cyber

“As a family we watched a TV programme with teenagers explaining the dangers of chatrooms... it really helped my daughter understand the potential danger.”

Oxfordshire parent

bullying on teenagers will be similar to any other bullying. You will need to look out for signs of bullying in your teenager, encourage them to talk about it and then take the necessary action to protect your child and stop the bullying. Fortunately there is a lot of helpful advice for parents available. Although some instances of cyber bullying can be unintentional, be aware that your child may be bullying online, or retaliating.

Some young people have been hurt when they have formed relationships, or gone to meet 'friends' that they have made online. Adults with a

sexual interest in children and young people do use chat rooms and other interactive areas online to befriend children. Harmful, inappropriate contact may be carried out online, but abuse also includes adults manipulating young people, and 'grooming' them to meet up. It is important that young people understand that people that they chat to online may not be who they say they are and that they are reminded to be cautious in their online communication. Childnet International has developed a set of SMART rules for young people to help them to keep safe online.

## SUMMARY + PRACTICAL TIPS

- ICT is a key part of teenagers' education, individuality and an increasingly popular and cheap way of communicating with their peers.
- There are risks, but it is important that you do not ban access to the Internet or over react in other ways.
- Keep informed – become confident at using the Internet and get your teenager to show you what they do online.
- Set up some ground rules and revisit these as your teenager gets older.
- Talk about the risks and help your teenager to take appropriate action to protect themselves.
- Watch out for signs that there is a problem – obsessive or secretive use of the Internet, distress after using the Internet or their phone, changes in behaviour, inappropriate sexual questions, not telling you where they are going or who they are meeting.
- As with any bullying – treat cyber bullying seriously.

## CONTACTS

- Beat Bullying
- Bullying UK
- Childnet International
- Chat Danger
- Kidsmart
- Think u Know

# HOW OLD DO THEY HAVE TO BE?

**Generally, a 'child' is a person under the age of 18 and people from the age of 18 are treated legally as an 'adult'. Parents are responsible for their children until they are 16. The age at which children can be left alone is a matter for parental judgment. The following is a guide to legal age limits...**

## MARRIAGE AND SEX

People can get married at 16 with parental permission, or at 18 without permission. The age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual sex is 16.

## MEDICAL CONSENT

At 16 teenagers can register with a GP and they can consent to treatment – i.e. they do not need parental consent to receive treatment. They have the right to confidential consultation under the age of 16 and they can receive medical treatment without their parent's permission if they are judged to be mature



enough to understand all the issues involved. Doctors must honour their duty of confidentiality to their patients and so they will not tell parents of teenagers under 16 about treatment without permission. Medical practitioners are likely to encourage teenagers to talk to their parents if they are younger than 16.

## **BODY PIERCING AND TATTOOS**

There is no minimum age for body piercing, but without parental consent the person must be considered mature enough to understand the consequences. Some places will insist that young people are accompanied by their parents.

It is illegal to tattoo anybody under the age of 18.

## **SMOKING**

In October 2007 the legal age at which cigarettes could be bought increased from 16 to 18. It is illegal to sell cigarettes to under 18s. There is no minimum age at which it is legal to smoke.

## **ALCOHOL**

The legal age of drinking on licensed premises is 18. Having said that, 16 and 17 year olds can drink beer or cider or wine with a meal on licensed premises if accompanied by an adult. It is an offence to sell alcohol to someone under 18 on licensed premises. It is an offence to buy alcohol for anybody under the age

of 18. Children are able to drink at home from the age of 5 years old.

## **GAMBLING**

There are some limits on people under 18 gambling and playing on fruit machines. Purchase of lottery tickets is restricted to those 16 and over. Young people under the age of 18 cannot go into a betting shop.

## **LEAVING HOME**

Parents can't stop a child leaving by physically restraining them. Parents can apply to a court for an order for their teenager to return home, but in the event of family breakdown it is unlikely that a court would force an older teenager to return home.

## **WORKING**

The rules are complicated around part time work for teenagers. With some exceptions the minimum age of employment is 13. 14 year olds can do light work, for not more than 2 hours on a school day and no more than 25 hours per week. They are not allowed to work before 7.00am or after 7.00pm. Working hours for 15 and 16 year olds are also restricted unless they are 16 and have left school. 16 year olds who have a National Insurance number and who have left school can work full time. The minimum wage applies from the age of 16. The minimum wage level increases for 18-21 year olds. There is no minimum wage for under 16s.

There is no minimum age for babysitters.

## **POLICE AND CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The police can stop and talk to teenagers of any age. They can search them at any age if they have reason to suspect that they are carrying stolen property, drugs or weapons, or if they match a description. They can search teenagers aged 10 – 17 without an adult present. From the age of 17 young people can be interviewed by police without an adult present.

