



MANAGING YOUR TEENAGER'S WELLBEING

Your guide to navigating the teenage years



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WHAT IS WELLBEING?

Wellbeing is defined by an individual's health and contentment in life. It takes into account good physical and mental health and includes a balanced lifestyle with the ability to be productive and handle stress in life, to be aware of your emotions, be able to self-regulate and have a positive outlook in life.



TEENAGE DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

The teenage years are an interesting phase where your teenager will demand increased independence while at the same time also crave your attention. They are on their way to becoming young adults while developing emotional maturity and finding their own identity. It is a confusing time where they will need your undivided attention and support. It is your support at home and the right environment in school that will lay the foundation for a healthy and balanced lifestyle and an awareness of their own wellbeing.

WHY IS WELLBEING IMPORTANT FOR TEENAGERS?

Physical, emotional and mental health of teenagers contribute to their overall well-being. High levels of well being can help teenagers make right decisions in life, overcome challenges, develop positive relationships and reach their full potential.

WHY ARE THE TEENAGE YEARS DIFFERENT FROM CHILDHOOD AND ADULTHOOD?

Adolescence is the transitional period from childhood to adulthood. This is where significant growth and development takes place. The changes may be different for different individuals. But this provides a framework.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT STAGES IN ADOLESCENCE- EARLY, MIDDLE AND LATE:

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (AGES 10-14)

This is where the early stages of puberty occurs. They experience significant physical growth and develop deeper moral thinking. Their mindset is still focused on the present and cannot consider thinking for the future. As their body changes, they go through various emotions and may experience mood swings from the emotional rollercoaster.

MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 15-17)

Puberty is completed for both genders and most of them reach their adult height. Boys continue their growth development but it slows down for girls. They are also more aware of their physical appearance and develop the ability to think better as their independence increases. During this stage, they tend to think for their future and the consequences of their decisions. They form an interest in romance and relationships.

LATE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 18-24)

Changes in physical appearance lessen and they gain the ability to think more rationally. Their emotional stability increases and they develop a better understanding of their choices and actions, and how it affects them in the future. They may be faced with more stress as they are given more responsibilities in life and their social circle expands.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

Teenagers function differently from adults as their brains remodel. The back of the brain remodels first and the prefrontal cortex is remodelled last. The prefrontal cortex is the decision-making part of the brain that enables human beings to plan, consider consequences and be less impulsive. As the brain remodels extensively, teenagers rely on the part of the brain known as the Amygdala, which makes them more instinctive, emotional and impulsive. Their brain development depends on their age, experience and hormonal changes. This explains why they may make very mature decisions on one hand and in certain areas of their life and poor decisions on the other hand. This is due to the fact that their brain is undergoing a restructure- the back to front development alters their thinking as they are working through changes taking place in their brain.

During this phase, they re-examine their identity and their friends play an important role in their lives, they may also prefer more isolated activities and shut themselves in their room and listen to music. Parents may find it challenging to get teenagers to open up during this phase. It is important that you show your availability- be present when they need you to. Attending their key events and being present when they achieve milestones is important.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

1. IDENTITY



They figure out who they are and where they fit in. Their choice in clothing changes and they are influenced by their peers, cultural backgrounds, media and expectations at home and in school.



2. INDEPENDENCE

They seek more independence and make decisions on their own. This affects family routines and relationships.



3. RESPONSIBILITY

They seek responsibility and take on new roles at home and in school.



4. VALUES

They develop their own set of values and morals. They learn to question things and think about consequences to their actions.

EMOTIONAL CHANGES

1. MOODS



They might experience periodic mood swings and a change of emotions between highs and lows. They can seem unpredictable at times as they are learning how to manage their emotions. They also get more sensitive as they begin to develop an understanding of emotions and expressions.



2. SELF-ESTEEM

They are conscious about their physical appearance as their body develops. There is a tendency for them to use their peers as comparison.



