

Get help if you need it.

Being a parent or carer of a teenager or young adult can be very confusing. If you are worried your young person has a problem with work, school, drugs, alcohol, relationships or cultural issues, seems too withdrawn, or is acting strangely, then speak to a professional. School counsellors, youth workers and mental health professionals are there to help. Don't be afraid to ask!



For more parenting information and support:

Parentline ACT	(02) 6287 3833
Parentline NSW	1300 130 052
Parentline NT	1300 301 300
Parentline QLD	1300 301 300
Parent Helpline SA	1300 364 100
Parenting Line TAS	1300 808 179
Parentline VIC	13 22 89
Parenting Line WA	(08) 6279 1200 (Metro) 1800 654 432 (Freecall STD)

Parenting lines provide a telephone service providing information and good ideas about caring for babies and children.

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

The Kids Helpline is a free 24 hour telephone counselling service for children and young people aged between 5 and 25.

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NAPCAN is an independent charity and the leading advocacy body for prevention of child abuse and neglect.

www.napcan.org.au

NAPCAN
PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

Listening to Young People



Understanding young people

Being a teenager or young adult is a challenging time. Young people are trying to make sense of the world around them and find their own place in it. They are becoming more independent and less reliant on their parents. They may seem confident and grown-up on the outside, but they are often very self-conscious, and unsure of themselves inside. Hormonal changes upset young people's emotional balance and judgment, leading to impulsive and risky behaviour. Science now tells us that a young person's brain isn't fully developed until the late twenties. So, throughout their teenage years, young people still need our support and encouragement. We can give them this by being patient, checking in on how they are going and listening when they want us to.

Why listening is important

Young people need to be able to express their ideas and values without feeling they are being judged. They want to fit in with their friends and may not speak up about how they really feel, especially if this means not going along with risky behaviour, or expressing unpopular views. They may also feel they can't talk to their parents or carers because the adults won't understand. When young people seem stand-offish and dismissive, it's tempting to take it personally. But this is often just part of 'normal' adolescent behaviour. It's important to be patient, stop what you are doing and listen to them seriously.

How to be a good listener for a young person...

Show interest.

Ask open-ended questions that begin with 'How', 'Why' or 'What do you think / feel about ...' This might encourage longer answers than 'Yes' or 'No'.

Show respect

by listening to young people's ideas thoughtfully and respect their need for space and time alone. Feel privileged when a young person shares a problem with you: Offer ideas but help them to come up with their own solutions.

Avoid being bossy.

It is tempting to ask a question, then jump in with what you think or want to be the right answer! Offer young people your opinion, guidance and support but also respect their ideas.

Allow for silences.

If young people don't reply immediately, just leave the conversation open. They may come back to you later.

Be patient and find the right moment.

Notice when a young person is more likely to talk. Suggest going out for coffee to get some one-on-one time together.

Encourage family discussions

where everybody's views are invited and respected, however different.

Build in family get-together times.

BBQs, picnics, bushwalks or once-a-week family dinners are good opportunities for relaxed talk.

Other adults can help out too.

If you think your young person has a problem they would rather discuss with another adult, don't be offended:

Ask them who else could help or suggest another adult that both of you respect.

Get to know their friends.

Suggest they bring friends home and spend some time chatting with them. Friends are often happy to talk to other people's parents. It might encourage your young person to open up more with you.

Let them know you are there.

No matter how independent they may seem young people need to know you are there for them, even if you don't always agree.

Remember:

Sometimes parents or carers need to over-rule a young person. If you have shown in the past that you respect their opinions, young people will be more likely to accept your decisions on matters needing an adult's judgment.