



Pastoral Information for Parents

The life of a millennial teenager is vastly different from anything we, as parents and teachers, experienced. Technological and societal changes have created pressures which we adults may not understand. Many parents ask us for advice on how to support their child through these years.

While we do not claim to be experts, we have seen and lived with a lot of teenagers! And so, we have put some of our thoughts and advice on paper. This is not intended to worry parents; the vast majority of young people will move through the teenage years without too much angst, navigating their way over the bumps and humps in the road to grow into the delightful young adults we always knew they could be. Others, however, may encounter more serious problems and we believe it is better that we, as the adults who care for them, are informed and prepared. Some of the issues we discuss here may not have any relevance to your child's schooldays but may be risks they face later in life – perhaps when at university or later. Many parents feel concerned they have lost influence over their teenage children. Yet based on many years' experience, we believe parents have a far greater impact than they sometimes realise.

Though our youngsters will play it cool and sometimes appear distant, parents remain their key role models. If you have any concerns about your child, or would like further advice, there are a number of experienced professionals at school who will be pleased to speak to you in confidence.

- Deputy Head Pastoral – Louise Ladds
- Assistant Head (Student Welfare and Pastoral Care) - Jacqui Skevington
- Housemasters/Housemistresses
 - Crake – Robert Hudson
 - Egerton – David Best
 - Merton – Cheryl Linton
 - Park Close – Sophie Heathcote
 - Raymond – Jude Single
 - Seymour – Matt Bull
 - Stonehill – Harriet Woodward
 - Wilberforce – Pippa Duncan-Jones
 - Wilson – David Bowden
- Head of Lower School – Clare Bridge

Above all, please don't panic; what we need to do is to work together. If you have any concerns, about any of these or other issues, please do come and see us at an early stage. Often, we will be able to reassure you. If not, we have a range of experience in-house, and greater access to outside expertise, to ensure that you and your child get the support you need. If you do find that something is wrong, try to remain calm, as often a child will clam up if pushed.



Phones

These are the key communication device for the vast majority of young people. Google now regards smartphones as the primary tool, and they are downgrading access for laptops/desktops to “secondary”. That shows the supremacy of phones in the market. The National Study of Health and Wellbeing website tracks developments since 1993.

Growing concerns over the addictive properties of phones are reflected in many publications. Dana Mark’s “[9 Tips that helped me beat my iPhone addiction](#)” may be helpful.

So, students need to learn how to use them well. The age-old virtues of awareness, compassion, consideration of others and self-discipline apply to phone use as to everything else. Where these virtues are not fully developed, parents can offer some help:

- Insist on itemised bills for your child’s phones.
- Take phones off your child overnight. At school, we do this until Sixth Form. They need to sleep and using screens into the night is bad news. If they tell you they have to have their phone to wake them up, you can always buy them an alarm clock!
- Set up filters (search Youtube for guidance and help)
- Stay alert to any mood/behaviour changes. A high percentage of unpleasantness amongst teenagers happens by phone. Keep listening for indicators that may suggest your child is receiving, or involved with, such behaviour.

Useful Links:

[Psych Guides](#)

[National Study of Health and Wellbeing in Children](#)



Computers, Social Media and Gaming

As with phones, any or all of these can take over a teenager's life. Young people are susceptible to such addictions. Recent research by the National Children's ICT suggests that whilst 77% of children who rarely use gaming devices get five or more good GCSEs this falls to 41% for those using gaming devices twice daily. Expecting them to develop the self-discipline to withstand the peer and commercial pressures that surround them may be asking too much, too soon. So again, parents can help.

- Firstly, we probably need to learn a bit ourselves. Whilst most of us know about Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram, we may be less savvy about Tumblr, Tinder, YikTak, Reddit or Imgur. See the links below.
- Then we parents can set age-appropriate filters on our home Wi-Fi. To do this successfully you need to keep revisiting the filters, as many sites change their settings regularly and you can easily be caught out. The best help in this is likely to come from people in their early twenties (older siblings, family friends etc.), many of whom have learned through their own experience.
- Apply the same, overnight shutdown rules suggested here for phones. This is key for those drawn to gaming. Some spend hours on these. [The Livestrong website](#) looks at the arguments about the effects of gaming. A simple step is to turn the router off overnight!
- Of course, we need to keep reminding young people that they leave an irreversible footprint of themselves on the web for universities, employers and others to view.
- Show an interest in how your child uses the internet positively, talk to them about ways it can be used positively. This makes it easier for a child to open up to a parent if things online go wrong and they need to ask for help or support.

Useful links:

[16 sites and apps kids are heading-to beyond facebook](#)

[Thinkuknow Parents' Information](#) (theThinkuknow website is a "go-to site" for many professionals in this field.)

[NCB ICT and Me](#)



Body Image & Healthy Living

We want our children to be confident and comfortable people. We want them to develop their own identity, without undue pressure from the rest of the world. We want them to develop healthy habits. The [KidsHealth](#) website explores common areas of concern in this area.

Therefore, we need to ensure that they eat properly at every meal (if they do, they don't need to stock up in the Co-op!) and take exercise. At Bloxham, we provide many opportunities for this and we also try to instil good habits for later. The statistics about the decline in healthy lifestyle after Sixth Form make for depressing reading. We discourage all forms of supplements (usually known as "shakes"). We encourage our students to make the most of the personalized training regimes our staff will offer.