The age of criminal responsibility is 10. Anti Social Behaviour Orders can be made against anyone over 10. These are civil orders but it is a criminal offence to breach them.

With the exception of small pocket knives, shops must not sell knives to people under 16. Carrying a knife or a similar object in a public place is an offence.

## **SCHOOL LEAVING AGE**

Teenagers must remain in school or education until the last Friday in June during the school year in which they become 16.

## **BANKING**

Many banks offer accounts to young teenagers and issue bank debit cards for 13 year olds. Credit is not available until the age of 18.

## **ARMED FORCES**

16 year olds can join with parental consent and 18 year olds without.



# HELP FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGERS IN OXFORDSHIRE

**All parents of teenagers are likely to need help at some time – this may be just talking things through with a friend, or becoming part of a parent support group, or you may want to get help from a statutory or voluntary service. You may also want to attend a parenting programme.**

If you want further help you can get in touch with any of the organisations listed in the contacts section of this guide – see page 44.

In addition you could start by contacting your health centre, your GP, your teenagers' school/college, or Oxfordshire County Council's Youth Support Service. You can contact Oxfordshire Children's Information Service (OCIS) for advice about where to go for help.

The Oxfordshire Services Directory (OSD) website provides detailed up-to-date information about a whole range of parent support, parenting programmes, and other services for children, young people and their families. See [www.oxfordshireservicesdirectory.org.uk](http://www.oxfordshireservicesdirectory.org.uk). There are many more organisations on the OSD than it has been possible to list in the contacts section of this guide.

## PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Parenting education (often referred to as 'parenting programmes') involves joint work with parents and carers to help in their overall parenting role. The programmes help parents to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that will increase the quality of relationships with their children, support the increased wellbeing of children and young people and encourage positive behaviour at home and outside. Parenting programmes put the parent at the centre of their learning. Programmes are supportive, fun and potentially life changing. Parenting programmes are delivered in groups or on a one-to-one basis.

There are several organisations in Oxfordshire that provide programmes for the parents of teenagers.

### Oxfordshire County Council Youth Offending Service (YOS)

YOS provides a 12-week Parent-Talk programme for parents of young people aged 10-17 who are at risk of, or involved in, offending behaviour. Programmes are delivered in groups and on a one-to-one basis. Call 01865 202218, email [yot.enquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:yot.enquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk) or go to [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) for more information.

### Oxfordshire Parent-Talk Programme

Oxfordshire Parent-Talk specialises in providing support to parents of 10 – 19 year olds whose behaviour is causing concern to the parents or the community. Programmes are delivered for groups of parents or on a one-to-one basis. Call 01865 559386 or email [parent-talk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:parent-talk@oxfordshire.gov.uk) for more information.

### Parentline Plus

Parentline Plus run a variety of programmes for parents providing the opportunity to explore issues that parents find challenging. Call 0808 800 2222, or go to [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk) for more information.



# CONTACTS

The contacts below include local and national services, information sites and helplines. For additional family information contact Oxfordshire Children's Information Service or use the Oxfordshire Services Directory.

## Acceptance UK for Parents of Gay People

Helpline run for and by parents offering support and help for parents and families of gay people.

**Tel:** 01795 661 463

**Email:**

jill&gordon@acceptance.fsnet.co.uk

**www.ukselfhelp.info/acceptance**

## ADFAM – Families Drugs and Alcohol

A national organisation working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. Provides direct support to families through publications, training, prison visitors' centres, outreach work and signposting to local support services.

**Tel:** 020 7553 7640

**Email:** admin@adfam.org.uk

**www.adfam.org.uk**

## Adoption UK

National charity run by and for adopters, providing self-help information, advice, support and training on all aspects of adoption and adoptive parenting.

**Tel:** 0844 848 7900

**Email:** helpdesk@adoptionuk.org.uk

**www.adoptionuk.com**

## Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Information about state education in England and Wales for parents of school age children. Free telephone advice on many subjects e.g. exclusion from school, bullying, special educational needs and school admission appeals.

**Tel:** 0808 800 5793

**www.ace-ed.org.uk**

## After Adoption

A voluntary adoption agency providing information, support and advice to all those affected by adoption.

**Tel:** Action Line 0800 0 568 578

**Email:**

information@afteradoption.org.uk

**www.afteradoption.org.uk**

## Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

A worldwide 'fellowship' open to alcoholics and their families and to anyone interested in solving a personal drinking problem or helping someone else to solve such a problem. For details of local meetings or to speak to a volunteer call the national helpline.

