

**I'm the Parent of a  
Teenager.....Get me out of Here!!**

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# Overview of Workshop

- Why Adolescence can be Difficult for everyone
- 11 Top Tips for Parents
- What if it goes to Penalties.....Five favourite adolescent tactics and what to do
- Minding yourself and Minding them
- Resources

# Why Adolescence can be Difficult for everyone.....Tasks for the Child

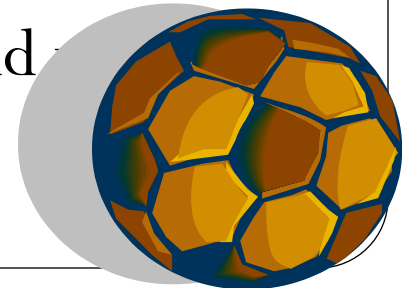
- Become more Independent: includes separating more from parents/family, trying new ways of relating with friends/peers & become more independent, and develop a capacity for closer/intimate relations with friends/peers.
- Developing a Healthy Sexual Identity: includes accepting your (rapidly changing) body and physique, being comfortable with this and using it effectively.
- Preparing for the Future: includes ongoing education, development of skills and preparation for the world of work and/or further study and training.
- Developing Personal Values: includes forming ideas and values which influence behaviour and thinking.

# Why Adolescence can be Difficult for everyone.....Opportunities & Risks

- Sexual/physical awakening from puberty
- Increasing demands from school ( state exams) and society (higher expectations)
- Trying out having more freedom (friends/activities) and choice
- However, risks can include
- Growing up with more demands made of them than their personal resources can handle
- Experience of “failure” & decide that as the future may not be bright, invest in activities which give short-term reward (eg. crime) instead of holding out for rewards later (eg. through education, training or business).

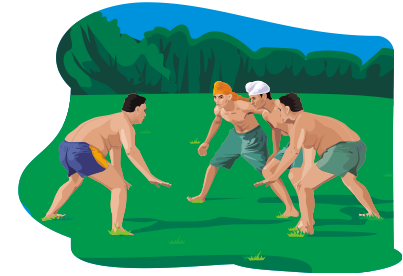
# 11 Top Tips for Parents

- One useful way to view yourself as a parent is as a football or sports team manager.....
  - You have to keep the family (team) happy, just not one person
  - When things go well the child (player) gets the credit & when things go wrong, its your fault!
  - You can pick the team, advise on tactics and still be able to do nothing about the performance!
  - As well as manager, you have to drive the bus, be the psychologist, physiotherapist & doctor.....and have to pay for everything!



# 1. Be Positive & Expect to Win

- To begin with, parents often only see the difficulties ahead.....but don't reflect on what & who helped the child get through the first dozen or so years
- So it helps to reflect on how you managed at every earlier stage...from sleepless nights through to getting them out of bed!
- TOP TIPS...what has always worked in the past for you and what positive behaviour are you already getting?....A great player can win *any* match, a great team can win *every* match!



## 2. Use a Squad System

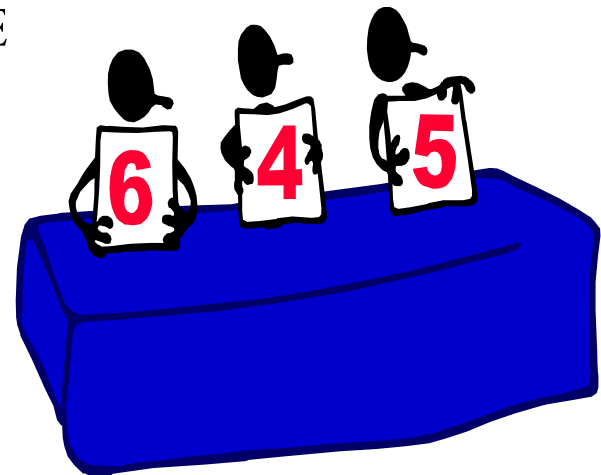
- Sometimes parents feel isolated, lonely and exhausted and often say they must be the only ones with difficult or moody teenagers
- You would be surprised how many parents feel this way and one of your greatest supports are *other* parents, often sharing the same worries and concerns
- TOP TIPS..You can also include in your squad school staff,



Youth workers, sports coaches,  
Voluntary agencies, family doctor and  
specialist services....in difficult times  
you may need to “empty the bench”!

