

Promoting Resilience in the Millennial Adolescent

The Lighthouse Model





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quietly improving lives

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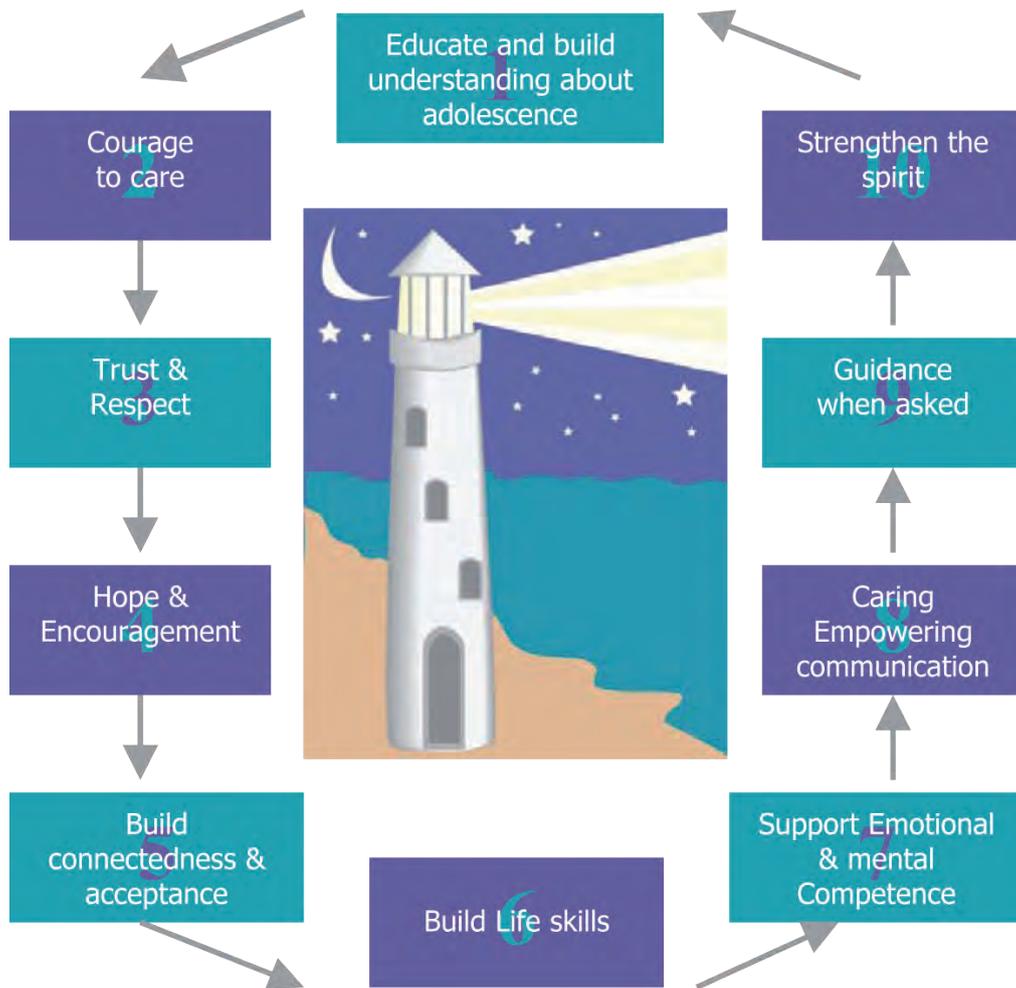
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The Lighthouse Model

Invisible sign: "Make me feel I matter..."





VISION

The Department for Communities' Office for Youth has engaged Maggie Dent to deliver a series of workshops on building the awareness of the importance of resilience in adolescents.

The workshops will be delivered throughout Western Australia to offer parents, service providers and adolescents the latest knowledge and information on the promotion of resilience. This model builds on the "10 Building Blocks Model for 0-12 year olds" that was explored in the Enriching Resilience Initiative from 2007.

The "Promoting Resilience in the Millennial Adolescent" workshops will incorporate practical strategies and skills as well as the latest information regarding the specific needs of today's adolescents. The aim is to raise awareness of the importance of building resilience in many areas with a key focus being the "Lighthouse Model".

Given the nature of the modern world, the Millennial Adolescent needs more support than ever before. They need more than family and friends to guide them on their bumpy ride to adulthood. They need "lighthouses" who can care for them while being a solid, reliable source of comfort when the ride gets tough.

"Lighthouses" are any significant adult who develops a caring, meaningful involvement with an adolescent and who supports them for all, or part, of their journey to adulthood.

We will also examine how resilience assists the developing adolescent in gaining autonomy and a healthy sense of identity – two of the "essentials" of this time of life. The "Lighthouse Model" is an easy-to-understand exploration of the very broad areas of concern for families, schools and communities with the aim of improving the mental, psychological, physical and emotional well being of Western Australian adolescents through education for both parents and people who work with them.

The workshops will be supported by a booklet for parents and service providers that has been co-authored by Maggie Dent and the Office for Youth. There will also be an interactive CD for the adolescents who attend the seminars.

The vision for Western Australia is for a paradigm shift in the way adolescence is viewed. Adolescence is a period of life when there is massive potential for growth and healthy development during a child's transition to adulthood and a final window of opportunity to work positively with young people to help them realise their full potential on all levels. This paradigm shift would influence family life, educational opportunities and the work environments.

We are proud of our State and even more enthusiastic about the children and young people who live here. These workshops will support families and those who work with adolescents to better provide for the health and well being of young people – for now and into their futures.



BACKGROUND ON ADOLESCENCE

What is adolescence?

Simplistically, adolescence is the bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is a stage or time of life that shapes the rest of an individual's life, either positively or negatively.

“Adolescence refers to the multifaceted set of maturational sequences and elements that impact on life for people moving from childhood to adulthood.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p.14.

As every child is different, the maturation rate of every adolescent is different. This means that there are no clear markers or boundaries for qualitative dimensions. There are two main theoretical schools of thought around adolescence – those that examine biological parameters and those that consider socio-cultural parameters of maturation. For the purposes of convenience, the “Promoting Resilience in the Millennial Adolescent” initiative will concentrate on those aged 12 to 18 years, even though there is significant evidence that shows that adolescence can be considered as young as 10 and continue well into the early 20's.

Main drivers in adolescence

- Seeking autonomy.
- Identity searching.
- Needing to belong.
- Immature brain driving mature looking body.
- Separating from parents.
- Forming relationships.

Adolescents are learning how to manage their rapidly changing minds, bodies and emotions while navigating their way through the most important years of their education. They are developing key skills that will enable them to manage life, at the same time as exploring their identity and potential. The strong drive to become independent is matched in intensity by the drives to belong with their peers and to step back from parental influence.

“Expecting the adolescent to forever remain a child sets you up for disappointment, disillusionment and hurt. Accepting the fact that the child-parent relationship is over and embracing the different but potentially wonderful one that lies ahead is a giant leap toward getting along with a teenager.”

Feinstein, S 2007, *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, USA, pp. 41-42.

One of the keys to helping adolescents to become more resilient is by developing emotional, social and spiritual competence in the presence of healthy adults who care about them and who understand the unique development of the transforming adolescent. All adolescents are consciously or unconsciously shaping their evolving identities on the significant adults who are present in their lives. The role of “charismatic adults” in the promotion of the healthy development of adolescents is explored in depth with the “Lighthouse Model”. The “millennial generation”, or MilGen, adolescent has unique characteristics that are impacting on their journey through adolescence.

“The United Nations (2005b, p2) makes an important observation fundamental to the global decision making about young people...“ a simple but often ignored fact; young people today are different from any of the previous generations of youth. It is essential that youth interventions are relevant and valid for the current young generation in society and not mired in the realities of times past.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 46.



The year 2000 saw a new millennium begin. Even though every generation of parents may have found adolescents confusing and challenging, the current generation of young people, sometimes called “Gen Y”, “Digitals” or “Millennials”, have created a unique set of concerns and challenges for parents and teachers. According to Peter Sheahan in his book *Generation Y* there are nine character traits that define the Y Generation (those born between 1978 and 1994):

1. Street smart.
2. Aware.
3. Life style centred.
4. Independently dependent.
5. Informal.
6. “Tech” savvy.
7. Stimulus junkies.
8. Sceptical.
9. Impatient.

Essentially, this means that the normal generation gap difficulties have become a chasm for many well meaning parents. It is important not to categorize young people as all belonging to one homogenous group with these characteristics, however, today’s adolescents are not only going through their own life transition but also right in the midst of a time of unprecedented society change. These two concurrent change processes have impacted deeply on young people. New media, information technologies and the Internet have changed the context of adolescents’ lives and the nature of interpersonal relations. The constraints experienced by their parents such as time, space, identities, communities and physical geographic boundaries, no longer exist.

“...technosavvy, image driven, develop graphics skills before literacy skills, do not think in a linear fashion but rather think non linear, loopy, in hyperlink hopscotch fashion. Time for them is measured in microseconds and survival of the fastest, not the fittest. They have a strong sense of immediacy, a desire for instant gratification, and a low boredom threshold. They learn by interaction and doing rather than sitting and listening and they prefer to experience and feel rather than think and analyse.”

Donnison, S 2004, “<http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/handle/10072/2085>” *The “Digital Generation”, Technology, and Educational Change: An Uncommon Vision*, p. 23.

In every age, there are advantages and disadvantages to living during that time. In this modern era, advantages include the ability to connect globally within seconds, and the availability of massive information pathways no matter where you live (provided you have access to the Internet). Disadvantages include the increase of abuse of children and adolescents and the increase in aggression and bullying using cyber space and mobile phones. The pressure for adolescents to be conditioned by the consumer driven “must have” mentality has created many levels of social alienation. The price of affluence for some families has been the breakdown of healthy family relationships, as the pursuit of financial prosperity has come at the high price of alienation from their MilGen children. Those without the financial means to meet the demands of the massive consumption patterns often end up with “plastic money” or credit card debt.

“Young people addicted to technology are dialling up debts that will take a lifetime to overcome... peer pressure on young people to incur debts for goods and chattels in a “must have now” society is driving the upswing in personal debt.”

Passmore, D 2005, *Lifelong Debt Only a Click Away*, The Sunday Mail, p. 38.

Lower social and emotional competencies have impacted on the generation with an increase in illicit drug and alcohol abuse, road rage, intentional delinquent behaviour (that is often repeated), mental illness, eating disorders, obesity, homelessness and premature deaths as a result of poor decision making.



Many adolescents struggle with problems of enormous magnitude

- Overall morbidity and mortality rates increase 200-300% between middle childhood and late adolescence/early adulthood.
- The onset of problems such as nicotine dependence, alcohol and drug use, poor health habits, etc. that will show up as mortality in adulthood.
- 80% of teenagers reported engaging in one or more risky behaviours during a period of a month.
- Many adult onset problems such as depression can be traced to early episodes in adolescence.

“Every year in Australia 20,000 people aged under 18 years of age disappear or go missing.”

(Australian Institute of Criminology.)

Most families and friends of missing adolescents believed that **conflict about authority, rules, or independent behaviour** were the most common reasons for disappearance.

Then there is the challenge of “hot cognition” which is defined as thinking under conditions of high arousal and emotion. This can be extremely risky for adolescents. When comparing performance of risky driving scenarios (eg. running orange lights) on computer simulations between adolescents and adults, L. Steinberg et al found similar results between the two groups, when tested alone. When tested in the company of friends, however, adults showed no change whereas adolescents showed clearly increased risk of accidents.

These statistics show the possible effects of ineffective relationships that involve volatile developing adolescents and their often confused adult carers. New research shows that the adolescent years are critical in the development of mental and emotional competence that will impact on resilience in adult life. The unique changes in the brain during adolescence impact enormously on the young person’s thinking, moods, behaviour and ability to communicate.

In promoting resilience in adolescents, adult carers, parents, teachers and others working with them must have a mature understanding of what is happening. They will then be able to provide better support for adolescents. Only then can adults appreciate the vital role of the “lighthouse” in adolescents’ lives. The adolescent years hold an enormous potential for positive growth and development that is often missed by a problem or crisis focus that has become the norm.

RESILIENCE

What is resilience?

Resilience refers to the ability of a person to successfully manage their life, and to successfully adapt to change and stressful events in healthy and constructive ways. It is about survivability and “bounce-back-ability” to life experiences — both the advantageous ones and the challenging, traumatic ones.

Other definitions include:

“A universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity.”

The International Resilience Project, 2005, p. 3.

In humanistic psychology resilience refers to “an individual’s ability to thrive and fulfil potential despite or perhaps because of stressors or risk factors.”

James Neill.

Nan Bahr writes that seeing resilience as a “competence” is a useful perspective because that means it is something that can be actively developed, taught, practised, demonstrated and deployed.