**Tel:** 0845 769 7555

**www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk**

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships range from Pre-Apprenticeships such as Entry to Employment (e2e) for those needing to build their confidence and brush up on their basic skills, to Advanced Apprenticeships that normally require four GCSEs at grade C or above and lead to NVQs at Level 3, key skills and technical certificates.

**Tel:** 08000 150 600

**www.apprenticeships.org.uk**

For local Apprenticeships see **www.connexionsoxfordshire.com/opportunities** or contact the Learning & Skills Council.

## Autism Family Support Project

Supporting families, carers and people on the autism spectrum. Support is offered if you have a family member who has just been diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. Information is available about autism, services in Oxfordshire, contact details of support groups and other parents and talks, training and developments in your area.

**Tel:** 01844 338696

**Email:** info@autism-fs.org.uk

**www.autism-fs.org.uk**

## Beat – beating eating disorders

Information, help and support on all aspects of eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and related eating disorders.

**Tel:** 08456 34 1414

**Youthline:** 08456 34 7650

**Email:** help@b-eat.co.uk

**www.b-eat.co.uk**

## British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas)

A charity with consultation centres and clinics throughout the UK offering pregnancy testing, emergency contraception, counselling, abortion care, sterilisation and vasectomy. bpas works with the NHS and provides a range of reproductive health care services, free of cost to the user, on behalf of the NHS where local arrangements allow.

**Tel:** 08457 30 40 30

**www.bpas.org**

## Brook

A national charity providing free and confidential sexual health advice and services specifically for young people under 25.

**Tel:** 0800 0185 023

**www.brook.org.uk**

### **Bullying UK**

Practical information and advice to young people and their parents, through the website and by email. It includes work with schools, youth organisations, police forces and health trusts, running workshops and speaking at conferences.

**Email:** [help@bullying.co.uk](mailto:help@bullying.co.uk)

**www.bullying.co.uk**

### **Carers in Oxfordshire (including young carers)**

The carers website is designed to signpost to information and support, including a list of local carers centres and young carers projects, for anyone looking after a relative, friend or neighbour who needs support because of frailty, illness, disability or a difficulty.

**Tel:** 01865 205192

**www.oxoncarers.org.uk**

### **Chat Danger (produced by Childnet)**

Information and advice about how to keep safe while chatting online. A site all about the potential dangers on interactive services online like chat, instant messaging, online games, email and on mobiles.

**Email:** [info@chatdanger.com](mailto:info@chatdanger.com)

**www.chatdanger.com**

### **Childnet International**

A non-profit organisation working with others to 'help make the Internet a great and safe place for children.'

**Tel:** 020 7639 6967

**Email:** [info@childnet-int.org](mailto:info@childnet-int.org)

**www.childnet-int.org**

### **Chiltern Centre for Disabled Children Ltd**

The Chiltern Centre provides support to children and young people (aged 2 to 25) with physical and/or learning disabilities and their families via a range of short break care services together with social and recreational opportunities.

**Tel:** 01491 575575

**Email:**

[chiltern@chilterncentre.demon.co.uk](mailto:chiltern@chilterncentre.demon.co.uk)

**www.chilterncentre.co.uk**

### **ChildLine**

ChildLine is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in distress or danger. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people who may feel they have nowhere else to turn. The website also has useful information on a variety of topics for children and young people.

**Tel:** 0800 1111

**Email:** [info@childline.org.uk](mailto:info@childline.org.uk)

**www.childline.org.uk**

### **Children's Legal Centre**

The Children's Legal Centre provides free, independent legal advice, information and representation to children, their carers and professionals throughout the UK.

**Tel:** 0800 783 2187

(Young people's free phone number)

**Tel:** 0845 120 2948 (advice for parents on legal issues, e.g. contact and residence)

[www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

Please note that the Children's Legal Centre does not provide advice on criminal offences/juvenile justice.

### **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

Online CAB service that provides independent advice on your rights and information on where to find your local CAB.

**www.adviceguide.org.uk**

### **Connexions**

Free, impartial and confidential service for all young people aged 13 to 19 or up to 25 if they have a disability or learning difficulty. Connexions personal advisers (PAs) provide information, advice and support on a wide range of issues from courses and careers to health, housing, money and relationships. PAs are based in schools, colleges and Connexions Centres. Connexions Centres have job and apprenticeship vacancies on display, free public access to careers software and the Internet, comprehensive libraries and friendly and helpful staff.

**Tel:** 080 800 13 2 19\*

**Tel:** 07766 4 13 2 19 (text)

**Email:**

[askconnexions@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:askconnexions@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**www.connexionsoxfordshire.com**

**www.connexions-direct.com**

**www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u**

\* Calls from landlines are free but mobile networks may charge so ask the adviser to phone you back.