3. CONFLICTING THOUGHTS AND DECISION MAKING ABILITIES

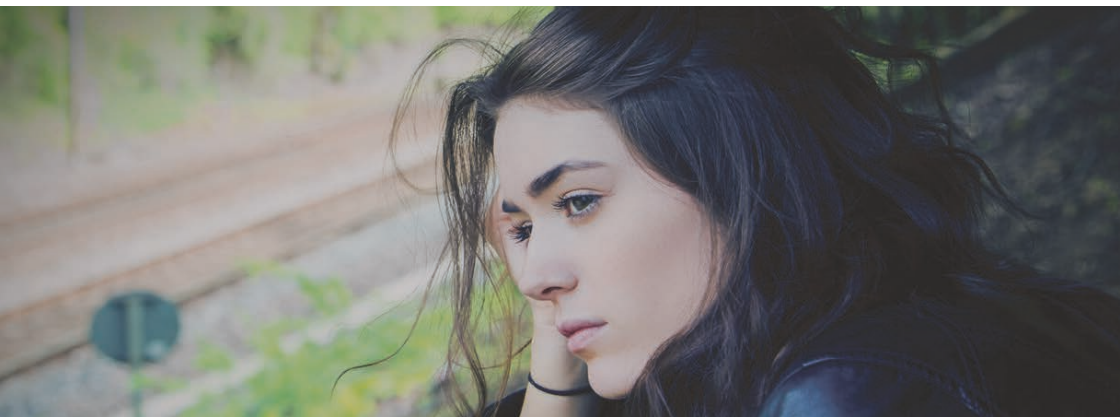
Their mindset begins to alter as their brain develops. They begin to understand the decision making process as they learn about actions and consequences. As they gain independence whilst still dependent on family, they may experience conflicting thoughts. They will also be influenced by their peers in several aspects.

WHEN DOES IT BECOME A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE?

It becomes a mental health issue when it impairs your child's ability to function well at home, in school and socially. The commonest is anxiety and depression. It is normal to feel anxious as we all experience anxiety from time to time. However, when it starts to impact on one's happiness and becomes too frequent, anxiety could develop into panic attacks. This then becomes a problem that should be addressed. Anxiety and depression are interlinked and children who appear to be excessively sad are prone to self-harm.

HOW DO YOU DETECT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS?

Mental illness in children can be hard for parents to identify. Parents should be aware of the warning signs of mental health problems in children and how to help them cope. Here are some signs that parents can look out for.



1. DRASTIC CHANGES IN MOOD

Be observant towards any drastic change in emotions, especially extreme emotional sensitivity and withdrawals from social activities.

2. HEALTH ISSUES

They might develop migraines or stomach discomfort due to anxiety or negative emotions.

3. EATING DISORDER

When you notice a sudden loss of appetite and refusal to consume food. Using the bathroom frequently after food can also be sign.

4. DIFFICULTY FOCUSING

Restlessness, uneasiness as well as a lack of concentration that causes them to perform poorly in school and academically.

5. SELF INFLICTED HARM

Being troubled can lead to depression which may result in self-injury, also called self-harm where they intentionally hurt themselves. This can lead to suicidal tendencies.

6. SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Some children may be influenced by their peers and use drugs or alcohol to try to cope with their feelings.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THEM WHEN IT BECOMES A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE?

- ✓ Understand their condition and the issues they are facing
- ✓ Seek medical attention
- ✓ Support them on their journey to overcome the issue

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, understand and regulate your emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathise with others and develop positive relationships. Emotional intelligence should be reinforced at home, where parents can support their children to develop these skills naturally and organically.

When emotions are at a peak, children, teenagers and adults react in ways they normally wouldn't. Over time, we develop skills and strategies to regulate our emotions and respond in ways that are mature and responsible. Studies have shown that children who can manage their emotion-driven impulses are more successful in engaging pro-social behaviours and accomplishing tasks. Children with higher EQ (emotional quotient) tend to do better academically and nurture better relationships with their teachers and peers.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THEM WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?



1. VERBALISE EMOTIONS

Talk to your teenager as often as possible and encourage them to articulate their feelings. Be present not just physically but mentally and emotionally when you speak to your son and daughter. It is absolutely critical to have meaningful conversations that go beyond 'physical well-being'. Talk about emotional topics and give them the freedom to voice their opinions and engage in discussions respectfully. When they are able to express their thoughts and emotions openly at home, they become sensitive towards people's emotions while increasing their social awareness. You can also make conversations fun by including some humour. It helps to refer to some funny anecdotes when you need to cheer up your teenager. Humour is indeed the best medicine!

2. OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Discuss ways in which they can overcome challenges and learn from experiences. Explain strategies to tackle their struggles and encourage them to keep a positive mind. You can also engage in some role play to equip them with communication strategies to use in real-life situations. Share with them personal accounts of how you were once in their shoes without sounding condescending. Communication is key. As a family, partake in activities that evoke joy and positive emotions. It is a great way to bond and strengthen the relationship.

3. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness equips teenagers with the ability to pause instead of the intrinsic need for automatic reactions which may have harmful consequences. Using this tool, they can pause, reconnect with their breath and develop resilience and kindness. From that moment on, they can see situations better and respond to it wisely.

As adults, we should practice what we preach- inculcate mindfulness into your daily life and practice it together with your teenager. There are several mindfulness apps like Calm and Headspace that are quite simple to use. It's a great way to incorporate mindfulness into their lives. Teenagers are definitely keener when technology is involved.

PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Teenagers sleep longer. We all did while growing up. They also find it harder to go to bed. There is a science behind it all. The hormone- Melatonin tends to secrete later at night as compared to when they were younger. This affects their circadian rhythms making them sleep later at night and longer in the mornings. A teenager typically needs 8-10 hours of sleep. Adequate sleep is absolutely critical to their well-being. A sleep routine like a predetermined bed time, quiet time with no devices 30 minutes before sleep time and checking in of all devices in a common area outside of the bedroom helps with the sleep routine.

Nutrition and fitness-ultimately you as a parent are in charge of what your child eats and what physical activity they are involved in. Growth of bones and body tissues demands a lot of energy. It is a high calorie activity hence eating sufficiently and consuming the right kind of food is important. Dietary habits that are set in adolescence tend to follow them through their lives. Whilst some children tend to be able to get away with consuming processed and junk food, you're setting them up for unhealthy lifestyles down the line.

To remain healthy, children should be doing physical activity on most days of the week. Half an hour to an hour a day of physical activity is ideal. Exercise helps your body release endorphins and that makes one happy. The best way is to build exercise into your teenager's routine so it doesn't feel like a chore.

Being sympathetic and understanding of the physical changes they're going through is important. These issues are mainly hormone regulated and it differs between both genders. Girls tend to start puberty at a younger age than boys. Furthermore, they experience breast development and menstruation; it can be a very difficult time for them and you need to be there for them every step of the way.

MANAGING COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT

Effective communication is when both you and your teenager can talk freely about your feelings. In the process of talking, each party feels heard and understood, where you don't feel judged and there is empathy demonstrated by both parties. When effective communication takes place, relating to your teenager will not seem so daunting.



TIPS TO COMMUNICATE BETTER



1. BE FACTUAL

What your children do or say is not a reflection on you. While we may not agree with some of the things they do, we do not have to get upset. Instead, understand that they may not make good decisions at times. If you take a step back, you will be able to guide them to make better choices in the future thus enhancing their confidence. You will be less emotional when you realise your role as a parent is to guide them and not make decisions on their behalf.



2. PATIENCE

While some of what your teenager says and does may not make sense to you as you may not agree or even comprehend them, you should not lose patience. Sometimes they just need you to be around them and be a silent pillar of support. It's a way to build trust and respect. Communication bridges cannot be built in a day.



3. CURIOSITY

Ask questions because you are curious to find out about what goes on in their lives. Information is key and helps you to support them better. It also makes your teenager less defensive and more open.



4. GENUINENESS

Show genuine interest in your child, their passions, quirks, and what is going on in their lives and that of their friends.



5. UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

Listen to them when they are sharing. Remove all gadgets and technology and be present.



6. SHOW EMPATHY

Ask yourself what you would have done if you were in their shoes and at that age.



7. AVOID GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Do not preach to them about what they should or should not do. Respect them and talk to them as adults.



8. ACKNOWLEDGE THEM

Listen to their difficulties and struggles. Do not belittle what they share and see things from their perspective.



9. VERBALISE PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

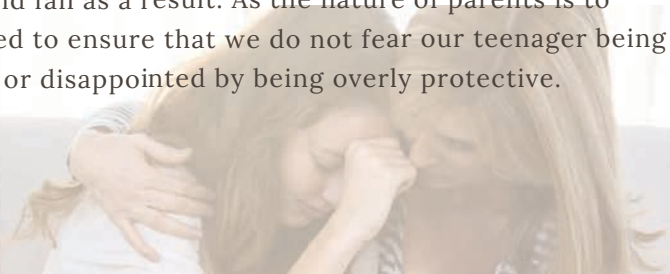
Regardless of age, your child needs praise and encouragement to feel good about themselves. Praising your teenager will also build their confidence and self-esteem. At this age of exploration and uncertainty, teenagers need the affirmation from their parents to know that they have done well. Be mindful not to over-praise, and ensure that the praise rendered is genuine.



10. ALLOW YOUR TEENAGER TO FAIL

As the saying goes, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”. Living in a world where everything is instant, teenagers need to understand that success requires hard work and time.