This means “that we can impact young people’s lives by providing the right configuration of experiences and learning events.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 184.

Indeed, Bahr goes on to say that without using this compassionate approach and doing nothing to help adolescents...

“We are dooming people to suffer the nastiest consequences of adversity. It seems a callous approach to refuse to actively attempt to develop resilience attributes because it is assumed to be an immutable trait.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 184.

Tim Burns, a US education consultant who works with adolescents with alcohol and drug problems, explored the results of a longitudinal study carried out in a severely disadvantaged area in the Bronx in New York - an area where a large number of children were assessed on the “potential to live successful lives.” Given the high crime rate, poverty, mental illness, drug use, high adult prison incarceration and drive-by shootings, the study determined that few had a real chance of success. On following up many years later it was found that almost 80% of these children were living meaningful lives. Findings revealed three characteristics present in the successful adults:

1. Sense of humour.
2. Healthy level of detachment.
3. One person who cared and believed in them.

Why is resilience so importance in today’s modern world?

Young people have always needed effective coping skills. The modern world is more challenging than ever before and, in comparison to previous generations, many young people today have fewer resources to deal with adversity. Our main concerns today involve the numbers of young people who are depressed, suicidal and engaging in maladaptive coping strategies such as substance abuse and anti-social behaviour.

Despite advances in modern life and more readily available knowledge and information, today’s modern world is not producing more resilient children, teenagers or young adults. Indeed, those working in both research and the health sciences are finding the reverse happening – more teenage pregnancies, depression, anxiety disorders, violence, illicit and social drug use, family disharmony, homelessness and often lower school success and literacy rates.

Adolescents are succumbing to more emotional, social and mental problems and disorders. They are also struggling with obesity, low self esteem and self worth, disconnection and the constant struggle with stress. Depression can effect any young person, even high achievers, so we must not assume that any adolescent is reliably and consistently resilient and able to make decisions that will guarantee their safety.

“It is therefore safest to assume that all young people, regardless of whether they seem vulnerable or not, could benefit from a focused attempt to develop resilient attributes.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 185.

The world experienced by today’s adolescent is very different to the one in which many of their parents were raised. The rapidly changing world has created a dilemma for those who are responsible for raising children and, even more importantly, adolescents. The generation gap is now a chasm that makes it harder to communicate, given the modern context that our young people live in. This is why it is so important to lift the awareness in communities and homes on how resilience is built or promoted in today’s children and teenagers.

From birth, we are building personal resilience through the acquisition of various life skills. The better the quality of parental care that children are exposed to, the stronger their resilience - provided the care has allowed for children to have opportunities to explore the world, make mistakes and learn how to overcome adversity.



Adversity is not all bad. Indeed, many of the most successful, competent and influential people in the world are doing so BECAUSE of adversity in childhood. This is where we can develop a social conscience and understanding of the need for change to cultural attitudes that exist.

The ability to overcome setbacks, disappointments or failure can be determined by the amount of positive resilience, protective factors and/or patterns of behaviour acquired by a person.

Resilience should be understood as a vital ingredient in the process of parenting all children. It is a process that directs our interactions as we strengthen our children's ability to meet life's challenges and pressures with confidence and perseverance. The most potentially dangerous time in an adolescent's life is between 14 and 16 years. This is why the "Lighthouse Model" clearly focuses on how to support our young people in building strengths and competencies.

Bonnie Benard, considered by many as the mother of the concept of resilience, has worked with children considered to be at risk for many years. Rather than focusing on what was wrong in these children's lives, she explored what was working, and what was helping them to cope with their very dysfunctional lives. This study led to her developing a list of protective factors that were needed in all communities to promote resilience.

Protective factors that enrich resilience in 12 year olds and above:

- Increasing bondedness.
- Learning life skills.
- Establishing and maintaining clear boundaries.
- Providing care and support.
- Communicating high and positive expectations.
- Creating opportunities for participation and involvement.

Michael Rutter, an English expert, identified the following protective factors for young people:

- Stresses fewer in number and shorter in duration.
- No genetic disposition.
- Easy temperament.
- Being female.
- Positive school climate.
- Successful mastery and self-efficacy.
- Warm, close relationship with an adult.
- Planning/goal setting as a coping skill.

Norman Gazey's research found the following protective functions as being valuable in developing resilience:

- Effectiveness in work, play and love.
- Healthy expectancies and a positive outlook.
- Self esteem and internal locus of control.
- Self discipline.
- Problem solving/critical thinking skills.
- Humour.

Steven and Sybil Wolin described the following four goals of resiliency:

1. Master painful memories rather than the victim trap of rehashing the past.
2. Accept that the family left its mark.
3. Get revenge by living well and not squandering energy blaming and finding fault.
4. Break the cycle of family trouble and put the past in its place.



Factors identified by MindMatters, a national initiative to build resilience in schools, are:

- Connectedness.
- Relationship with caring adult.
- Support, belonging, role models.
- Self esteem.
- Belief in own ability to cope.
- Handling the demands of school.
- Sense of control.

Robert Brooks PhD and Sam Goldstein PhD, identified the following ten ways to help build a resilient mind set in children:

- Be empathetic.
- Communicate with respect.
- Be flexible.
- Give your undivided attention.
- Accept your kids for who they are.
- Give kids a chance to contribute.
- Treat mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Stress your children's strengths.
- Let your kids solve problems and make decisions.
- Discipline to teach.

From *Raising Resilient Children* by Robert Brooks PhD and Sam Goldstein PhD.

“Thirty years of research tells us that resilient people are happier, live longer and are more successful in school and jobs, are happier in relationships and are less likely to suffer depression.”

K. Reivich, A & Shatte, A 2002; Werner, E & Smith, R 2001, *Journeys from childhood to midlife: risk, resilience, and recovery.*

Characteristics of a resilient person:

- The ability to bounce back and recover from almost anything.
- Optimistic and flexible thinking skills.
- Have a 'where there's a will, there's a way' attitude.
- Tend to see problems as opportunities to learn and grow.
- The ability to hang in there, persevere and persist.
- Have a healthy, authentic self esteem.
- Capable of setting clear, realistic and attainable goals.
- Have a healthy social support network.
- Practise assertiveness rather than aggression or passivity.
- Seldom dwell on the past or the future.
- Have well developed emotional and spiritual competence.
- Learn from previous challenges and mistakes.
- Have a capacity for detachment.
- Have a well developed sense of humour.
- Have meaningful involvement with others or their community.
- Treat themselves and others with respect.
- Have problem solving and conflict resolution



Characteristics which break down resilience:

- **Destructive relationships**... as experienced by the rejected or unclaimed child, hungry for love but unable to trust, expecting to be hurt again.
- **Climates of futility**... as encountered by the insecure youngster, crippled by feelings of inadequacy and a fear of failure.
- **Learned irresponsibility**... as seen in the youth whose sense of powerlessness may be masked by indifference or defiant, rebellious behaviour.
- **Loss of purpose**... as portrayed by a generation of self-centred youth, desperately searching for meaning in a world of confusing values.

Brendtro, L & Brokenleg, M 1990, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*.

British psychiatrist Michael Rutter identified the following risk variables in children who developed psychiatric disorders and delinquency in adulthood:

- Marital discord.
- Low socio-economic discord.
- Large family size.
- Paternal criminality.
- Maternal psychiatric disorder.
- Removal from home by local authorities.
- Major loss experience not resolved (death, moving home, major illness).
- Being male.
- Repeated bullying or harassment.
- Low literacy skills.
- Negative school experiences.
- Low social competence.
- Lack of significant caring adult relationship.
- Contrasting and conflicting experiences between home and school.
- Highly spirited / energetic children.
- Ethnic / cultural differences.
- Disabilities of any kind.
- Uncertain / different sexual preferences.

In *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Sheryl Feinstein identifies the following danger signs of teens at risk:

- Isolation from family and friends.
- Sudden changes in schoolwork, job performance or athletic activities.
- Drastic mood swings.
- Lack of interest in outside school activities.
- Family conflict.
- Living in a community with high crime and easy availability of alcohol and drugs.
- Delinquent friends.
- Academic failure.
- Change in eating and sleeping habits.
- Cutting or hurting themselves.

The essentials for troubled adolescents and ones who seem to be travelling well are exactly the same. They need “charismatic, caring adults” or a “lighthouse” who can act as an anchor – much like young babies and toddlers need a secure base.



“LIGHTHOUSES”

Attributes of “lighthouses” in adolescents’ lives:

1. Solid and reliable.
2. Offer protection.
3. Well informed about adolescent development.
4. Offer safety.
5. Shine light in the darkness.
6. Show the way from potential danger.
7. Offer silent guidance.
8. Give hope.
9. Committed to the greater good of all.

They shine a light on the sign around an adolescent’s neck that says
“Show me you care”

“Lighthouses” support adolescents in navigating the uncertain waters of adolescence. They will:

1. Have knowledge and understanding of adolescence.
2. Have the courage to care.
3. Be trustworthy and respectful.
4. Give hope and encouragement.
5. Build connectedness through genuine acceptance.
6. Encourage mastery and teach life skills.
7. Help adolescents manage “big ugly emotional states”.
8. Practise caring, empowering communication.
9. Give guidance when asked.
10. Strengthen the spirit – including laughter and lightness.

They shine a light on the invisible sign around an adolescent’s neck that says
“Make me feel I matter”

The influence of a potential role model is increased when, in the eyes of the young person, they fulfil the following criteria:

- Attractiveness (physical and emotional).
- Social power (over reward and punishment).
- Status (perceived importance of model).
- Competence (specifically in area of shared interest).
- Nurturance (perceived concern for the observer).
- Interaction level (degree of contact).
- Similarity (characteristics in common or expected due to similar life experiences or genetic heritage).

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 194.

“The complexity of the types of development that help young people toward resilience indicate that any approach needs to be proactive, holistic and part of an on going ethos rather than a program for implementation.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 195.

“One of the givens of this generation is the certainty of uncertainty.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 196.



Conclusion: All adolescents will benefit from having committed, capable and compassionate “lighthouses” or charismatic adults who support their growth and development. These “lighthouses” need to guide, support and provide a safe harbour for young people while they discover their unique strengths, weaknesses and place in the world.

“We’re all here for a reason. I believe a bit of that reason is to throw little torches out to lead people through the dark.”

Whoopi Goldberg USA

Every adolescent needs a “lighthouse” ... to help them navigate the uncertain waters of the adolescent journey.

“People who have had a strong connection with a strong positive role model during adolescence are much more resilient throughout their life.”

Bahr, N & Pendergast, D 2007, *The Millennial Adolescent*, ACER Press, Victoria, Australia, p. 194.

7 key roles for “lighthouses”:

1. Understanding adolescence.
2. Lighting the inner flame of possibility.
3. Building trust and being trustworthy.
4. Managing “big ugly emotional states”.
5. Building life skills and competencies.
6. Caring, empowering communication.
7. Strengthening the spirit.

ADOLESCENCE

Understanding adolescence

Fundamental facts about adolescence from *Parenting The Teenage Brain* by Sheryl Feinstein:

1. A mother’s education is the greatest indicator of a teenager’s future success.
2. Teenagers function mainly via the amygdala – the emotional centre of the brain.
3. During the teenage years there is a huge window of opportunity to learn key life skills like impulse control, developing relationships and communication skills.
4. Massive pruning of the brain occurs during adolescence.
5. Short term memory increases 30% during adolescence.
6. The closer a girl is emotionally to her father, the later she enters puberty.
7. The teen brain craves novelty.
8. Teens need more sleep than pre teens or adults.
9. 70% of teens have difficulty waking up in the morning.
10. Students with close bonds to their parents are less likely to drop out of school.
11. Only 5 hours of playing violent computer games will show brain activity with aggressive thoughts.
12. 40% of adolescent deaths are caused by vehicle accidents.
13. 50% of teens have tried drinking by age 14.
14. Adolescents often misinterpret body language and the spoken word.
15. Computer games emphasise rapid responses in the teen’s brain instead of encouraging thoughtful decisions.
16. Children who are born prematurely are at high risk for dropping out of school as teenagers.



Let's get technical about adolescent brain development...

“The new knowledge about the teen brain shows us that adolescence offers perhaps a second chance – or at least an additional one – to unleash the enormous potential and possibilities that lie within a person’s brain and to shape positively that person’s social, emotional and intellectual development. It means that what happens during their adolescent years is very important and can have a considerable and long-lasting impact on their lives.”

Corbin, B 2008, *Unleashing The Potential of the Teenage Brain: 10 Powerful Ideas*, Corwin Press, USA, p. 122.