National phone and web-based helpline for young people. Connexions Advisers are available from 8am to 2am, seven days a week to answer telephone or email enquiries, or have a one-to-one web chat.

### **Contact A Family**

Provides advice, information and support to the parents of disabled children. Also enable parents to get in contact with other families.

**Tel:** 0808 808 3555 (freephone helpline)

**Email:** [info@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:info@cafamily.org.uk)

**www.cafamily.org.uk**

### **Disabled Parents Network (DPN)**

A national organisation of and for disabled people who are parents (or who hope to become parents), their families, friends and supporters. The organisation provides information, advice and peer support.

**Tel:** 08702 410 450 (Helpline & general enquiries)

**www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk**

### **Drinkline**

A national helpline service offering information, support and advice to callers worried about their own drinking or the family and friends of people who are drinking. The service can advise callers on where to go for further help and has a database for referrals to local services.

**Tel:** 0800 917 8282

**www.knowyourlimits.gov.uk**

### **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**

Funding initiative available to support teenagers to remain in post-16 education or training. EMA is an allowance paid directly to young people. Some eligibility criteria apply.

**Tel:** 0808 10 16219

**www.direct.gov.uk/ema**



### Education Otherwise

Provides support and information for families whose children are being educated outside school.

**Tel:** 0845 478 6345

**Email:** eoemailhelpline@education-otherwise.org

**www.education-otherwise.org**

### Equality and Human Rights Commission

The commission is working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

**Tel:** 08457 622 633  
(disability rights helpline)

**Tel:** 0845 604 6610  
(race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and human rights helpline)

**www.equalityhumanrights.com**

### Everyman Project

The project aims to help men change their violent or abusive behaviour.

**Tel:** 0207 263 8884

**Email:** everymanproject@btopenworld.com

**www.everymanproject.co.uk**

### Evolve

Evolve is Oxfordshire's Young Person's Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service. Evolve is a confidential treatment service which provides community support for 10-18 year olds with complex and serious substance misuse issues in Oxfordshire.

01865 723909

**Email:** enquiries@evolveoxon.co.uk

**www.evolveoxon.co.uk**

### Face 2 Face Youth Counselling

A free, confidential counselling service run by Oxfordshire County Council Youth Service for young people aged 9 – 19 living in Oxfordshire. Also offers a specialist service for young people aged 9 – 19 years who are misusing drugs or are at risk of developing drug misuse.

**Tel:** 01993 892420

**Email:** face2face@oxfordshire.gov.uk

**www.spired.com**

### Families Anonymous

A worldwide 'fellowship' of relatives and friends concerned about the use of drugs or related behavioural problems. Group meetings aim to help the family and friends of people with a current, suspected or former drug problem by providing mutual support and to offer a forum where experiences and anxieties can be shared. For details of local meetings contact the helpline or view through the website.

**Tel:** 0845 1200 660

**www.famanon.org.uk**

### Families need Fathers

Information, advice and personal support to help parents to retain, develop and make best use of the children's relationship with them.

**Tel:** 08707 607496  
(national helpline)

**Email:** fnf@fnf.org.uk

**www.fnf.org.uk**

### Family and Parenting Institute

Aims to improve the wellbeing of children and families by supporting families to bring up their children.

**Tel:** 020 7424 3460

**Email:** info@familyandparenting.org

**www.familyandparenting.org**

### Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG)

Provides information and local contacts to support parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual children.

**Tel:** 0845 652 0311

**Email:** info@fflag.org.uk

**www.fflag.org.uk**

### Family Planning Association (FPA)

National charity providing information and advice on contraception, abortion, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy choices. The helpline and website have information regarding local clinics including NHS emergency contraception, genitourinary medicine (GUM), sexually transmitted infection, family planning and young people's services.

**Tel:** 0845 122 8690

**www.fpa.org.uk**

### Family Planning Service

The Family Planning Service offers contraceptive advice, supplies, and time to talk, particularly around sensitive issues like pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The Oxfordshire family planning service is provided from nine clinics across the county. The main Alec Turnbull Clinic in Oxford (ATC) plus satellite clinics in Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Kidlington, Thame, Wantage & Witney.

**Tel:** 01865 456666

**www.oxfordshirepct.nhs.uk/  
local-services**

### Fathers Direct

Promotes close and positive relationships between men and their children.

**Tel:** 0845 634 1328

**Email:** mail@fathersdirect.com

**www.fathersdirect.com**

### FRANK (National Drugs Helpline)

A national drug helpline offering free, confidential advice, information and support to anyone concerned about drugs and solvent/volatile substance misuse, including drug misusers, their families, friends and carers. Advisers are professional trained to give straight, unbiased information.