# 3. Get on the Scoreboard early....

- One major mistake many parents make is to only focus on what you don't want from your teenager instead of what they are already doing well
- Even “basic” things such as getting up, eating meals, going to school or playing a game are a chance to encourage them and let them know you appreciate it
- TOP TIPS....think about the last FIVE positive behaviours you have got from your teenager?



## 4. Focus on Effort, Not Outcome

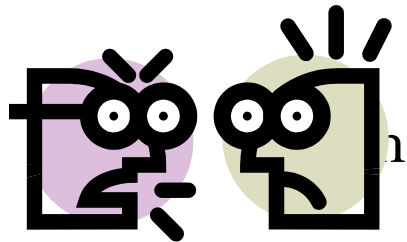


- Like life itself, we cannot control everything and effort is then much more important, and usually all *we* can control as success is never guaranteed
- At one stage, this man could not get on his school rugby team
- TOP TIP...try to praise more for EFFORT than SUCCESS

## 5. Its a Game of Two Halves

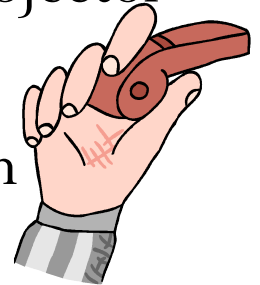
- It is *Normal* and *Healthy* to both get on very well *and* have disputes with your teenager, in fact teenagers may learn more from this pattern, rather than getting all they want or nothing
- Teenagers seems to do better with firm but reasonable rules/requests, but will not always show you appreciation for this!

- TOP TIPS...Trying too hard to be their friend or not giving leeway is difficult for you both, help learn to negotiate...they'll need it now and in the future!



## 6. Play to the Whistle

- In sport, good referees don't get noticed or remembered, and usually explain a few ESSENTIAL rules, the rest is interpretation (so you can decide in the moment what is best to do), *too many rules gives away your tactics!*
- Good referees *agree* rules with their officials, just like good parents and partners or ex-partners
- Good rules tell the teenager *what you can do* (eg, projector rule)
- TOP TIP..3-6 essential rules work much better than 10 or 20 essential/non-essential ones



## 7. Don't Count on Popularity

- Being effective is not the same as being popular, and not everyone wants you to succeed (Just ask this man!)
- Good managers and parents stick with the game plan even if not everyone likes it all the time
- TOP TIP...Think of a time you made an unpopular but effective decision



## 8. Don't Worry about "Offside"



- Teenage culture, like sports culture can be hard to understand, and like the “offside” rule, hard to explain to an outsider
- We all talked about (or tried to do) daft things as teenagers, just like this generation
- TOP TIP.... Listen to some Lady GAGA..you’ll be cool for five minutes at least!

# 9. Its a Marathon, not a Sprint

- The teenage period lasts for a number of years and the one thing that is certain is that things will change and the child who became a teenager will be a different young adult when leaving the teenage years
- Like any manager, tactics and approach have to change over the years, and it might feel like two steps forward and one step back.....
- TOP TIP....each week stop and think, or even better, write down one thing you did well as a parent and one thing you could learn from that week



# 10. Fancy Taking a Penalty?

- Teenagers tend to do surprisingly well when given responsibility, it can work in two ways.....firstly you get something done that you don't have to do yourself and secondly, he or she will know that *you* think that they are capable of doing this task
- TOP TIP....give them a task to do this week  
and see how it goes



# 11. You Can't win them All...

- No manager or parent will be successful all the time, no matter what you do
- So try to focus on what does go well and your successes, and don't worry if there is a disappointment
- Teenage development is not really about who wins or who is right or who will be proved right...**its about holding on to the relationship through the turbulent years, knowing that they will still need you and you will be happy about that!**



# What if it goes to Penalties...

- What follows is a brief guide to five of the most difficult problems a foster parent can face when raising a teenager..
- It really is like taking or saving penalties in a sudden death shoot out...it can seem very worrying and you just hope you don't let anyone down or make a mistake....