They will find many instances where they fall short of their own expectations and fail as a result. As the nature of parents is to protect, we need to ensure that we do not fear our teenager being uncomfortable or disappointed by being overly protective.



Understanding your teenager is a constant work in progress. It can be a challenge but with some effort, it will get easier over time. Work together to maintain a respectful relationship. Remember your teenager is their own person and does not need to conform to your expectations of him or her. Respect them for who they are and you will navigate this stage with positivity and confidence.

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO YOUR TEENAGER?

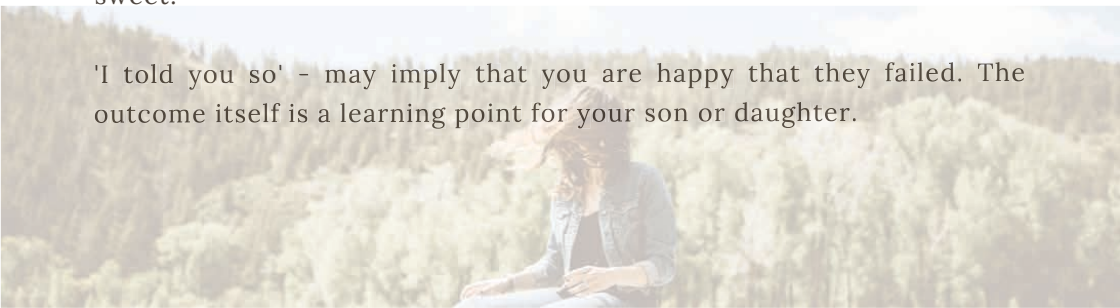
Avoid negative conversations with your teenager. Instead use words of encouragement and positivity. Avoid these sentences which most likely will trigger a negative response:

'You are not grown up enough to make your own decisions' - this comes from a place of authority and discourages independence and diminishes responsibility towards their decisions.

'Because I said so' - pretty much sums up a discussion with no scope for understanding the rationale. This does not nurture decision making capabilities in your teenager.

'This is not allowed' - it is important to identify boundaries and define positive behaviour but prohibiting something without explaining the rationale will only lead to opposite behaviour. Forbidden fruit is always sweet!

'I told you so' - may imply that you are happy that they failed. The outcome itself is a learning point for your son or daughter.



USEFUL APPS

With the advancement in technology, it is easy to access digital tools that will benefit your teenagers. Here are some recommended apps that both parent and child can utilise.

MY FITNESS PAL - NUTRITION

MyFitnessPal is a smartphone app and website that tracks diet and exercise. You can set goals and log activities with this app. It allows you to keep a food diary and keeps you motivated. Furthermore, you can find healthy recipes for guilt-free meals.

HEADSPACE - WELLBEING

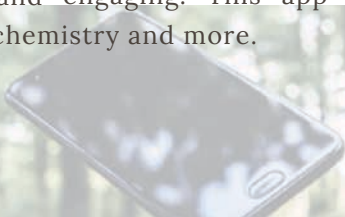
This mobile app ensures mental wellbeing. It contains guided and unguided meditation exercises, promotes stress relief and encourages positive emotions, you can also explore videos and articles to take you on a mindfulness journey.

NARRATE - JOURNALLING

A journal app that teaches teenagers the benefits of keeping a diary and ensuring their psychological wellbeing. Journaling their thoughts and experiences allow them to stay creative, inspired and motivated daily.

KHAN ACADEMY - EDUCATION

An educational app for teenagers with courses and explanations of different topics and content. It contains videos to make their learning journey entertaining and engaging. This app offers k-12 subjects, mathematics, biology, chemistry and more.



POCKET GUARD - PERSONAL FINANCE

This app helps budget monthly expenditures and ensure savings. It prevents one from spending too much, tracks bills and everyday expenses. It will encourage your teenager to save more for their goals and future.



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ABOUT ETONHOUSE



The EtonHouse International Education Group is headquartered in Singapore with 120 schools in over 12 countries. Together these schools provide high quality education to over 12,000 children globally.

Over the last 25 years, EtonHouse has been at the forefront of international education offering innovative pre-schools and K-12 schools across Asia. The Group runs several primary and secondary schools offering the International Baccalaureate PYP, MYP, DP and IGCSE programmes.

The Group is deeply committed to research and professional development and excellence in educational practice. It has an in-house research and professional development centre that provides continuous training and pedagogical support to its teaching staff.

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