**Tel:** 0800 77 66 00

**Textphone:** 0800 917 8765

**Email:** frank@talktofrank.com

**www.talktofrank.com**

### **It's not your fault**

A website organised by NCH the Children's Charity, with practical information for children, young people and parents going through a family break-up.

**www.itsnotyourfault.org**

### **Jigsaw 4 U**

To support children and young people, and their families, who have experienced loss and trauma.

**Tel:** 020 8687 1384

**www.jigsaw4u.org.uk**

### **Kidscape**

Charity committed to keeping children safe from abuse by preventing bullying and child sexual abuse. Kidscape works, with children and young people under the age of 16, their parents/carers, and those who work with them, to provide individuals and organisations with practical skills and resources necessary to keep children safe from harm.

**Tel:** 0845 1205 204

**www.kidscape.org.uk**

### **Kidsmart (part of Childnet)**

A practical internet safety programme website for schools, young people, parents, and agencies.

**Email:** kidsmart@childnet-int.org

**www.childnet-int.org**

### **Learning & Skills Council**

Provides information about training opportunities for young people including apprenticeships

**Tel:** 01865 291700

**Email:** info@lsc.gov.uk

**www.lsc.gov.uk**

### **Missing People**

Offer support, advice and guidance, and practical help to families of missing people. Also runs 'Message Home', a confidential service that can provide a vital link to those left behind.

**Tel:** 0500 700 700  
(24 hr confidential freefone)

**Tel:** 0800 700 740  
(message home freefone)

**Email:**  
enquiries@missingpeople.org.uk

**www.missingpeople.org.uk**

### **Multi Arts Programme (MAP)**

Works with specific target groups including disaffected young people and young people excluded from school.

**Tel:** 01295 227186

**Email:** map@oxfordshire.gov.uk

**www.map-project.co.uk**

### **National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA)**

A charity offering information, advice and support to children of alcohol dependent parents of all ages to address the needs of children growing up in families where one or both parents suffer from alcoholism or a similar addictive problem.

**Tel:** 0800 358 3456

**Email:** helpline@nacoa.org.uk

**www.nacoa.org.uk**

### **National Domestic Violence Helpline**

A national 24-hour service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Run in partnership between Women's Aid & Refuge.

**Tel:** 0808 2000 247

**www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk**

### **National Self Harm Network (NSHM)**

A national charity providing support and information for those people who self-harm, their family and professionals.

**Email:** info@nshn.co.uk

**www.nshn.co.uk**

### **NCH the Children's Charity**

NCH is one of the UK's leading children's charities, supporting some of the UK's most vulnerable and excluded children and young people.

**Tel:** 08457 626579

**www.nch.org.uk**

### **NHS Direct**

A 24-hour service providing information and advice about health, illness and health services – including listings of local GP surgeries, dentists, pharmacies and opticians.

**Tel:** 0845 4647

**www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk**

### **Nomad**

Works with children, young people and families and in particular those who are at risk of anti-social behaviour, exclusion from school, drug or alcohol misuse, child protection orders.

**Tel:** 01491 577414 (ext 16)

**Email:** info@nomadhenley.co.uk

**www.nomadhenley.co.uk**

### **NSPCC**

The NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

**Tel:** 0808 800 5000  
(Child Protection Helpline)

**Tel:** 0800 056 0566  
(Textphone)

**Email:** help@nspcc.org.uk

**www.nspcc.org.uk**

### **One Parent Families/Gingerbread**

Confidential, independent information and advice service for lone parents.

**Tel:** 0800 018 5026  
Lone Parent Helpline

**Email:** info@oneparentfamilies.org.uk  
**www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk**

### **Oxford Friend Lesbian & Gay Helpline**

A voluntary organisation providing free and completely confidential information, support and counselling for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

**Tel:** 01865 726893

**Email:** confidential@oxfordfriend.co.uk  
**www.oxfordfriend.co.uk**

### **Oxford Sexual Abuse Rape Crisis Centre**

If you are a survivor of sexual abuse or rape, recently or in the past, and need help ring us. We offer help through counselling, support or information for you or friends and family.

**Tel:** 01865 726295 (Helpline)  
**www.rapecrisis.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Children and Voluntary Youth Services (OCVYS)**

Supports voluntary and community organisations that work with young people.

**Tel:** 01865 810650  
**Email:** ocvys@oxfordshire.gov.uk  
**www.ocvys.org**

### **Oxfordshire Children's Information Service (OCIS)**

Family and parenting information. If you are concerned about your teenager, wanting support, to find out about parenting programmes, or looking for services, organisations or activities.

**Tel:** 08452 26 26 36  
**Email:** enquiries@oxoncis.org.uk  
**www.oxoncis.org.uk**

### **www.oxfordshireservicesdirectory.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire County Council schools information**

Information for parents about Oxfordshire's schools, including financial help with school clothing, meals and transport to parents with low incomes or on benefits.