There are three major transformations that occur in the brain during the teenage years:

1. **Overproduction of dendrites and synaptic connections** - there will have been zillions of synaptic connections in an adolescent’s brain by the end of adolescence. This massive potential growth is dependent upon using this “window of opportunity” as positively as possible. When neurons communicate with each other, synaptic connections are created and learning occurs. The more you engage in an activity, the more dendrites grow and the stronger the synaptic connections become (Feinstein 2007, p. 4). This thickening of the grey matter is due to massive changes in the synaptic reorganization, meaning more usage and more connections (Durstun & Casey 2001, p. 40, pp. 1012-1020).

During this period, adolescents are acquiring learning and knowledge at an unprecedented rate. However, if they are not engaged in their education or in positive pursuits like music, reading, sport, creative arts or practical skill development, they may be learning things that can impede their development for the rest of their lives. Those who are spending their time watching television, playing video games, binge drinking, drug taking or indulging in other risk taking behaviours, are strengthening those areas of their brain.

This is why the role of caring adults is vital in helping adolescents to develop thinking skills which enhance their capacity to predict, plan or make measured choices. Consequently, this will help lower the morbidity rate of young people.

Adolescents need help managing their overactive amygdala and the effects of surging hormones, to help them build social and emotional competences. This, in turn, will help them build positive connectedness with others on their journey towards adulthood.

“The brain’s ability to acquire and retain new information as well as the reliability and degree of connectivity of the brain’s neural pathways are largely influenced by the quality, type, and number of experiences that teenagers receive.”

Corbin, B 2008, *Unleashing The Potential of the Teenage Brain: 10 Powerful Ideas*, Corwin Press, USA, p. 125.

Please remember, during this period adolescents can learn something quickly and with more ease than any other time in life - especially impulse control, how to cook, fix a car, surf, ride a skateboard, develop deeper relationships and expand communication skills. Never will it be easier for them to learn these skills and never are they more motivated to do so (Feinstein 2007, p. 10).

Technically, adolescence is the best time to tap into a person’s potential.

2. **Pruning – use it or lose it** – there is a massive pruning that occurs in the brain (anywhere up to 15%) during the teenage years. Information that is used often is deemed important and becomes stronger and easier to remember. Information that is not used is deemed unimportant and forgotten. Every area of the teenage brain is pruned.....this may sound troubling news but in actual fact it’s just the opposite- the brain becomes more efficient discarding some of its inconsequential information (Feinstein 2007, p. 6). Parents and teachers know this has occurred when monosyllabic grunts replace articulation in communication with many adolescents! This pruning process simply removes the clutter from the brain so that there will be less neurons, however, better potential for stronger and faster connections to be used. Many 12 to 15 year olds are struggling with boredom and



disengagement in classrooms because they are not being provided with enriched environments that allow their changing brains to be building connections at this critical time. This time is a “once only” window of opportunity for accelerated learning in the human brain.

“Regrettably in many secondary classrooms today adolescent students are still doing things and learning in ways that have characterized classrooms for decades and that unfortunately have long been shown to be ineffective.”

Corbin, B 2008, *Unleashing The Potential of the Teenage Brain: 10 Powerful Ideas*, Corwin Press, USA, p. 115.

Pruning seems to curb ADHD symptoms and Tourette’s Syndrome. Disorders such as schizophrenia and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder may get worse with pruning.

- 3. Myelination – the process of insulating the neurons and synaptic connections.** This stage of brain development involves the thickening of the “white matter”, or myelin, on the axons, allowing more connections and more efficient usage. The quality of thinking improves and around the age of 22 to 24 years the pre-frontal lobe or the “executive function” part of the brain will be mature to ensure that improved decision making can take place. This generally indicates less emotional unpredictability, more impulse control and better organizational skills. The myelination process is negatively affected by alcohol and drug abuse.

“The frontal lobes are the section of the brain responsible for abstract thinking, good decision making, analysing and problem solving are among the last parts to receive myelination. As the frontal lobes mature during adolescence the quality of thinking increases.”

Feinstein, S 2007, *Unleashing The Potential of the Teenage Brain: 10 Powerful Ideas*, Maryland, USA, p. 7.

During this time of significant brain development adults, or “lighthouses”, who are involved in the adolescent’s life hold the keys to their future life success on all levels. Even for adolescents who have had challenging childhoods with abuse and deprivation, this time is still a potential to re-shape themselves. In his book, *Enriching the Brain*, Eric Jensen wrote about the following factors that contribute to brain enrichment:

- Physical activity versus passivity.
- Novel, challenging and meaningful learning versus doing what is already known.
- Coherent complexity versus boredom or chaos.
- Managed stress levels versus stressful conditions.
- Social support versus isolation.
- Good nutrition versus poor quality food.
- Sufficient time versus one shot experiences.

Jensen, E 2006, *Enriching the Brain*, Jossey-Bass, USA, pp. 184-5.

These factors are especially pertinent in supporting adolescents to develop healthy maturation within the context of the “Lighthouse Model”, especially in our school environments.

There are a couple of other serious considerations that need to be acknowledged at this point...

- 1. Teenagers are relying on the emotional part of their brain** – they use the amygdala, or the emotional centre, to interpret the same information for which an adult uses the frontal lobe. This is why adolescents have such difficulty with misreading social situations, communicating with others, emotional vulnerability, impulse control. The amygdala is part of the limbic system, or the primitive brain. This part of the brain includes the amygdala, basal ganglia, hippocampus and the cingulate gyrus. Together, they deal with emotional response and control. The teen brain also influences such aspects as hunger, thirst, sleep, sexual response and hormone production and is particularly affected by the increased surge of sex hormones.



“Various neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) that control and regulate such things as moods, impulse, motivation and emotional excitability are greatly influenced by sex hormones produced during this emotionally explosive time in an individuals life. Because of this teenagers often experience emotional highs and lows more quickly and at the same time have less control over these emotions.”

Corbin, B 2008, *Unleashing The Potential of the Teenage Brain: 10 Powerful Ideas*, Corwin Press, USA, p. 20.

So much of the adolescent's responses to their world and to their experiences come from the least developed part of the brain. When confronted by a threatening situation, the brain tends to respond quite automatically in one of three ways:

1. Flight
2. Freeze
3. Fight

It takes the development of the pre-frontal lobes of the brain for an individual to have the capacity to make a different choice, although this automatic response will always be the most likely first choice. How often do adolescents get into fights, whether verbally or physically? How many run away? Adults who act as “lighthouses” need to be aware of this behaviour in young people and know how to support them through their choices. Emotional competence includes many areas and doesn't just appear in a box on a 16th birthday!

Qualities of emotional intelligence

In Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence, the following qualities of emotional intelligence were identified:

- Awareness of feeling states.
- Being able to motivate oneself.
- Persistence in the face of frustration.
- Impulse control.
- Delayed gratification.
- Regulation of one's moods.
- Keeping distress from swamping one's ability to think.
- Ability to accurately empathise.
- Hopefulness.

Understandably, emotional illiteracy is common in all young people, especially troubled adolescents. An important part of an adult's “lighthouse” role is to help build these competencies. Many adolescents tend to take things very personally and many struggle with irrational and emotional states. They need safe adults to help them move through these states without acting from the primitive brain - that is, to flight, freeze, or fight!

Emotional illiteracy

Gayle Greogry PhD identified the following key elements in violent adolescents:

- Kids were ignored as children.
- Very little play activity as a child.
- Average age 13-14 years.
- Typically very bright.
- Usually overweight or underweight.
- Absent dad or poor relationship with dad.
- Don't know how to lose.
- Have few emotional breaks.
- Members of groups with like interests (eg. gangs).
- Have no fear.
- Desire to use power with violence.
- Often TV, video or computer over users, especially with violent preference.



2. **The search for identity and autonomy in a consumer driven, high tech, fast paced world.** The search for identity is one of the most important jobs that teenagers have and, in order to complete this search, they need to step back from their family - especially their parents.

According to Martin Seligman (1995), one of the reasons why young people are less resilient today than in earlier generations, is the change in parenting styles.

“He argues that parents have focused too much on trying to make their children happy. He believes that out of misguided love parents have given their children the message they should be happy, and that it is terrible and abnormal to feel unhappy even for a short time, and that something must be done to ‘feel good’ again.”

McGrath, H & Noble, T 2000, *Bounce Back: Teachers Handbook*, Pearson Education, New South Wales, p. 33.

This touches on the “over protection” of children so that they are given “treats” and “quick fixes” to make them feel better after being disappointed or hurt by normal life experiences. This behaviour does not help children or adolescents know that they can overcome setbacks and failures themselves. Managing and learning from failure is a huge life skill, as is recovering from a painful experience. These patterns, whether healthy or unhealthy, will tend to stay with individuals for life if they are not given some support to change them during the vital teenage years. Autonomy can only occur when an individual has overcome challenge, or achieved a success, because of their choices and behaviours and quite independently of others – sometimes in spite of others!

3. **The importance of peers and deepening friendships** – this is a very important stage of adolescent development.

“Just hangin’ and talkin’ is healthy teenage behaviour and actually has an important purpose in an adolescent’s development.”

Feinstein, S 2007, *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, USA, p. 51.

Being connected to friends and peers has the added advantage that an adolescent will be in touch with the parents of those friends. These friendships help develop social skills, help modify the “dark moods” of adolescence and usually enhance moral development. Through friendships, adolescents learn unspoken codes of conduct that they will take with them throughout life.

This does not mean that friendships are easy! Being sanctioned by peers will be one of the fastest ways to create the catalyst for an adolescent to change an unhelpful behaviour or uncaring communication. Also, friendships can make or break an adolescent in many ways. Positive friendships are a powerful protective factor that will help adolescents avoid unlawful, risky behaviour, especially those involving addictions. This time is a window of sensitivity – never will addiction to alcohol, drugs or tobacco occur more quickly than during the teenage years. This is a double whammy because they are also much more resistant to recovery (Feinstein 2007, p. 9).

Positive friendships help young people develop a sense of belonging. This builds their inner sense of acceptance, as well as their extrinsic sense - “I am acceptable.” “Lighthouses” need to help adolescents form friendships with peers as this is vitally important for their social and emotional development on many levels.

“A study of resilient and optimistic teenagers noted they belonged to a group of friends, particularly those in high school. More than 90% of the young people reported that being connected to peers was the second most important protective factor during crises and applied to most young people.”

Worsley, L 2006, *The Resilience Doughnut: The Secret of Strong Kids*, Wild & Woolley, Australia, p. 70.



Lighting the inner flame of possibility

Even as adolescents step back from their parents' or primary adult carers to gain independence and autonomy, they still need safe adult guidance and support. "Lighthouses" fill this role.

During times of conflict "lighthouses" shine a light of reason, encouragement and acceptance. Adolescents often have poor skills around life management, planning for the future and coping with their chaotic emotional worlds, and so "lighthouses" can be personal life coaches. Some "lighthouses" have a large role to play, others just influence in passing, either as a parent of a friend, coach or employer.

Lighting the flame of potential, while being realistic about adolescent development, is extremely important because many young people are hard on themselves and adept at self criticism and self sabotage. They simply get stuck in patterns of limitation. "Lighthouses" can help them see beyond these limitations. "Lighthouses" do not rescue, advise or make judgements on an adolescent's behaviour - they act like a mirror so that the young person can see their world from a different perspective.

Many adolescents learn how to be trustworthy from the "lighthouses" in their life. These adults must be helpful in all the roles that they play – through communication, helping to build life skills and having the courage to connect deeply. "Lighthouses" shed light on the pathways of the journey to adulthood, and often beyond. "Lighthouses" are respectful, reliable, responsive and reciprocal. They provide an open door and a space to retreat, no matter when, what or why!

Building trust and being trustworthy

Trust, and the role it plays in the developing adolescent, is enormous. When their trust is broken, and they feel betrayed by the few people they have chosen to be trustworthy, adolescents are deeply wounded. "Lighthouses" must be completely trustworthy. The only time these adults can break this confidence, is when the adolescent expresses suicidal ideation - duty of care must then override confidentiality and a professional must be informed immediately.

"Trust is a function of two things: character and competence. Character includes your integrity, your motive, your intent with people. Competence includes your capabilities, your skills, your results, your track record. And both are vital."

Covey, S R 2006, *The Speed of Trust*, Free Press, New York, p. 31.

If children have displayed a degree of trustworthiness as children, then a good starting point is to assume that, as adolescents, they can be trusted. Adolescents should be allowed to gradually assume responsibilities – both in the school and the home context. Choose relatively "safe" things at first. Remember – they cannot demonstrate responsibility if they are not given the opportunities to do so. Be prepared for adolescents to make mistakes, bear the consequences, and trust them to learn as they go along.

Trust is important in adolescent-adult relationships because a high level of trust tends to bring out the best in adolescents. When they feel they have the trust of significant adults like parents and their "lighthouses", adolescents are more likely to communicate openly and honestly, as well as to stick to rules and parental expectations. There is even research to show that teenagers who feel they are trusted are less likely to engage in high-risk or delinquent behaviours.

