



Teenagers translated

In their new book, *Teenagers Translated*, **Janey Downshire** and **Naella Grew** look at how to raise happy adolescents



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where the opinions of a few can be instantly broadcast to many, challenging and modifying beliefs about what is acceptable. Normalising dysfunctional behaviours like self-harm, binge drinking, porn, drug taking or eating disorders will have a significant influence on a child's developing psyche.

Add to this the changing social values around us and we end up with a potentially combusive cocktail. Gone are the days when most families were like-minded, and similar values would be imbibed while out and about at a friend's house, at school or even church. A familiar message seems to reverberate around many households now: “it's so unfair, everyone else is allowed to”. The hard thing is for each of us to hold out for what we consider right for our family, not only to lay down our limits and boundaries, but to uphold them. While teenagers do need to spread their wings and push boundaries, they also need clear limits around them so that they can learn to gauge risks and develop their own moral compass.

We know how difficult this balancing act can be as we both have teenage children. What we present in our book are the tools and responses that we have found actually work. These have been distilled over the years from our counselling training and from conducting our range of workshops for parents, staff and teenagers. Our book offers an chance to help parents work out the most effective solutions for their child and family. **ISP**

The teenage years can sometimes instil fear, anxiety, dread or even resignation among parents – a roll of the eyes and a “what can I do, it's out of my hands” mindset. But gone are the days when we could adopt a “fingers crossed” attitude and just hope for the best. For one thing, the teenage years are no longer a skip and a hop from 13 to 19. With children growing older younger, the first sign of teenage-style behaviour is appearing probably as early as aged 10. Brain science tells us that the male brain is still undergoing its re-construction work at 24. Put this together with the reality of many children still being dependent on their parents well beyond their teens – either financially or through living at home – and this parenting period may last up to 14 years. Not only might this play havoc with your child's

behaviour as their innate need to separate and become independent drives them to rebel, but it also severely tests parenting styles and skills.

Parenting practice

Now more than ever, handling teenage problems requires precision tools, as opposed to a sledgehammer approach, and our book aims to help parents develop a better understanding of what is going on at home, to recognise when things are not going well and to find ways to manage things more calmly and effectively. Knowing more about our pre-teen or teenager's world, what pressures and challenges they are facing and understanding what they actually need from us, translates into better parenting practice. Understanding how the brain changes and develops in the

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teenage years is an important thread in the book. Your baby's brain, which was a “blob of potential” at birth goes through life adapting and moulding itself in response to influences and to its environment.

We now have evidence, from modern brain science, that simple everyday parenting practices can have a very positive or negative impact on a child's developing habits and behaviour. So if we want to play a proactive part in how our child's personality is shaping up, this book helps us look at specific aspects of family life that will help us do this.

Parenting is sensitive and emotive stuff. We all want to get it right, to be “good enough parents”, but unlike any other job we may do, we get no training, no preparation, little praise, gratitude or encouragement, no chance of being head hunted, we can't swap our colleagues or

even look forward to a retirement free of work-based dilemmas. Most of us take our cue from our own childhood experience, but because society has changed, we may need to do things very differently. Teenagers, as we know, are less malleable. It is a fine balance between embracing a preventative approach that deftly avoids problems and not micro managing every potential danger: of letting go of the reins just enough so that teens can give things a go, but not appearing to turn a blind eye by implicitly sanctioning things of which you disapprove.

A changing society

So why are things more complicated now? Why are we facing new and different challenges, so that despite having been teenagers ourselves, we may

feel ill equipped, or even unconfident, about what's right for our child? One way to understand our teenager's world is to think of it in terms of their culture. A culture, or society, is constantly evolving while attitudes and circumstances change from one generation to the next. Education now encourages children to be independent thinkers and to develop their own opinions from a young age. This has been propelled by the internet offering free and accessible knowledge and opinion round the clock. Adults are no longer automatically looked up to, relied upon, respected and obeyed for their wisdom and expertise. So the dynamic between adult and child has transformed. A teenager's view is moulded by their peers and the Internet, and our opinions, as parents, matter less. Although the internet undoubtedly has huge benefits, it also has a sinister side,

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Teenagers Translated - How to Raise Happy Teens by Janey Downshire and Naella Grew (xyxyxx, Eyxxyx) is out teenagerstranslated.co.uk