

Parents and teenagers

Families Supporting Families Discussion note, July 2017

About this note

Outside the Box is working with families and other organisations across Scotland to develop peer support for families. The project is funded by the Scottish Government through the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund.

This is one of a series of notes to start off discussions about what can help families, especially when people welcome some additional support.

What do we know about parents and teenagers and what they want?

Adolescence is a period of big changes for young people and their families. During this time, teenagers experience rapid physical, intellectual and psychosocial change – it all happens at a faster pace than at any other period in our development except infancy.

Teenagers' parents can also be having a challenging time. Some are helping to look after their own parents or grandparents who need more support. Parents can also be dealing with their own problems – poor health, pressures at work, relationship difficulties, money worries and the like.

Some teenagers appear to manage the changes effortlessly, while others struggle. Some parents cope mostly ok, at least some of the time, while others struggle.

- The teenage phase can start at 10 for some young people, while other parents describe it still happening when their child is about 20.
- Most parents worry about risks that their children face, such as drugs, alcohol problems, bullying at school or through social media, early sexual experiences or committing offences.
- Around 1 in 10 young people have a diagnosable mental health problem and at least as many have poor mental wellbeing.
- Some families want help before problems associated with adolescence start and hope they can prevent them, or at least reduce the impact
- Other families look for help when there is a disruption for the family or when their young person is struggling.
- Some parents say they are reluctant to look for help because they feel that by this stage they should know how to be a good parent.

"There is lots of support when your children are babies and when they are starting school. You feel you are doing ok. Then it all starts – hormones, peer pressure, social

media, worrying about school, working out who they are. It's hard for my son and hard for me. I want to be a good mum at this time but it feels like there is no-one to help you."

What is happening in Scotland?

In Scotland, the legislation covering children and young people is GIRFEC – Getting it right for every child. It covers wellbeing (the right to feel healthy, safe, included and nurtured, being active, respected and responsible, and achieving). There are arrangements to co-ordinate the way professionals support families.

2018 is the Year of Young People. There will be 4 themes:

- **Participation** – looking at how young people can influence public services and decisions which affect their lives
- **Education** – creating a stronger role for young people in shaping their learning
- **Health and Wellbeing** – supporting young people to lead healthier, active lives and have opportunities to learn about and improve their mental health and resilience
- **Equality and Discrimination**

There is a current research project in Scotland looking at the development of an intervention and stress management resource to support parents with teenage children in Scotland. This is led by the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research & Policy and funded by the Robertson Trust.

What do we know about peer support for parents and teenagers?

A report in 2006 found that provision for parents of teenagers was very sparse. Not much seems to have changed.

(<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR830.pdf>)

We looked for examples of support from professionals and peer support for parents to help them over the teenage years.

- There are projects in many places for teenagers, but very few for parents or for teenagers and their parents to get support together.
- There are some projects for teenage parents, and some look at the support they can get from their own parents or extended family
- There are projects aimed at teenagers who are having mental health problems, including some that also offer support for their parents.
- There are a few projects for young people who are gay or are working out their sexuality or identity. Some of these are linked to support for parents who want to help their children around this aspect of their lives.

- There are projects for teenagers who have disabilities. Projects for their parent tend to focus on the young person moving on from school and are looking at issues around further education or employment and move from children's to adult services, rather than how parents feel and cope.

We have found one project in London where parents of sixth-form students pass on tips to parents whose children are just starting secondary school. They will talk about helping teenagers deal with everything from sex and relationships to social media, cyber-bullying and getting enough sleep. The project is designed to boost young people's mental health.

In 2016, the Department for Education in England launched a consultation into whether peer support is an effective method of support for young people with mental health issues. The findings were as follows:

- 50% of young people were interested both in receiving and providing peer support for mental health. Girls were more likely to be positive about this than boys.
- Young people said that peer support programmes should be flexible with regards to timings and settings and appropriate to the circumstances. 69% said the most important feature is that peer supporters are friendly and approachable, followed by 50% who felt they should be trained and knowledgeable. Influential teachers and pupils should be involved.
- 96% who responded to the online call for evidence felt that some training for participants was needed when developing and delivering peer support programmes. Training should occur before they become mentors as well as throughout the programme. It should cover the issues of confidentiality, safeguarding, role boundaries and pathways for further support.
- 60% of young people said the most important recognition would be the ability to be able to refer to their peer support skills on their CV or UCAS application for university places. Younger children felt recognition from school was the most important reward that they could be given.

You can read the full report here:

http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_51314-10.pdf

Useful resources

Parenting across Scotland has produced a series of helpful booklets for parents of teenagers, they are available on their website:

<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/>

We especially like their "Top 10 Tips" series.

They also produced a report, called: "Let's talk teens: what do parents of teenagers want to know about the teenage years."

http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1166/pastalkteenagers_report.pdf

We have brought together a list of useful resources for Rainbow families. We are keen to hear about and share other resources that people know of.

What next

Over the next year or so we will be working to fill some of these gaps. We hope that other organisations will also look at how they can develop what they do to provide support for parents and teenagers,

These are some of the gaps that we are hearing people describe:

- General support to help families through this stage – reassuring parents that some difficulty is normal and help when it gets more of a challenge.
- Informal, welcoming support in more places for teenagers who have disabilities and for their families on all the aspects of life with a teenager
- Peer support for families who are waiting for care at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Contact Us

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