As children grow up, it's natural that they gradually expect more freedom and independence. Adolescents, in particular, yearn for and require greater parental trust in their ability to make decisions for themselves. This is how they grow in autonomy. Fortunately, most parents adjust their parenting to accommodate their child's growing independence, quite often without even noticing.

Giving teenagers more freedom and loosening the reins is not easy for parents. Yet it is an issue that has to be faced - a 'head-in-the-sand' approach is not the answer. Research shows that teenagers who are not given the chance to make decisions for themselves are more likely to rebel. The preferred



parenting style for raising adolescents is the authoritative or democratic style. This allows for open dialogue between parents and adolescents, and helps build trust and a sense of being valued and heard.

Good decisions involve rationally assessing the risks, benefits and alternative actions that are relevant in the particular case. While adolescents are beginning to think more like adults than children, they often still need help from their parents to make decisions that have serious or long-term consequences. This is because adolescents:

- Are likely to be more impulsive.
- Lack rational thinking strategies.
- Are looking for novelty experiences.
- Are less concerned about risk.
- Are not thinking about the future.
- Are more susceptible to peer pressure.
- Are more concerned about physical appearance.

Developing trust with adolescents:

- **Share** (share of personal events etc.).
- **Be available to listen** (keep in touch via SMS, email and phone).
- **Vulnerability** (to err is human...).
- **Loyalty** (commitment to goals and visions).
- **Accepting others** (accepting the unique qualities and behaviours of others).
- **Involving others** (asking others for input or decision making).
- **Valuing** (willingness to exchange ideas and ideals with others).
- **Awareness** (sensitivity to the needs of others).
- **Communicating** (gives clear communications both oral and written).
- **Openness** (willingness to explore new experiences).
- **Honesty** (willingness to share the truth).
- **Shared positive vision** (willingness to dream).
- **Being accepting and non-judgemental** (as adolescents can be sensitive to criticism).
- **Only give advice when asked** (this shows respect for the the young person's ability to make good decisions).

“.....trust is one of the most powerful forms of motivation and inspiration. People want to be trusted. They respond to trust. They thrive on trust. Whatever our situation, we need to get good at establishing, extending, and restoring trust – not as a manipulative technique, but as the most effective way of relating to and working with others, and the most effective way of getting results.”

Covey, S R 2006, *The Speed of Trust*, Free Press, New York p. 29.

Managing “big ugly emotional states”

“When we feel unsafe, physically or psychologically, impulses from the reptilian and mammalian parts of our brain override our higher functions, and we can behave like a threatened animal. We can experience impulsive “fight or flight” reactions that make us lash out with rage or move into anxious behaviour.”

Sunderland, M 2006, *The Science of Parenting: How Today's Brain Research Can Help You Raise Happy, Emotionally Balanced Children*, Penguin, USA, pp. 16-17.

The development of the physical body together with sexual urges, novelty seeking behaviours, rapidly changing moods and emotional states make adolescence a very interesting time. The developing pre-frontal lobe affects the ability of adolescents to manage emotional states such as anger, frustration, fear, boredom, shame and feelings of worthlessness. Their way of thinking can allow themselves to “frighten themselves with their imaginations” rather than accurately assess the current situation.



“Adolescents experience more intense urges than children and adults and the mental controls to stop them are in short supply. The abilities to plan, monitor, evaluate and reflect are lacking, so reckless behaviour becomes the norm rather than the exception. Increased dopamine levels (feeling good) and decreased serotonin (the calming agent) just add to the desire for novel, risky and intense stimuli.”

Feinstein, S 2007, *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, USA, p. 68.

When sleep deprivation is thrown into the mix, an adolescent's ability to successfully manage emotional states is seriously impaired. Stress symptoms, which are likely caused by uncertainty, colour their ability to manage emotions. This helps make them prone to acting in any one of the “primitive responses” to threat – flight, freeze or fight.

“Lighthouses” have a huge role in helping adolescents in the following ways:

- To encourage adolescents to develop an awareness of their own feelings.
 - To enable and encourage adolescents to become reflective regarding their own behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour.
 - To enable adolescents to label feelings and know when they may or may not affect both work and relationships.
 - To enable adolescents to further develop personal insight.
 - To develop adolescent's self-esteem and self-confidence.
 - To enable adolescents to accept and utilise constructive structured criticism and feed back.
 - To encourage adolescents to develop their own self-control and self-management strategies.
 - To encourage adolescents to develop empathy and authenticity.
 - To enable adolescents to develop flexibility in order to cope more effectively with change and new systems and ways of doing things.
 - To help adolescents develop internal locus of control (i.e. to encourage them to have a sense of control over their own actions).
 - To encourage adolescents to develop self-motivation, resilience and a positive attitude.
 - To encourage students to learn and make use of alternatives to physical or verbal aggression and to express their feelings and views in a more positive and assertive way.
 - To encourage parents and school staff to adopt a consistent approach in terms of developing adolescents' emotional literacy, social skills and self-esteem.
 - To further enable and encourage school staff to review current policy and practice in terms of managing the emotional, social and behavioural needs of students in their care.
- (Source Unknown)

There is no question that adolescents who feel supported, understood and who have a place where they are heard, manage emotions much better than those who are not. Emotions need to be diffused from the body or they will remain in the nervous system. Vigorous physical activity is the preferred mode for diffusing the big emotions such as anger and frustration, however, there are other ways to do this.

“Anger is an emotion that involves two notions. First a perception of some wrong, or problem in the world, committed by someone else and second, a sense of the unfairness or the injustice of this wrong.”

Currie, M 2008, *Doing Anger Differently: Helping Adolescent Boys*, Melbourne University Press, Australia, p. 7.

As people develop emotional maturity, they are often better able to use their “executive function” (the frontal lobes) to interpret potentially “unfair” experiences. For the adolescent brain, however, it is clear – it's about them, it's wrong, it's unfair and they get very angry very quickly! It is essential to understand that anger is a symptom, not the problem. Many parents want their adolescent to stop being angry because they see the anger as the problem. The parent does not understand that anger is a response – often a reaction to feeling disconnected, useless, powerless or out of control. Once again, “lighthouses” in an adolescent's life can help them explore the deeper issues that drive their “big” feelings. Often, anger, which is accepted more easily among peers, is a cover up for sadness or depression, characteristics which can be perceived as weaknesses.



Another key area to understanding anger is conflict about the adolescent's own sense of identity. Repeated acts of aggression, especially with a key figure of authority where an adolescent is made to feel "bad" or "hopeless", can be a way of him defending or attacking his wholeness, or how he sees himself. He must attack so that he does not succumb to "disintegration" (Currie 2008, p. 15).

"...anger is an emotion that emerges when the stability of one's self image is threatened from without. Aggression, the act of physically damaging or destroying something or someone in the world, emerges when this threat becomes unbearable."

Currie, M 2008, *Doing Anger Differently: Helping Adolescent Boys*, Melbourne University Press, Australia, p. 23.

This is a vitally important understanding for "lighthouses" as they can be that one person who can help an angry adolescent find reassurance that their core identity still has a potential for goodness, or there are parts that hold positive value. This is why a relationship built on trust and acceptance can be such an important buffer against the confusion of an adolescent's world.

Michael Currie believes that helping aggressive adolescent boys with a "cycle of identity" will help them grow emotionally and enable them to better manage their apparently irrational aggression. The "cycle of identity" contains three steps that build the adolescent's capacity to find meaning in their world:

1. Perception of the event – by describing the actions that took place from their place of reality.
2. Meaning-making – from description to constructing meaning - be an emotions coach and help them identify the positive and negative consequences of his actions.
3. Performing meaning- from constructing "meaning to action" – helping them identify any attempts to change their previous choices. This can help them understand what is ethical behaviour, accepting responsibility, and learning about the value of growing awareness of how social interaction occurs.

Currie, M 2008, *Doing Anger Differently: Helping Adolescent Boys*, Melbourne University Press, Australia, pp. 124-146.

When an adolescent is angry, upset or feeling threatened, their brain is being swamped by stress hormones such as cortisol, which is produced by the hippocampus. Cortisol is a slow acting chemical that can stay in the brain at high levels for hours, and in clinically depressed people for days or weeks (Sunderland 2006, p.40).

"There is a mass of scientific research showing that quality of life is dramatically affected by whether of not good stress-regulating systems are established in the brain in childhood. Research also shows that it is very hard to reverse an over-active stress response system."

Sunderland, M 2006, *The Science of Parenting: How Today's Brain Research Can Help You Raise Happy, Emotionally Balanced Children*, Penguin USA, p. 31.

This flooding of cortisol makes people feel anxious and stressed and, to avoid such emotional pain, individuals can act impulsively and rashly. Just as for children, the stress hormones in the adolescent brain need some help to change so as to stimulate opioids, dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin - the calming brain chemicals.

Serotonin is responsible for improving mood, emotional stability and sleep quality. This again reaffirms the vital role of "lighthouses" in adolescents' lives. The "lighthouse" offers safety, trust, unconditional acceptance, and gestures of reassurance and kindness that can help the adolescent alter the chemical reactions in their brain. Unfortunately, most troubled and distressed teenagers are met with quite the opposite – and this further adds to their inability to manage the "big" feelings without causing more problems.

Some of the quick methods used by adolescents to numb these emotional states include abuse of drugs, alcohol or other risk taking behaviour and novelty activities. They also tend to project their inner turmoil and angst onto the people they love. Supporting adolescents through their emotional upheavals can prevent further adversity.



This is part of a “lighthouse’s” invisible role – one of being an emotional coach – to help the young person navigate themselves through the myriad of emotional challenges they face everyday. Loving, caring relationships have a huge impact on the emotional stability of adolescents – at home, at school, at sport and any social activity. The sense of belonging feeds positive brain chemicals that help keep adolescents feeling optimistic and emotionally stable. Activities within the home or the school that build inclusivity support calmer, more compassionate and happier environments for young people. This is why “connectedness” is a vital protective factor in resilience – regardless of age.

When connectedness is combined with genuine compassion, concern, kindness, acceptance and understanding, there is a much higher possibility of an individual “healing” from adolescent patterns of aggressive or angry behaviour. “Lighthouses” do this for young people.

“80% of teenagers report engaging in one or more risky behaviours during a month. Adolescents experience more intense urges than children and adults and the mental controls to stop them are in short supply....increased dopamine levels and decreased serotonin just add to the desire for novel, risky and intense stimuli.”

Feinstein, S 2007, *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, USA, pp. 67-68.

The journey through adolescence is a passage from childhood to adulthood, and every individual goes through it. The emotional unpredictability and uncertainty that happens due to brain immaturity is a normal part of the journey. Anything that can help adolescents diffuse or reduce their “big ugly emotional states” will help prevent them getting into serious problems like alcohol or drug abuse, aggressive behaviour, self harm and patterns of self destructive choices. The pre frontal lobe that supports this emotional maturity does not develop until over 20 years in the vast majority of adolescents – we must all keep this in mind and act accordingly.

Jack Canfield’s Truth Letter is a helpful process that can be modified for use to help gain an understanding of the layers underneath anger, and how to explore these layers (see Appendix 1).

Techniques to manage/ transform emotional states:

- Colour/ breath clearing.
- Staying in the moment – is it really happening?
- Magic Eye Scramble.
- Becoming grounded.
- Creative visualization.
- Safely expend excess energy.
- Caring, empowering communication.
- Allow nature to nurture you.
- Energy therapy techniques.
- Emotional freedom technique.
- Being really heard and understood.
- Avoid sleep deprivation.
- Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques to reframe or hide the painful experience.
- Ask “what would love do right now?”
- Be mindful of “awfulizing”.
- Artistic effort – dance, paint, draw, sing.
- Make another choice.
- Find resolution through some action (eg. truth letter, venom letter).
- Practise honesty.
- Safe, reassuring touch.
- Ensure healthy nutrition.
- Reduce other stressors in an individual’s life.
- Build sense of humour and learn to laugh.
- Keep lighting the flame of hope!



Laughter and lightness are powerful healing tools to use around “big ugly emotional states”. They change the brain chemicals and help people feel safe and relaxed. “Lighthouses” need to have a well developed sense of humour to be effective. They also benefit from having a tendency to smile often! See Appendix 3 for more information.

Hope is also recognized as a serious emotional state changer in adolescents’ lives. Amidst the chaos of an adolescent’s immature mind, hope can transform doom and gloom into light. We all need to believe that adversities or challenges can be diminished. This optimistic thinking pattern is characteristic of resilient people. “Lighthouses” need to harbour hope, especially when the adolescent appears to have given up. They also need to sow possibilities of hope into the psyche of adolescents. Germination of this hope may not be readily seen, however, there is a strong possibility that the young person, in the future, may look back and remember quite clearly a time in their life when a positive influence helped them through a difficult time.

The power of hope - from *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman.