**Tel:** 01865 815449 (general enquiries)  
**Tel:** 01865 815175 (school admissions enquiries)  
**Email:** learning@oxfordshire.gov.uk  
**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/schools**

### **Oxfordshire Crossroads**

Provides social, domestic and personal care to children with disabilities or to parents who have disabilities and need support. Services are tailor made, and they can arrange training for more complex and specialist tasks.

**Tel:** 01865 260280  
**Email:** care@oxfordshirecrossroads.org.uk  
**www.oxfordshirecrossroads.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Family Mediation Service**

A charity providing experienced family mediators/children's workers who are there to help parents and children move forward, and make decisions following parental separation.

**Tel:** 01865 741781  
**Email:** admin@ofm.org.uk

### **Oxfordshire Foster Carers Association**

Support service run by foster carers for foster carers  
Oxfordshire County Council – Fostering and Adoption

**Tel:** 01865 816057  
**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies**

### **Oxfordshire Guideposts Trust**

Provides direct services for people with dementia, mental health problems and learning difficulties including children's services and friendship scheme

**Tel:** 01993 899980  
**www.guidepoststrust.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Parent Partnership**

Providing support, impartial advice, information and training for parents of children with Special Educational Needs

**Tel:** 01865 810 516  
**Email:** parentpartnership@oxfordshire.gov.uk  
**www.parentpartnership.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council**

Advice and information on racial discrimination in services, industrial tribunal assistance, support & advice on racial harassment, promotion of good community and race relations

**Tel:** 01865 791891  
**Email:** info@oxrec.org  
**www.oxrec.org**

### **Oxfordshire Smoking Advice Service – NHS (OSAS)**

A National Health Service available to anyone who would like information, support or advice regarding giving up smoking. The service provides a 7-week course for smokers wanting to quit as well as trained smoking cessation advisors contactable at all local health centres and surgeries.

**Tel:** 01865 226663  
**Email:** smoking.advice@oxfordshirepct.nhs.uk  
**www.smokefreeoxfordshire.nhs.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Women's Aid**

Women's Aid is the national domestic violence charity that helps women and children.

**Tel:** 01865 778400  
**Tel:** 0808 2000 247 (24 hr helpline)  
**Email:** info@womensaid.org.uk  
**www.womensaid.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Youth Support Services**

Provides a range of personal and social education development programmes for young people in the 13 – 19 age range

**Tel:** 01865 815166

**Email:** [youthsupportservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:youthsupportservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk**

### **Ouch**

A BBC website that reflects the lives and experiences of disabled people. Includes regular columns, features, quizzes, a monthly podcast, blogs and a community message board.

**Email:** [ouch@bbc.co.uk](mailto:ouch@bbc.co.uk)

**www.bbc.co.uk/ouch**

### **OutProud**

A website for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youths, providing advocacy, information, resources and support.

**Email:** [info@outproud.org](mailto:info@outproud.org)

**www.outproud.org**

### **Oxfordshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)**

Provides access to a variety of sources of information about drugs and alcohol. Commissions and coordinates local drug services such as treatment services, free needle exchange scheme, overdose prevention and response workshops.

**Tel:** 01865 260250

**Email:** [enquiries@oxfordshiredaat.org](mailto:enquiries@oxfordshiredaat.org)

**www.oxfordshiredaat.org**

### **Oxfordshire Mind**

A registered charity, separate from but affiliated to National Mind. Offers support and information, including a monthly therapeutic relatives support group, regarding mental health matters primarily for adults

**Tel:** 01865 247788

**Tel:** 01865 251152 (Crisis Line)

**Email:** [info@oxfordshire-mind.org.uk](mailto:info@oxfordshire-mind.org.uk)

**www.oxfordshire-mind.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Mind – Young People**

Operates dedicated services for young adults in Banbury and Abingdon

**Tel:** 01295 271064 or 01295 259442 (Banbury)

**Tel:** 01235 522096 (Abingdon)

### **Parentscentre**

Information and support for parents on how to help with your child's learning, including advice on GCSEs, young apprenticeships, higher education and careers.

**Tel:** 0870 000 22 88

**www.parentscentre.gov.uk**

### **Parentline Plus**

Parentline Plus is a national charity offering help and support for parents.

**Tel:** 0808 800 2222 (National 24 hr Freephone Helpline)

**www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

### **Oxfordshire Parent-Talk Programme**

Specialises in providing support to parents of 10-19 year olds with challenging behaviour.