# 1. (Threats of) Running Away

- Try to talk and listen, but not give in necessarily...you want to try and understand how you can help in the situation
- Dealing with brief spells away from home needs to be done carefully, best to talk about the situation when *you* are calm
- Be honest with those who can help, as this is a common enough incident
- Talk to other parents or friends who your child may talk to away from home
- Instead of simply asking “**why?**” this happens or happened, try to work on how you can encourage the child to stay at home, without changing so much that it does not feel like your home

## 2. School Refusal/Lack of Effort

- Always work with the school/ educational system, they have lots of experience with these issues
- Focus on *solving* the problem without having to *explain* it
- One powerful technique is to attend the school if necessary (with prior agreement)
- Other options include bringing the child to work if you are employed and basing rewards at home around school performance
- If this persists, contact your GP for referral to psychological/mental health services, the Educational Welfare Officers are also there to help parents primarily

### 3. Threats of Suicide/Self-Harm

- Threats of or actual self-harm usually serve one main function....communication
- The best strategy is always to take such threats seriously right away, and get help for the child and you as soon as possible
- About half of the children I see in clinic have self-harmed or have seriously thought about self-harm, and up to 10% of teenagers may self-harm
- Help is at hand and GP referral onto local Mental Health services is very important, these are usually seen within 48 hours, in an emergency go to A&E
- Several approaches have been developed to work with Teenage self-harm, and many outcomes are very positive

## 4. Threats of/or Actual Violence

- The first point is not to become too concerned, this can often happen especially between siblings
- Don't entertain threats or play down any actual assaults, help is at hand and the Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer works closely with families in such cases
- Mental Health services also have a role and often good outcomes emerge once the crisis has past
- A critical point here is that the authorities can often do nothing to help unless parents actually seek assistance, and in a number of cases this one intervention turned the cases around completely

## 5. Disrespect: Swearing & Ignoring

- Most teenagers will display some element of these behaviours at some stage, sometimes due to copying peers and/or the fact that they are not sure how else to deal with a situation
- A key point is not getting drawn into a row when you are upset or annoyed, you are liable to say something you regret that can be held against you for ever!
- Not becoming provoked is important as is only ever talking to the child about the behaviour when your partner is also there, or a time for a single parent when you know the child is usually calmer
- Again, if it persists, seek onward referral and speak with school also to see what their view may be on this

# Minding Yourself and Minding Them

- Parenting teenagers often requires much energy, patience, forgiveness and hard work, so you need to remind your self and each other, that this often is a hard gig and you will need time with other people where children are not always discussed
- However, you do not want to do too much for the child as independence is a good quality to deliver
- Remember the airline advice...  
Put on you own oxygen mask before attending to your child!



# Some Useful Resources

Biddulph, S & S. (1998) *The complete secrets of happy children*  
London: Thorsons

Biddulph, S & S. (2004) *The secret of happy parents* London:  
Thorsons

Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (2001) *How to talk so kids will listen and  
listen so kids will talk* London: Picadilly Press

Harris, R. (2008) *The happiness trap* Boston: Trumpeter Books

Hayes, C. (2006) *Stress relief for teachers* London: Routledge

Pearsall, P. (2005) *The last self-help book you'll ever need* New  
York: Basic Books

[www.mindyourself.ie](http://www.mindyourself.ie) (for adolescents)

[www.getselfhelp.com](http://www.getselfhelp.com) (for parents & adolescents)

Many Thanks and Good Luck!