- Hope can be defined as “believing you have both the will and the way to accomplish your goals, whatever they may be.”
- Hope makes all the difference. Given roughly the same range of intellectual abilities, emotional aptitudes can make the critical difference.
- Modern researchers are finding that hope does more than offer a bit of solace amid affliction—it plays a surprisingly potent role in life.
- Students with a high level of hope recover quicker from poor school grades.

People with high levels of hope share the following traits:

- Are able to motivate themselves.
- Feel resourceful enough to find different ways to accomplish their objectives.
- Reassure themselves when in a tight spot that things will get better.
- Are flexible enough to find different ways to get to their goals or to switch goals if one becomes impossible.
- Have the sense to break down a formidable task into smaller, manageable pieces.

“Having hope helps people from overwhelming anxiety, a defeatist attitude or depression. Optimism works like hope—it can lift performance in life. Hope and optimism can be learned just like helplessness and despair.”

Peterson, C Maier, S F, & Seligman M E P 1995, *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control*, Hoeber.

“Emotions are contagious. Most emotional contagion is subtle. People who are able to help others soothe their feelings have an especially valued social commodity; they are the souls we turn to when in greatest emotional need.”

Jensen, E 2006, *Enriching the Brain*, Jossey-Bass.

“Hope is a powerful motivating force.”

Our daily and hourly life experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours can modulate both gene expression and neurogenesis in ways that actually change the physical structure of the brain.

Factors such as stress, nutrition, exercise, social factors, trauma and even extended emotional states can influence gene expression. Thus, the environment affects our cells. Is it any wonder that adolescents from violent homes bring violence into schools, and their future relationships?

The science of hope suggests that hope, affirmations, prayer, celebration and expressions of gratitude may do more than make you feel good; they may be changing your brain (Jensen 2006, pp. 122–123).

“Lighthouses” need to be people who are optimistic, hopeful and aware of the infectious nature of emotions.



Simple techniques that can help adolescents manage “big, ugly feelings” and feeling inadequate, useless and unimportant include:

- Reframing.
- Magic Eye Scramble.
- Hiding unpleasant memories.
- Taming the negative critic voice with circuit breakers.
- Deep breathing.
- Finger tapping.

Circuit breakers for negative self talk:

- I am enough exactly as I am.
- I am, I can, I will.
- I am so much more than this experience.
- Stretching my comfort zone will make me grow stronger.
- I can deal positively with anything that happens in my life.
- I am lovable and capable.
- No matter what you say or do to me I am STILL a worthwhile person.
- I deserve to be here and to be successful and happy.
- I matter in this world.
- I make a positive difference every day.
- I am capable, competent and confident most of the time.

Building life skills and competencies

In a perfect world, all children would have loving, consciously aware parents who invest in building emotional and social competencies in their children. By 12 years of age an adolescent’s kit bag for life would be full of all sorts of practical, sensible skills that would support them on their chaotic journey through to adulthood and beyond. However, this is not what always happens.

Even if life skills are taught with great love and patience, the years of “pruning”, coupled with the random growth of the amygdala, hormones and very little pre-frontal reasoning, an adolescent will often succumb to impulsivity, irrational choices and risky activity. Even with the skills in their kit bag, there is no guarantee these skills will be used until the frontal lobes develop in the 20’s. This is why adolescence is such a vulnerable and potentially dangerous time for the child-adult, no matter what their background, their education or their socio economic status. Several “lighthouses” watching out for them increases their protective factors, and makes them more resilient to the dramas that occur on the “bumpy yellow brick road” from childhood to adulthood.

There are a few life competencies that deserve special mention:

1. The value of good sleep.

Adolescents need more sleep than prepubescents or adults. Most are running a sleep “deficit”, and this has significant negative effects on their well being on many levels. An article in the Weekend Australian Magazine (24 November 2007) highlighted recent research which showed that the more learned during the day, the more sleep required at night. This is so the brain can process and consolidate the memories. Vital gene activities need to occur during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) to ensure synaptic plasticity, or the strengthening of neural connections. Without deep sleep, these activities do not occur.

Many adolescents sleep with a consistently active mobile phone, are easily distracted by their global friends on various social Internet sites or play games that absorb them far too much for them to sleep!



Another interesting finding from research is that sleep deprivation makes people recall unhappy memories over pleasant memories. This finding is enormously important in relation to troubled teens and many people who struggle with deep depression and despair.

Improving adolescent sleep has always been important, especially for those struggling with stress, emotional overwhelm or anxiety. Now it seems that moods are also very affected by lack of sleep. The research also supports teenagers starting school at a later time, as their brains are not ready for learning early in the morning. The results from the few Australian schools which are trialing later start times, have been very supportive of this research.

The final part of the research which deserves mention is the powerful link between obesity and sleeplessness. Sleep loss elevates the stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol is lipogenic, meaning it stimulates the body to make fat. Human growth hormone is also disrupted. Normally secreted as a pulse at the beginning of sleep, growth hormone is essential for the breakdown of fat (Weekend Australian Magazine, p. 36).

Sleep is essential for the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well being of every individual - this is not only important for children and teenagers whose brains are still developing. Our behaviour is moderated by moods and emotions which all come from the brain. A healthy appreciation of the value of good sleep is a life skill.

What are the consequences of insufficient sleep in adolescents?

- Missed school.
- Sleepiness (including micro-sleeps).
- Negative synergy with alcohol.
- Tiredness (decreased motivation).
- Irritability and low-frustration tolerance.
- Over-eating, and yearning for high fat foods.
- Difficulties with self-control of attention, emotion, and behaviour.
- Difficulties with focused attention, irritability, emotional ability.
- Affect regulation and Cognitive Emotional Integration.
- Direct effects on learning, memory consolidation.

2. **Awareness and understanding of developing sexuality that includes emotional and spiritual dimensions, not just the mechanics!**

Education benefits all areas of life. Without it, adolescents are at more risk of being manipulated and taken advantage of, especially in the area of sexuality.

Given the sexualisation of young girls that has occurred over the last decade, there are many things that are unique for the Millennial Adolescent. With overcharged sexual energy and urges flowing through their developing brains and bodies, adolescence is a very risky time for young people. They have been conditioned by television, films and the Internet on messages about sexuality, which are not necessarily based on fact.

The free availability of pornographic material, especially child pornography, is a danger to young people who are exposed to it before their adult brain can process the inappropriateness of the visual imagery. Many adolescents get confused about their sexuality, and need safe people who are able to support them and help them work through their concerns.

Parents and guardians must provide adolescents with truthful and accurate information highlighting the potentially negative consequences of incautious sexual activity. An excellent book to recommend to parents and "lighthouses" is "10 Talks that Parents Must Have with their Teenagers about Sex and Character."

Life skills that prepare adolescents to walk this potential minefield are often best given by "lighthouses".



3. The best support parents and “lighthouses” can give adolescents is the preventative sort.

It is easier to prevent problems from occurring by using vigilance and caring communication, especially in the areas of alcohol use, sexual behaviour, drug use and social freedom.

Research now shows that the earlier adolescents start drinking, the more the chances are that they will have problems with binge drinking and future health and alcohol addiction problems later in life. In Australia, the provision of alcohol to teenagers has now become a cultural problem. Parents should avoid the little tastes that were once thought to be a sensible way to show adolescents responsible drinking.

The 14-16 year old brain is unable to process the sensible management of alcohol, which is possible after 16-17 years of age due, to the myelination of some of the frontal lobes. The binge drinking culture is doing serious damage to the developing brain and is impeding the growth of an individual’s true potential.

It is normal for the curious adolescent brain to want to experiment, however, binge drinking is not experimental when it becomes a weekly activity. The same applies to other forms of experimentation.

The fragile adolescent brain is at its most vulnerable stage, in terms of developing addictions, in the 14-16 year age group. At an age where young people are learning to drive, alcohol is a serious contributing factor in car fatalities.

4. Understand depression and support adolescents who struggle with it.

“Approximately 20% of adolescents, 23% of males and 18% of females suffer from mental health problems. The highest incidence (27%) occurs in the 18-24 age group.”

Dingle, Dr P 2005, *The Deal for Happier, Healthier, Smarter Kids*, Positive Living Foundation, Fremantle, p. 154.

Adolescent depression is a huge contributing factor in suicide. Most professionals believe that depression is a combination of genetics, environment and biology (Feinstein 2007, p. 123). Lower levels of serotonin during adolescence can contribute to depression, especially for those with negative thinking loops. This further feeds the low serotonin levels, making adolescents feel worse. For more information on depression, see Appendix 5.

Healthy activation of positive brain chemicals can help in the prevention of depression, as can healthy nutrition, plenty of exercise, loving relationships, meaningful involvement and a strong spirit. Parents and “lighthouses” can help adolescents keep healthy in mind, body and spirit. Vigilance is essential in ensuring the well being of adolescents.

Caring, empowering communication

Good communication leads to:

- Warm relationships.
- Cooperation.
- Feelings of worth.

Poor communication leads to:

- Kids who “turn off” adults.
- Conflicts and bickering.
- Feelings of worthlessness.

The truth about communication

Communication is done without thinking and is virtually automatic. It is never taught to us, we learn it by default. Indeed, it is largely an unconscious act that is driven by our past life experiences, without us being aware of exactly what we are communicating – even though we may know what we are saying. The key to improving communication is having awareness of how we communicate. Neuro Linguistic Communication (NLP) considers the following:



Communication is made up of:

7% Words

55% Physiology

38% Tonality

The greatest conversation is the one we have in our minds. When we become aware of how we are really communicating, and where our communication comes from, we become free to develop more caring relationships – and everyone wants and needs caring relationships if they are to live healthy, worthwhile happy lives. Connectedness and “bondedness” are essential protective factors in resilience at all ages (Benard 1993). This connectedness needs to exist on as many of the following levels as possible:

- Deep connection to self.
- Deep connection to another (family, friends).
- Deep connection to community (school, sport, faith, local).
- Deep connection to lineage (ancestry, cultural).
- Deep connection to nature and the environment.
- Deep connection to a higher power (the mysterious, the spiritual, the non-logical).

Kessler, R 2000, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion and Character at School*, ASCD Publications, VA, USA, p. 18.

Adolescents need to have caring adults in their lives to help them navigate through the major life journey from childhood to adulthood. The metaphorical “lighthouse” needs to be a caring adult, or adults, who will help them grow emotionally, socially, cognitively and spiritually.

One of the key attributes of “lighthouses” for adolescents is the ability to be a caring communicator – someone who can be trusted and is committed to empowering an adolescent’s ability to understand themselves, others and the world in which they live. This relationship is about building autonomy, personal responsibility and vital life skills through the art of caring and empowering communication. This art aids in encouraging reflective, flexible thinking to guide the adolescent in their choices. By doing this, the “lighthouse” plays a key role in supporting the identity formation of the emerging adult to being one that acknowledges the adolescent’s strengths and challenges, as well as possible pathways of how the adolescent’s unique potential to make the world a better place can be realised.

What is caring empowering communication?

Begin with a clear intention to be a support.

Thought fields – the invisible field of influence

The invisible field of influence is evident in the Oak School experiment conducted by Robert Rosenthal of Harvard University on 650 students and 18 female teachers. Teachers were led to believe that certain students, selected at random, were likely to be showing signs of a spurt in intellectual growth and development. The students of whom the teachers had these expectations did perform superiorly and did produce REAL above average increases in their IQ’s over the year...even though they were chosen randomly! This showed that performance is clearly influenced by expectation, rather than ability!

Rosenthal did an earlier experiment on rats, where students were told that certain rats had been genetically bred to be superior in performance. Two groups were given 30 rats. Group A was told they had the superior stock and Group B the inferior stock. The rats were trained in the same ways and in the same environments, however, the ones believed to be smarter achieved scores far above the supposed unintelligent rats. The rats came from exactly the same gene pool and stock.

This shows that the expectation of the “teachers” or significant carers can create the same results, without the participants knowledge. “Lighthouses” who hold high, positive expectations for adolescents can make a significant positive difference in their growth and development.



This has become known as the Pygmalion Effect.

Your intention and your core beliefs will impact everything you communicate, consciously or unconsciously.

Build rapport – making connections

- **Finding a positive intention** - hold the belief that under every negative behaviour is a hidden unconscious positive intention.
“What were you wanting to happen when you did this behaviour?”
If you blame, criticise or judge, you will automatically get a defensive response.
- **Mirroring** - try to mirror the other person’s unconscious verbal or non verbal behaviours. If they act seriously and nod their head - you do the same, smoothly and without being obvious.
- **Auditory rapport** - mirror voice patterns if possible (ie. timbre, tempo, pitch, projection & emphasis).
Match breathing.
- **Match their processing channel** - whether it be auditory (A), visual (V) or kinaesthetic (K).
“I can see what you are saying.” (V)
“I can feel where you are coming from.” (K)
“I hear what you are saying.” (A)
- **Listen with all faculties** - listen to your instincts and what they are NOT telling you as well as what they ARE telling you.
- **Reflect back something positive** that they say.
“Well done for being so honest... That must have made you feel great!!!”
“That must have been challenging!!!”
This shows you are really listening.