**Tel:** 01865 559386

**Email:** [parent-talk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:parent-talk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **PCAMHS – Primary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

An early intervention and preventative service which nips in the bud problems which might for example, be linked to bullying, low self-esteem, family breakdown and avoiding school.

**Tel:** 01865 849612

**Email:** [pcamhs@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:pcamhs@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **RaisingKids.co.uk**

Offers support, information and friendship to anyone raising children, whatever their circumstances or income.

**Tel:** 0208 444 4852

**Email:** [feedback@raisingkids.co.uk](mailto:feedback@raisingkids.co.uk)

**www.raisingkids.co.uk**

### **Reducing the Risk**

Oxfordshire's dedicated website for those affected by domestic abuse or violence. Find out how to get help and advice.

**Tel:** 0808 2000 247 (24-hour National Helpline)

**Email:** [reducingtherisk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:reducingtherisk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)  
**www.reducingtherisk.org.uk**

### **Relate Oxfordshire**

Offers relationship counselling, family counselling, sex therapy and counselling for those experiencing domestic abuse or violence.

**Tel:** 01865 242 960

**Email:** [appointments@relate-oxfordshire.org](mailto:appointments@relate-oxfordshire.org)  
**www.relate-oxfordshire.org**

### **Ridgeway Partnership (Oxfordshire Learning Disability NHS Trust)**

Provides a range of health care and social support services, mainly for people living in Oxfordshire who have a learning disability, and their families/carers. Oxfordshire Learning Disability Child & Adolescent Team – OLDCAT is a multi disciplinary community team who provide a service to children and adolescents under the age of 18 with a learning disability who are registered with a GP in Oxfordshire.

**Tel:** 01865 228159 (Children's services)

**Email:** [enquiries@ridgeway.nhs.uk](mailto:enquiries@ridgeway.nhs.uk)  
**www.ridgeway.nhs.uk**

### **Rights4me**

A website with advice and information on children's rights, for children and young people living in children's homes, foster care, boarding schools, residential special schools, or FE colleges or going through adoption.

**Tel:** 0800 528 0731  
**www.rights4me.org**

### **RU Thinking About It? (including Sexwise Helpline)**

Offers free, confidential advice on sex, relationships and contraception to under 18s.

**Tel:** 0800 28 29 30

**Tel:** 0800 328 1651  
(Textphone Sexwise)

**www.ruthinking.co.uk**

### **Samaritans (Oxford)**

Samaritans provide confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Oxford Centre is open to receive visitors 8am – 10pm.

**Tel:** 01865 722122  
(Local helpline 24hr)

**Tel:** 08457 909090  
(National helpline)

**Email:** jo@samaritans.org  
**www.samaritans.org**

### **Seesaw**

A registered charity providing grief and bereavement support for children (up to the age of 18), in cases where a parent or sibling has died or is dying.

**Tel:** 01865 744768 (24-hour answer phone service is in operation)

**Email:** info@seesaw.org.uk  
**www.seesaw.org.uk**

### **Shires Spectrum Support Group**

Support group for families whose children have autistic spectrum disorders (also welcomes parents of children with other impairments).

**Tel:** 01295 712287

**Email:** sue@countrystile.co.uk

### **Skills for Life Unit**

Offers part-time English and Maths courses to anyone over 16, from complete beginners to GCSE. Study may take place by distance learning, in the workplace or in a local venue. Call to request your local service.

**Tel:** 01865 778827

### **Social Care Access**

The Access Team at Oxfordshire County Council is the route for all new contacts, and referrals into social care. Provides information, advice and signposting, delivers an assessment of needs and implements some services.

**Tel:** 0845 050 7666

**Tel:** 0800 833408 (out of hours emergency number)

**Email:** access@oxfordshire.gov.uk  
**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk**

### **Spired.com**

A dedicated website for young people provided by Oxfordshire Youth Support Service.

**www.spired.com**

### **Starlight Enterprise Limited**

A support group for families with black children of mixed heritage.

**Tel:** 01865 776691

**Email:** StarlightEnt7788@aol.com  
**www.starlightenterprise.co.uk**

### **Stop It Now!**

Aims to protect children and prevent child sexual abuse, by raising awareness, changing attitudes and behaviour, so that people take appropriate action to prevent abuse, and seek help if they are worried about themselves or others.

**Tel:** 0808 1000 900  
(freephone helpline)

**Email:** help@stopitnow.org.uk  
**www.stopitnow.org.uk**

### **Talking Teens Campaign**

A new campaign by Parentline Plus, supports parents with teenagers, offering top tips by parents, personal stories and ideas of how to get the very best from your relationship with your teenager.

**Tel:** 0808 800 2222  
(National 24 hr Freephone Helpline)  
**www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

### **Thames Valley Police**

Nobody should have to put up with crime, or with other people behaving in a way that makes them frightened or unhappy, including domestic violence or child abuse.