Based on *Rediscover the Joy of Learning* by Don A Blackerby, Ph D.

NB: Most adolescent “lighthouses” do rapport building automatically, however it is a skill that can be learned, and improved upon, with practice.

How do we break rapport without causing emotional conflict?

How can this help with a very aggressive adolescent?

Why is this important to the adolescent brain?

Build caring relationships - being respectful and trustworthy

“The words we choose in our interactions with children and adolescents have the power to heal or hurt, to create distance or foster closeness, to shut down feelings or touch the heart and open it, to foster dependency or to empower.”

Aldort, N 2005, *Raising Our Children Raising Ourselves: Transforming parent-child relationships from reaction and struggle to freedom, power and joy*, Book Publishers Network, USA, p. 1.

If we are genuinely respectful and unconditionally accepting of others, we will be respectful and trustworthy. “Lighthouses” are able to do both and this is why they have power to act as stewards and guides for rapidly developing and evolving adolescents.

Always remember that all of our behaviour is the result of choices we make based on our beliefs and past experiences – and we make assumptions and expectations quite automatically. **Our reality is simply our reality - no-one else will share your view of reality.**

One way for “lighthouses” to be respectful, accepting and trustworthy in their communication is by having a strong core belief that everyone has the potential for greatness. This belief will influence their physiology and the tonality of their voice and will build an invisible sense of safety and trust.



The task of “lighthouses” is to help young people find their unique strengths and weaknesses, and then work out how to use them in a positive way. The period of adolescence is ripe for this vital new development to take shape.

Caring, empowering communication indicates an ability to understand another’s reality, a process which can be difficult when there is a difference of culture, age, gender or significant life experience. We often assume that others understand us when they can have a very different view point. Here are some possible different interpretations that can occur with adolescents.

When adults:

Threaten _____
 Command _____
 Preach _____
 Lecture _____
 Shout _____
 Criticism _____
 Shame _____
 Nag _____
 Withhold love _____
 Disconnect _____
 Solve my problems _____
 Tell me what I am feeling _____
 Are unavailable _____

Adolescent interpretation:

I don’t matter.
 I’m inadequate.
 You don’t like me.
 I can’t do anything right.
 I’m frightened.
 I’m useless and incapable.
 I’m bad and hopeless.
 You disrespect me.
 You make my world unsafe.
 There’s no-one I can trust.
 You crush my search for solutions.
 You invalidate me and my feelings.
 I’m invisible and unlovable.

Negation language

Isn’t it a nice day? _____
 Wouldn’t you like to go? _____
 Don’t you like Maths? _____
 I love you but.... _____
 I want, I wish, I need _____
 I should, ought, have to _____
 I would _____
 I must, I’ve got to _____
 I might, I am supposed to _____
 I’ll try _____
 I hope _____
 Maybe _____
 It’s hard _____

Life enhancing language

It is a nice day.
 Would you like to go?
 Do you like Maths?
 love you and...
 I require, I choose, my choice is...
 I choose, I will
 I will
 I will
 I will
 I will, I am, I can
 My choice is...
 Is
 It’s a challenge

There is great power in the words of suggestion.

Use “door openers”

“Door openers” are invitations to say more, to share ideas and feelings. They tell the child that you are really listening and interested, that their ideas are important, and that you accept them and respect what he/she is saying.

Examples:

- “I see.”
- “Tell me more.”
- “Oh.”
- “Say that again. I want to be sure I understand you.”
- “No kidding.”
- “How about that!”
- “Now that’s interesting.”
- “Really?”



“Door openers” tell adolescents that their ideas are important, that you are interested and that you respect them, even if you don’t agree or completely understand. Non-verbal “door openers” are just as important – eye contact, posture, presence and really listening.

Use “I” messages to communicate your thoughts and feelings

Sentences that encourage (avoid using WHY questions):

- “How might we resolve this?”
- “What do you think needs to happen now?”
- “What questions do you have about what we have just done?”
- “What can I do to help you complete this task?”
- “Sounds like you have a problem.”
- “How can we work together to get the best outcome here?”
- “There is a conflict here – how can I help you sort it out?”
- “Please make a decision to stay with us or go to the time out area.” (CHOOSE. DECIDE. PICK.)
- “Please consider making a different choice.”
- “Check yourself.....do you have everything to do this?”
- “Check it out inside.....does it feel right?”
- “What’s your goal? What’s your intention?”
- “Make a picture in your mind?” (positive picturing...)
- “What do you attribute that to? How did you produce that result?”
- “I’m willing to help you complete this task.”
- “I know you can handle it!”
- “Every problem has a solution.”
- Use “next time” rather than “don’t do this...”
- “I noticed.....”
- “I know you can overcome this....”
- “There is a part of you that knows the answer.....check it out within.”
- “I have faith in you to make a healthy choice around this decision.....”
- “If I rescue you from this challenging experience I dis-empower you...do you want me to do this?”
- “If I lead you out of this challenge, I am the leader not you - is this what you want?”
- “I will walk beside you, no matter what choice you make....”

Avoid evaluative praise “You’re a terrific runner.” “You are so clever” “You are so beautiful.”

Choose descriptive “We have finished dinner and everything looks clean and tidy.” Let them tell themselves they did a great job!!!

Or choose appreciative “I appreciate you helping to make the kitchen clean and tidy.”

Life affirming language

1. **I choose**
Expression of our will and identity moving toward our outcome.
2. **I can**
Expression of our identity, our will, our potential in choosing our outcome.
3. **I have**
Bring our desired state to now; collapses time from the future to the present.
4. **I am**
Expression of identity, claiming the emotional state of our desire fulfilled.
5. **I create**
Expression of identity, claiming our divine right as co-creators.
6. **I will**
Expression of intention for future.
7. **My highest choice**
Leaves our highest vision for the event, circumstance, or person as the last thing on the screen of our minds.



“Lighthouses” often have to support or coach an adolescent who is being challenged.

Always remember that you are like a lighthouse – and that you offer a silent, strong presence that helps an adolescent find his/her own answers through reflection, thinking processes and affirmation. “Lighthouses” do not rescue, advise or make judgements on an adolescent’s behaviours. They act like a mirror so that the young person can see the world from a different perspective.

We know that intention and focus are key elements in successful people’s lives. Adolescents get easily confused and anxious when they are unable to make sense of their world, or solve a problem that is causing them difficulty. Coaches use certain questions to help them find clarity – to make them think wider, and more flexibly so that they can make a clear decision and have a definite intention to follow – no matter how small that may be.

What is caring, empowering communication? When you allow an adolescent, with your support, to make positive changes in their thinking, their behaviour and the way they see themselves, without telling them how to do that.

The First Duty of Love is to Listen

When I ask you to listen to me, and you give me advice
You have not heard what I asked of you.
When I ask you to listen and you tell me why I shouldn’t feel as I do,
You are trampling on my feelings.
When I ask you to listen and you feel you have to find solutions to my
problems I feel let down, strange as it may seem.
Please listen. All I ask is that you listen - not talk or do or advise –
Just LISTEN.
Advice is cheap. I can get that anywhere.
I can do for myself. I’m not helpless- Maybe discouraged and faltering,
But not helpless.
When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself,
you contribute to my fear and reinforce my weaknesses.
When you accept as a simple fact, that I feel what I feel
However irrational it may sound to you,
then I can quit trying to convince you and I
can then explore this irrational feeling.
When that’s clear, the answers are obvious and I don’t need advice.
My irrational fears make sense when I can discover what’s behind them.
If you listen and understand I can work things out for myself.
So I ask again. Just listen - and if you too have something to say be
Patient - Then I’ll listen to you.

Source Unknown

Hidden inhibitors to caring, empowering communication

NLP has discovered that we communicate in preferred representational systems – mainly visual, kinaesthetic or auditory. Explore the language below and see if you can work out your preferred style of communication. Communicating without understanding how another communicates, and communicating without even attempting to meet another person’s style, will create challenges. Kinaesthetic and auditory communicators have particular difficulty communicating, especially if they sit too close, or have a tendency to touch – both are behaviours that threaten auditory communicators!



Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
See	Hear	Feel
Look	Listen	Touch
Appear	Sound	Grasp
View	Make music	Get hold of
Show	Harmony	Slip through
Illuminate	Tune in/out	Catch on
Clear	Be all ears	Tap into
Focus	Rings a bell	Make contact
Imagine	Silence	Throw out
Picture	Resonate	Turn around
Catch a glimpse of	Deaf	Hard
Dim view	Overtones	Hand in hand
Get a perspective of	Outspoken	Get a handle on
Eye to eye	Tell	Touch base
In light of	Clear as a bell	Boils down to
Make a scene	Clearly expressed	Come to grips with
Mind's eye	Earful	Connect with
Pretty as a picture	Give me your ear	Cool/calm/collected
Showing off	Word for word	Firm foundations
Well defined	Orchestrate	Get in touch with
Vivid	Clearly expressed	Slipped my mind
Clarity		

Exercise: In 4-5 sentences, describe a problem, in writing, using first visual, then auditory and then kinaesthetic cues and language.

Personality differences

Temperament has been identified as being a factor in communication within families. In his book *The Difficult Child*, Dr Stanley Turecki writes that children appear to be born with a "...natural, inborn style of behaviour that is innate and not produced by the environment." Many temperamentally difficult children struggle with behavioural inflexibility, low tolerance for frustration, temper outbursts and unstable moods.

In his book, *The Explosive Child*, Dr Ross Greene writes that managing human interactions and the simple frustrations of life do not come naturally to some children. The same could be said of many adolescents because of their brain development. Dr Greene suggests that, in order to avoid "vapour locks" or "meltdown" moments, parents need to create user friendly environments in their homes and be mindful of how they empathetically communicate.

There are schools of thought now suggesting that temperament and personality arrive at birth and both are evident by three years of age. The recent publication of a longitudinal study that has followed babies born in New Zealand for over 35 years has found "...that broad personality traits are laid down by the age of 3; under-controlled toddlers grow up to be impulsive, unreliable and anti-social: inhibited 3 year olds tend to become unassertive and depressed adults (Education Review, Vol 18, No 2, Mar 2008, p. 5).

The Enneagram, based on a psychological system called the E-model (1972), is a helpful tool to helping understand character types. This detailed system identifies nine different personality types and unravels personality in ways that are very helpful for parents.



Janet Levine's *Know Your Own Personality* is an excellent book to start with, as is *The Enneagram of Parenting* by Elizabeth Wagele. These books help parents identify both strengths and challenges of each personality types - a powerful tool in developing communication styles that are caring and empowering.

Another helpful book is *Tricky Kids* by Andrew Fuller, an exploration of temperaments, the role of clever communication, and how to manage challenging children and adolescents.

Over large amygdala

Researchers at the University of Melbourne, working with US colleagues, scanned the brains of nearly 140 11-14 year olds, catching them just before the age when the "true teenage angst tends to emerge". They found that the amygdala, the emotional "gate keeper" of the brain, was larger in adolescents who were being angry, aggressive or unpleasant towards their parents. Associate Professor Nick Allen (ABC, 26 February 2008) adds that "...obviously a lot of environmental factors are important – how much stress the family is under, how much stress the members of the family are under individually."

According to Professor Allen's research, aggressive and moody behaviour is something most teenagers will grow out of as the brain develops into the 20's. "Their cognitive development is moving very rapidly, it's very easy to forget that there are some aspects of the brain that are still developing slowly."

This research further highlights the role of caring, empowering communication in assisting adolescents to feel heard, valued and understood. This type of communication reduces stress and creates home environments that are refuges from a chaotic world.

Parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive

1. Authoritative style - the democratic style of parenting. Authoritative parents actually listen to their teens when making rules and decisions. Kids raised in these homes are encouraged to make their own decisions, to take responsibility and to become autonomous - with age appropriate discretion (Feinstein 2007, p. 15).

The most frequent form of discipline used in these homes is talking about the problem.

Adolescents who experience authoritative parenting, benefit with more social competence, and fewer psychological and behavioural problems.

2. Authoritarian style - the "my way or the highway" style. This relationship is based on control, control, control ... teens raised in these homes lack confidence, have more social problems and have difficulty getting along with their peers and teachers stemming from their sense of insecurity... (Feinstein 2007, p. 17). This confrontational style of parenting has no feeling of warmth or acceptance in the house - just rigid, and often irrational, adherence to house rules. This type of parenting creates a combination of rebellion and dependency in the teenager. The weaker adolescents remain co-dependent and the strong ones rebel.

3. Permissive parenting comes in two forms – indulgent and neglectful. Overindulgent parents express their love by giving into their kid's every demand - these parents often want friendship from their teens - and act more like peers than parents (Feinstein 2007, pp. 20-21).

Neglectful parents send a clear message that they don't care about their kids. This could be by neglecting to attend their children's activities or by never being home for dinner. Adolescents receive little guidance in these homes and, in their teens, will yearn for a sense of belonging, no matter what the risk.

Boundaries show you care, even if they cause many heated discussions – just ask an adolescent who never had any!



What doesn't work with adolescent communication?

- Lecturing.
- Nagging.
- Timing.
- Arguing (say your piece, turn, leave – ignore any last words thrown at you).
- Unkindness.
- Criticism.
- Guilt games.
- Any physical abuse.
- Ignoring them or freezing them out.
- Using “always”, “never”, “it’s easy!” or “It’s going to be hard” as a predictor.

What does work?

First, always remember that adolescents often misunderstand body language and the spoken word. They need to have their feelings validated in some way.

- Conversation.
- Be a source of support.
- Encourage autonomy.
- Trust.
- Monitoring.
- Rules and consequences.
- Coping skills.
- School involvement.

Communication tips that work for adolescents:

- Listen to them more than talk to them.
- Begin statements with “I” instead of “you”.
- Be open to learning from them and let them instruct you sometimes.
- Stay focused on their conversation and resist the urge to interrupt with your own story.
- Accept opinions and ideas even when they differ from yours.
- Be an active listener and periodically ask questions to show interest.
- Match their emotional state except if hostile.
- Show empathy and identify his point of view.
- Withhold advice unless they ask for it.
- Allow them to discuss any topic.
- Think before you speak especially if a sensitive topic.
- Be pleasant and stay positive or else walk away.
- Avoid generalizations.
- Avoid comparisons to others.
- Ask questions that require more than a one word response.

Feinstein, S 2007, *Parenting the Teenage Brain*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, USA, pp. 23-30.

Positive and caring human relationships are the most powerful protective factor we can have in life, regardless of age. The healthier the home environment and the better the communication channels, the more chance adolescents have of navigating the journey to adulthood in a healthy and positive way. “Lighthouses” are important in all adolescents’ lives. For those from dysfunctional, traumatic and stressful home environments, they often hold the only keys to the doorways to life success.



Strengthening the spirit

In *A Soul of Education* (2000), Rachael Kessler wrote that “...when schools systematically exclude heart and soul, students in growing numbers become depressed, attempt suicide, or succumb to eating disorders and substance abuse.”

In his book *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore describes the symptoms of loss of soul as:

- emptiness
- meaninglessness
- vague depression
- disillusionment about marriage, family and relationship and life in general
- a loss of values
- yearning for personal fulfilment
- a hunger for spirituality.

The Millennial Adolescent struggles with a disconnection from this indefinable source of sustenance. Consumer pressures, messages that promote image over character and the general velocity of life, cause many adolescents to become disillusioned. The human spirit gets crushed from such a chaotic and troubled individualistic world.

From the *Soul of Education*, by Rachael Kessler:

Seven gateways to the soul of education

1. The yearning for deep connection.
2. The longing for silence and solitude.
3. The search for meaning and purpose.
4. The hunger for joy and delight.
5. The creative drive.
6. The urge for transcendence.
7. The need for initiation.

Understanding deep connection

- **Deep connection to self** — nourishment of the human soul occurs when we really know ourselves, express our true self, and feel connected to the essence of who we are.
- **Deep connection to another** — authentic intimacy. A deeply caring, mutually respectful relationship with one other person can be a deep connection for anyone.
- **Deep connection to community** — a teenager’s need to belong is seen by some as a form of spiritual hunger. For others, it is seen as a key to building authentic resilience. Close ongoing meaningful groups are important for developing deep connections to others.
- **Deep connection to lineage** — discovering a strong sense of prior family history can build a connectedness and a sense of belonging.
- **Deep connection to nature** — For some, the beauty and majesty of nature brings awe and wonder that satisfies and feeds the spirit.

We all see forms of transcendence, or natural highs. Adolescents need these opportunities to experience moments of heightened pleasure and well being, without the influence of drugs or alcohol. The need for transcendence is part of every human being’s journey to awareness and maturity. Creating experiences that allow for these heightened states show how to find it safely:

- Athletic success.
- Artistic and creative expression.
- Deep relaxation and stillness.
- Safe, honest human connection.
- Significant immersion in nature.
- Acts of service.
- Discovering new purpose and meaning.
- Ritual and ceremony.
- Celebration activities.



These experiences activate the “joy juices” of the brain and create feelings of well being which aid in shifting sadness, despair and the sense of disconnection.

Just as we have a cognitive or emotional intelligence, we also have a spiritual intelligence which needs nurturing and developing.

Spiritual intelligence includes:

1. wonder
2. awe
3. listening with the heart
4. respect and reverence
5. spirit of relationships
6. contemplation
7. calmness, stillness and quiet
8. tenderness and gratitude
9. simplicity
10. lightness and laughter

Dent, M 2005, *Nurturing Kids' Hearts and Souls*, Pennington Publications, Australia, p. 259.

“This is the first generation brought up on conspicuous consumerism. And they have no perceived guide to help them manage the new freedoms, cultural changes and technologies that have led to incredible individualism.”

(Silburn, Professor S 25 May 2005, The West Australian, p. 8)

Strengthening the spirit is an important role of “lighthouses”. Adolescents who have strong spirits, have a protective mechanism that is difficult to measure, yet very clear when absent.



Appendix 1

Truth letter

Sometimes we can resolve issues with people by writing an honest letter to them....sometimes we do not even need to give them the letter, but the mere process of acknowledging what troubles you is enough to resolve it inside yourself.

Dear.....

I am writing this letter to release my resentment and negative emotions and to discover and express any positive feelings that I might have towards you.

Anger

I don't like...

I feel angry...

I can't stand...

I hate it when...

I resent...

Hurt

It hurt me when...

I feel hurt that...

I feel awful about...

I feel sad when...

I feel disappointed about...

Fear

I'm afraid that ...

I'm afraid ...

I feel scared when...

I get afraid of you when...

Remorse, Regret, Accountability

I'm sorry that ...

Please forgive me for...

I didn't mean to ...

I'm sorry for ...

Wants

All I ever wanted...

I want you to...

I want...

I deserve...

Love, Compassion, Forgiveness, Appreciation

I understand that ...

I appreciate...

I love you because ...

Thank you for ...

I forgive you for...

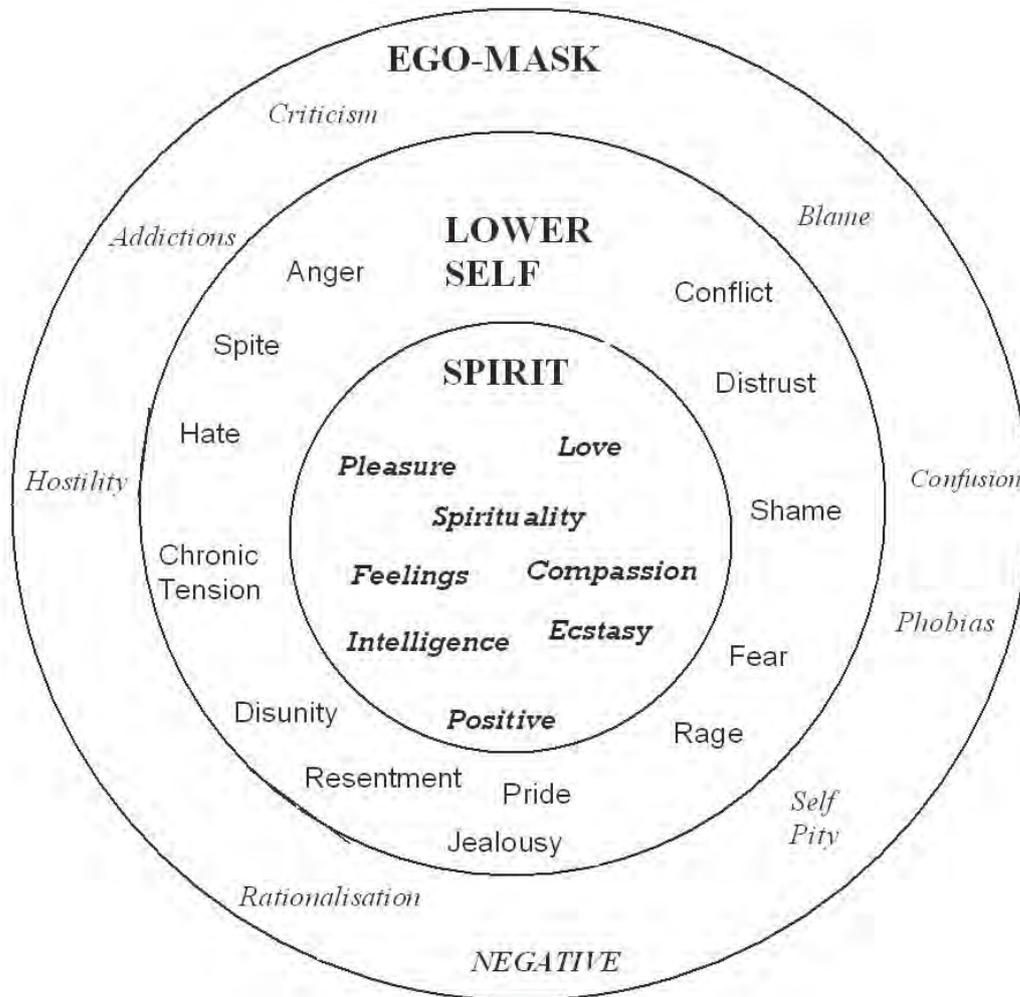
I love you when...

Adapted from 1997 Self Esteem Seminars, Santa Barbara, US with permission from Jack Canfield



Appendix 2

Map of the personality



This symbolic map of the personality is adapted from John C. Pierrakos. Sometimes when we communicate we think we are being honest, when in reality we are speaking from our mask. We have to acknowledge that we have all levels of our personality and that sometimes we can feel disconnected from our spirit.

The voice of your spirit is much quieter than the voice of your ego. Sometimes, your spirit will try to communicate to you silently through your senses or your feelings.

ALWAYS listen to your senses and your gut feelings...Check experiences and choices with your spirit. **IT KNOWS YOU BEST.**
Trust yourself



Appendix 3:

The power of laughter

Laughter:

- Transforms emotional states.
- Creates endorphins of well being.
- Increases the level of serotonin.
- Is a key coping skill — especially for boys.
- Is an anti-bullying strategy.
- Encourages “lightening up” for serious moments.
- Is a bonding experience when shared in groups.
- Builds inclusivity and connectedness.
- Releases tension and stress.
- Is a key element in effective communication—especially in close relationships.
- Is an anti-violence antidote.

“Humour also assists in accepting life’s imperfections, inevitabilities, difficulties, frustrations and disappointments. It helps us to realise what we cannot control, such as death, the behaviour of other people, incompetence, ageing, physical limitations and illness. Jokes and funny throw away lines can also communicate messages that help us understand what is normal and typical. In knowing that others share some of the same feelings, perceptions and troubles, we feel more empowered to deal with these troubles.”

McGrath, H & Noble, T 2000, Bounce Back: A Classroom Resilience Program, Pearson Education, New South Wales, p. 43.

“Laughter sharpens most of the instruments of the immune system’s tool kit. It activates thymphocytes and natural killer cells, both of which destroy invading microorganisms. Laughter also increases production of immunity – boosting gamma interferon and speeds up the production of new immune cells. And it also reduces the stress hormone corisol, which can weaken the immune response.”

Doskoch P 1996, Happily Ever Laughter, Psychology Today, p. 32.

“Telling a joke, particularly one that illuminates a shared experience or problem, increases our sense of belonging and social cohesion.”

Richman, J, Psychiatrist and Professor Emeritus at Albert Einstein Medical Centre in New York.



Appendix 4

Coaching tips for “lighthouses”

Coaching

- Is a process that enables people to come up with solutions that suit them personally.
- Encourages individuals to work out the steps that suit their own circumstances.
- Promotes independent thinking and encourages people to take responsibility for finding their own solutions.
- Creates the climate for individuals to examine their own strengths and to use them to achieve their own goals.
- Avoids the pitfalls of advice.
- Engenders choice.

10 principals of coaching

Be non-judgemental.

Be non critical.

Believe that people have their own answers to their own problems within them.

Respect a person's confidentiality.

Be positive and believe that there are always solutions to issues.

Pay attention to recognizing and pointing out strengths and building and maintaining self esteem.

Challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zone.

Break down big goals into manageable steps.

Believe that self knowledge improves performance.

Hold a genuine willingness to learn from the people you coach.

Remember, the focus is always on putting things right - not what went wrong!