**Tel:** 0845 8 505 505  
(single non-emergency number)

If you are in immediate danger call 999

**www.thamesvalley.police.uk**

### **The Abingdon Bridge (TAB)**

A service for young people aged 13 – 25, offering accurate, unbiased, relevant information and support on a whole range of issues. Free, confidential and non-judgemental service.

**Tel:** 01235 522375

**Email:** tabcentre@yahoo.co.uk  
**www.theabingdonbridge.org.uk**

### **There4me.com**

A website run by the NSPCC for young people aged 12-16 years. Offers help with issues such as abuse, bullying, exams, drugs and self harm. Talk confidentially with a There4me adviser.

**www.there4me.com**

### **Thesite.org**

A website for young adults. Provides high quality, impartial information and advice when they need support and guidance through life.

**Tel:** 020 7250 5700  
**www.thesite.org.uk**

### Think U Know

The latest information on the sites you like to visit, mobiles and new technology. Find out what's good, what's not and what you can do about it. There is also a place which anyone can use to report if they feel uncomfortable or worried about someone they are chatting to online.

**Email:** enquiries@ceop.gov.uk

**www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

### Time Off for Study Training

Entitles young workers aged 16 and 17 to paid time off to study towards a Level 2 qualification (e.g. BTEC First Diploma or NVQ Level 2) if they do not have one already.

**www.dfes.gov.uk/tfst**

### Transition Information Network

A website for parents, carers and people who work with and for disabled young people in transition to adulthood. Has a separate section for young people.

**Email:** TIN@ncb.org.uk

**www.after16.org.uk**

### UnderZone

A section on the Thames Valley Police website with information for children and young people on keeping safe and staying on the right side of the law

**www.thamesvalley.police.uk/underzone**

### Wantage Counselling Service

A registered charity which offers counselling to the communities of Oxfordshire and beyond, including individual adults, couples and young people aged 15 years upwards. Fees set in relation to income.

**Tel:** 01235 769744

**Email:**

wantagecounselling@tiscali.co.uk

### Working Families

Provides free advice and information for working families on employment rights, childcare and flexible working.

**Tel:** 020 7253 7243

**Tel:** 0800 013 0313

(free helpline for low income families)

**www.workingfamilies.org.uk**

### YoungMinds

A national charity committed to improving the mental health and emotional well-being of all children and young people. Gives advice, training, and distributes publications.

**Tel:** 020 7336 8445

**Tel:** 0800 018 2138 (parents helpline)

**www.youngminds.org.uk**

### Young People's Survival Guide for Oxfordshire

Free guide with information and support for young people, published by the Oxfordshire County Council Youth Support Service

**www.spired.com**

### Youth Access

Provides information, advice, counselling and support services to parents and young people, including drop-in, befriending and sexual health. Visit the website for information on local services.

**www.youthaccess.org.uk**

### Youth Health Talk

A collection of interviews with young people about their experiences of health or illness aimed at patients, their carers, family and friends, doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

**Tel:** 01865 487176

**Email:** info@dipex.org

**www.youthhealthtalk.org**

### Youth Justice Board

Works to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people under the age of 18, and to ensure that custody for them is safe. Secure and addresses the causes of their offending behaviour.

**Tel:** 020 7271 3033

**Email:** enquiries@yjb.gov.uk

**www.yjb.gov.uk**

### Youth Offending Service (YOS)

YOS is a partnership between council departments and Thames Valley Police, county magistrates, Mental Health Trust, NHS Primary Care Trust and Youth Offending/National Probation Service.

**Tel:** 01865 202218 (Youth Offending Team Headquarters)

**Email:**

yot.enquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk

**www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/  
youthsupportservices**

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide has been written by Oxfordshire Children's Information Service (OCIS) in conjunction with Oxfordshire Parenting Forum. We extend our grateful thanks to the many parents, young people and practitioners working in Oxfordshire for their help and expertise in putting this guide together. Much of the information has also been drawn from popular websites and recent publications.

'A Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenagers' is based on a previous publication called 'Teenagers – a survival guide – for parents and carers' that was produced by a group of local practitioners in 2001.

Funding for the guide has been provided by Oxfordshire County Council (through the Parenting Support Strategy Reference Group), Awards for All – the National Lottery, and Cherwell District Council.



Oxfordshire  
Children's  
Information  
Service



OCIS is a registered charity, number 1092491

Photographs: istockphoto.com/ Justin Horrocks, Erik Skorupa, SJLocke, Stephen Strathdee, Chris Schmidt, Timothy Large, Andreas Reh, Laurin Rinder, Dora Pete