The power of questions - 8 question types for coaches.

1. **Future placing questions** - these help to get people in touch with what they want to achieve and to motivate them. Examples include:
 - What are you seeing, hearing or feeling now you are doing this new role?
 - What is it like to be X who already has this?
 - Put yourself 6 months ahead. What decisions did you make along the way that got you to there?
2. **Truth probers** – these help people make insightful leaps forward in understanding themselves. Examples of truth questions to help:
 - What do you really want?
 - What's actually stopping you?
 - What's the truth here?
 - What else is there?
 - How will you look back on this?
 - What gives you most anxiety here?
 - What difference does this really make to you?
3. **Dumb questions** – these are the ones that are too dumb to ask! For example:
 - What do you want?
 - Where are we?
 - What's next?
 - What's needed?
 - Where do you want to go from here?
 - What did you learn?
 - What do you think?



4. **Reframing questions.**
5. **Incisive questions** – stimulate creative thinking. The first part of the question suspends the limitation, while the second part encourages the search for solutions. For example:
 - What would you do if it didn't matter what others thought?
 - What if there was a time in the past when you overcame a similar problem?
6. **Permission and precision questions.** For example:
 - How would you feel about exploring this a bit deeper?
7. **Commitment questions.** For example:
 - When will you know you have been successful?
 - When will this start?
 - What could get in the way of you completing this?
8. **Distal questions** – these extend beyond the coaching session and into the future.

Young people require adults who can help them to find their own way in life.

- Teens do not want or need adults who tell them exactly how, what, and where to do this, that, and the other thing.
- Teens who feel heard and respected can more readily access their own sense of self and create lives of joy and meaning.
- When teens feel understood they work harder, display more interest and curiosity, and are far more compassionate and easy to get along with.
- When teens feel that they are seen as responsible, they become more responsible.
- When teens feel appreciated, they are more willing to feel and show gratitude.
- When adults open the lines of communication through the Parent as Coach/Lighthouse role, the result can be harmonious and loving relationships that both parents and teens can treasure

Sterling, D, Parent as Coach: Helping Your Teen Build a Life of Confidence, Courage and Compassion, [HYPERLINK "http://www.parentascoach.com"](http://www.parentascoach.com) www.parentascoach.com.



Appendix 5

What is depression?

So how do you distinguish between clinical, “capital D” depression and the common old blues? For some people, the symptoms are obvious. But others manage to keep up their daily routine, not really knowing what’s wrong.

To get a doctors’ diagnosis of clinical depression you have to have at least five of the following symptoms, including number one or number two, for at least two weeks:

- Depressed mood (feeling sad or low).
- Loss of interest or pleasure (in activities you normally enjoy).
- Significant appetite or weight loss or gain.
- Insomnia or hypersomnia (sleeping too little or too much).
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation (being restless and jittery, or alternatively, slower than usual).
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt.
- Impaired thinking or concentration; indecisiveness.
- Suicidal thoughts/thoughts of death.

From the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders, 4th ed. (DSM-IV)

Types of depression

Depression affects different people very differently. As a result, many psychiatrists now argue that it is helpful to understand depression not as a whole but as different sub-types. These sub-types can affect not only the symptoms a person has, but the type of treatment that is most likely to be effective. Common sub-types of depression include:

Non-melancholic depression

This is the most common type of depression and is also called ‘reactive’ depression. It can occur in response to specific life events or it can be the consequence of ongoing life events that may affect someone’s self-esteem. Individuals with this type of depression are less likely to report psychotic symptoms – such as hallucinations – and don’t tend to suffer symptoms of melancholia – such as extreme lethargy and a complete inability to be cheered up.

Melancholia

This kind of depression is primarily caused by biological factors, although episodes can be triggered by life events. Those suffering this type can display a profound lack of energy along with a significant mood disturbance, psychomotor changes (affecting concentration and movement), extreme lethargy – that is distinctly worse in the morning – and an inability to be cheered up or to respond to positive events.

Psychotic depression

Another type of depression caused by biological factors, this type is dominated by profound mood and movement disturbance together with delusions and hallucinations.

Depressive symptoms can also occur along with other mental disorders, especially bipolar disorder (which involves extreme ‘up’ moods as well as downs), anxiety, and schizophrenia.



Appendix 6

Building life skills and competencies

What skills do adolescents need in their kit bag for life when they venture into the big wide world at 18?

Remember that everyone needs life skills to manage life. Life is a journey of continually gaining knowledge, skills and competencies. Every person is unique and every life journey is different. This list is one that many people have contributed to – what would help you cope with and conquer life at the age of 18, if you were to leave the safety of the home nest?

This list is not gender specific, because both girls and boys need these skills to feel capable.

Living with others – essential skills

- Change toilet roll when empty.
- Replace toothpaste lid after use.
- Know how to clean a bathroom – and how to get rid of mould!
- Avoid using other people's deodorant.
- Don't use other people's towels – or use them as the bath mat!
- Wipe bench down after preparing food or making toast and don't sweep crumbs onto floor!
- Know how to wash and dry dishes hygienically.
- Never wipe your face or nose on a tea towel.
- Learn basic food preparation skills, especially around raw meat.
- Know how to sweep the floor.
- Know how to wash the floor.
- Cover food left in the refrigerator.
- Don't eat other people's food without asking!
- If you use the last of the milk, bread or butter – replace it!
- Know how to cook at least three main meals that people enjoy!
- Always smell milk before using – if it has lumps, it's off!
- Eat fresh, wholesome meals 80% of the time.

Living in rental properties

- Rental inspections are very serious – do your share of the cleaning.
- Rental inspectors check inside the oven and grill – clean them!
- Know how to mow lawns.
- Know how to weed and make gardens look tidy.
- Never lose your key.
- Any damage after a party will have to be paid by those who live there!
- Know the difference between the recycle bin, normal bin and the one for green waste.
- Rent must be paid when due – no matter what.
- Keep doors/windows locked when no-one is there.
- Old places will need cockroach baits and mouse traps – lots of them.
- If you have valuable things, you should have contents insurance.
- Pay gas, power and water bills before they are over due or they will cut you off and it costs more to re-connect.
- Whoever's name is on the lease is the person held responsible for rental arrears, damage or any other problem. This information will be passed on to other rental agencies for the rest of your life.
- Remember your house mates' birthdays.
- Offer to make your house mates' a cuppa occasionally.
- Don't play music loudly after others are in bed!
- Cook when it's your turn and do it with a smile on your face.
- Keep your clothes, shoes, undies, skateboard, surf board and wet towels in your room – not all over the house!
- Dirty plates will attract ants, cockroaches and rats!



Life skills with cars

- Cars need fuel, oil and water – know where each one goes, and how to check them.
- Know how to change a flat tyre – you need to have a spare tyre to do this.
- Dirty, rusty cars that look poorly maintained are obvious targets for the police.
- Cars with rude stickers are also obvious targets for the police.
- Don't drive after you have been drinking.
- Never get into a car with someone who has been drinking or doing drugs.
- If you park in a paid parking zone, and don't pay, you will most likely get a fine.
- Avoid parking in loading zones or disabled parking spaces – you will get a fine.
- Avoid driving at night with friends – this has been shown to be a time of greater risk for adolescents.
- If you do burn outs in public places you could lose your car.
- If you do burn outs in public places remember how much new tyres cost.
- Cars are expensive to run and maintain.
- A licence is a privilege that you can easily lose.
- Drive slowly around schools – even on holidays – kids are unpredictable!
- If you can, complete an advanced driving course.
- Brakes and tyres need to be kept in optimal shape for obvious reasons.
- Never overtake on double white lines or on hills.
- Don't lock your keys in your car, especially not in the boot!
- Always keep 2 litres of water in your car in case of radiator problems.
- Uneaten food left in cars can smell REALLY bad in a short time.
- Things like keys, wallets, mp3 players and CD's can slip behind seats and appear lost.
- NEVER text while driving – pull over and stay alive.
- Get a hands free set for your mobile – or pull over and stay alive.
- Avoid any impulses that appear to be a good idea at the time while driving your car.
- Be careful if driving into a setting sun!
- Don't cheat on your driving log – experience is the best teacher for new drivers.

Communication and etiquette skills that are helpful

- Avoid grunting or using monosyllabic answers.
- Say hello to people when you first see them.
- Use manners all the time – people make judgements on you that last.
- Wait until people on the train get off before you get on.
- Wait until people leave an elevator or lift before you get in.
- Learn how to say “no” politely.
- Learn to be assertive to ask for what you want, without being aggressive.
- Know how to eat properly while dining in a restaurant.
- Avoid speaking while your mouth is full of food – or even half full!
- Don't shovel food into your mouth.
- Avoid using your fingers to put food in your mouth unless it's fruit or on a platter.
- Make eye contact with people you are speaking to and try to use their names.
- Avoid burping in public places or during meetings.
- Say “ Pardon me..” or “Excuse me..” if you do this.
- Wash your hands after visiting the toilet.
- Listen to anyone who is speaking to you.
- Be respectful of older people – they might be your future employer.
- Dress to impress – in situation appropriate ways.
- Be punctual – on time or 10 minutes early.
- Be mindful of people's personal space – this differs.
- Avoid telling inappropriate jokes in your work place, home or any public place.
- Avoid gossip – especially spreading it, worse still starting it.
- Learn about appropriate email etiquette.
- Say sorry and apologise when you make a mistake.



- Say thank you.
- Be kind rather than right – a much easier way to make friends.
- Look after your best friends – or you will lose that connection
- Be there for your friends – for the good, the bad and the ugly.
- Be generous – with yourself, your family and your friends.

Life skills around money

- Learn how to save money – and keep some for a rainy day.
- Never steal other people's money – borrow yes, but they need to give it to you.
- If you spend your money on junk food, you will eat vegemite sandwiches for dinner until next pay day!
- Accept responsibility for your own bills and debts – pay your own way.
- Never be late with mobile phone payments – this can adversely effect your credit rating for years.
- Credit cards are big traps – check out all the charges and only use it for emergencies.
- Being a broke student or apprentice builds appreciation for having financial freedom later in life.
- Never be afraid to ask banks or financial institutions questions about fees and charges, and ask for the best deal they can offer you!
- Cooking food rather than buying fast food is actually cheaper and healthier for you!
- Debit cards are better for young adults than credit cards.
- Shop within your budget.
- Keep an eye on all pay slips to make sure you are being paid for the hours you have worked and at the correct rate.
- If you borrow from your parents, pay them back!
- Learn about taxation and how to maximise your return.
- Set clear goals around your financial future.
- Never be afraid to ask successful adults how they became successful.
- Money does not bring you happiness, however, it can make living easier and give you more choices.

Other helpful life skills

- Learn the power of intention through goal setting.
- Complete as much education as you can – if not now, then later.
- Dream your own dreams and don't let anyone steal them!
- Know how to address a letter and where to put the stamp.
- Learn basic first aid.
- Learn how to laugh at yourself when you muck up!
- Learn to trust your intuition and your instincts!
- Know that everyone makes mistakes – get over it!
- Know how to use a washing machine.
- Know how to remove stains out of clothes.
- Know how to wash delicates and woollens without ruining them.
- Learn organisation skills in your bedroom – especially dirty and clean!
- Learn simple home remedies to help when someone has a cold or flu.
- Know how to treat a sprain, splinter and snake bite.
- Learn how to cheer yourself up.
- Learn basic organization skills, making reminder lists for important things such as exams, holidays and end of year activities.
- Always leave with plenty of time to spare when going somewhere new in case you get lost.
- Keep your mobile charged and in credit when travelling long distances.
- Don't drop your laptop.
- Know that soon you will be old enough to be a "lighthouse" for someone younger.



Appendix 7

10 Resilience Building Blocks

10



Strengthen the spirit

8



Absence of stress

9



Self mastery

5



Build life skills

6



Meaningful involvement
with positive adults

7



Clear boundaries

1



Positive healthy pregnancy

2



Good nutrition

3



Safe nurturing care within
the circle of family

4



Plenty of play



Appendix 8

Emotional overwhelm- strong stressors

This occurs when we feel overloaded by life. Some of things that can overwhelm are:

- Car accidents.
- Bullying and harassment.
- Nasty, malicious gossip.
- Failing at school.
- Depression.
- Other mental illness.
- Death of a loved one.
- Loss of job.
- Abuse of any kind.
- Teenage pregnancy.
- Betrayal.
- Criminal activity.
- Alcohol or drug abuse.
- Gender confusion.
- Discrimination.
- Serious illness.
- Personal injury.
- Family disharmony.
- Sudden unexpected life change.
- Unresolved conflict.
- Pressure of expectations.
- Perceived failure.
- Being late.
- Living outside your honour code.

A key protective factor is to own your share of responsibility for the things that are causing you conflict and resolve them. Then shut the door and leave the past in the past.



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