We do have uniform rules at Bloxham. Uniform has a number of benefits in terms of school identity and tidy appearance, helping students to be orderly in their thinking and behaviour. Perhaps the biggest single advantage, however, is that it takes pressure off students. So many students feel a huge pressure about expressing both conformity and individuality and are fearful that the "wrong" look will leave them ostracised. Developing an understanding of self-image, and how others perceive them, is a difficult part of the teenage process. A certain uniformity in appearance helps to counter that pressure. We also don't allow excessive make-up and jewellery, introducing more flexibility over the use of these as students move up the school and so feel like they have a little more freedom when they reach Sixth Form. Throughout, our objective is for safety, to reduce peer pressure, to educate and to allow for gradual development. Your support in this delicate area is much appreciated.

We do not allow tattoos. We feel that our students are still too young to take body-image decisions which are life-long, and are very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse. Whilst they may be a positive self-expression in time, the teenage years should be a time for feeling their way towards identity, rather than setting irrevocable styles.

Facial piercings of any kind are unacceptable. 1 plain silver/gold stud or small hoop (circumference no larger than a 5 pence piece) per year can be worn.

Useful links:

[NHS Food and Diet](#)

[Healthy Living](#)

[Kids Health - Self Esteem](#)

[Young Minds](#)



Sexual Relations

Like so many of the areas we discuss, this is one where teenagers are often eager to move too far, too fast. The role of both school and parents is to be a break on actions which may be immediately attractive but can be negative in the longer-term. All students get taught about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, but the deeper issues are often about self-esteem, consideration of others and long-term awareness. We want our children to grow up as people who respect themselves and others. We want them to value their own bodies, their own characters, their own development and their status. We also want them to value these things in others. And so despite the increasingly sexually explicit culture we see portrayed on television and in the media, we hold to our rules about no sexual activity between any of our students. We ask that parents also uphold this clear boundary. The best way we have to prevent issues is, of course, an open dialogue with young people.

Mental Health Issues

Mental Health issues have increased greatly amongst the young. School offers more and more staff training in this field and has wellbeing/counselling and medical help on site. For most teenagers, the love, encouragement, interest, guidance and care that we all give is enough for them to build up the resilience needed to negotiate the challenges of adolescence. For some, however, more help is required and then the key thing is for us all to be working together. If you have concerns, please raise them with us. We will try to get the right kind of support and work with you in helping your child through these challenges. Sites such as [Young Minds](#) and [Mind](#) are worth looking at in this area.

Parties

This topic probably causes more widespread concern for parents than any other. Care needs to be taken and plans thought out thoroughly. Drink and drugs can be made available by just one person attending, and so some honest discussions with your child before they attend parties has got to be wise. It is very important to know precisely where your child is going and who the responsible adult contact is. Those hosting the party do need plenty of adult presence, to be able to keep a watchful eye. Parties with a mix of age-groups are especially vulnerable. The main concern is alcohol. Indeed, if you serve alcohol to minors you run the risk of breaking the law.



Drugs

Whilst rare, incidents of drug-use are an ever-present fear for parents. [NTA NHS](#) has a national report on drug-use and trends. While alcohol is a more common threat, drugs can have such drastic consequences it is important that parents are aware of the risks. Cannabis has increasingly been linked to mental health problems and Class A drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, methadone & speed can have life-changing or even fatal consequences. So-called legal highs have attracted significant attention in recent years. These substances are often only legal in the sense that they have yet to be banned or are legitimate drugs, but ones which can have dangerous side-effects when not taken under medical supervision. Unfortunately, technology has made access to drugs easier. While we block open-access from the school system, young people do not spend their whole lives at school. Often, drugs acquired illegally can include other dangerous substances, such as washing powder and weed-killer.

So, we all need to be observant. Changes in behaviour, changes in sleep patterns, heightened aggression - often alongside periods of indolence or inactivity may be worrying signs (though they may also be typical teenage behaviour!). As ever, talking to your child about their use of the internet is crucial. Also, try to be aware of where your child is going and with whom. Do not allow delivery of unexplained packages. A recent development on the market is budbombs designed to allow smoking of cannabis without creating smell or smoke.

At school, we expose the students to a number of guest speakers to try and educate them about the dangers of drugs. Often, these events are opened to parents and we have received good feedback about how informative they have been.

Useful links:

[Talk to Frank](#)

[NHS Livewell - Drugs](#)

[HopeUK](#)

Smoking

A few years ago, smoking seemed to be dropping off, but sadly it appears to be re-establishing itself within youth culture. Its potential results are well-known to us all. The long-term effects, whilst obvious to us, often fail to register with teenagers. Often teenagers start smoking by taking cigarettes from a family member who is totally unaware. Concern over e-pens or "vapes" is high. Our medical adviser voices strong concerns that research on the physical impact of vaping is under-developed and strongly advises us to avoid all forms. It creates an addiction to nicotine as well as introducing very high temperatures into the lungs. Cannabis may also be smoked through vape pens. Buying and using vapes under the age of 18 is illegal.

Useful Links:

[NHS Smokefree](#)

[NHS Livewell](#)

[Smoking Ash](#)

Alcohol

Our view is that alcohol is unnecessary and inappropriate below Sixth Form. Young people need to be encouraged to see that enjoyment is not dependent on alcohol. Most teenagers are quietly relieved when we remove the pressure of alcohol from their parties. We may understand how our own children respond to alcohol, but we cannot know how others will react and it varies enormously. For school events we may allow Sixth Formers wine and beer or sometimes a low alcohol "punch" in supervised conditions and to accompany food. Spirits should always be avoided. Teenagers leave themselves vulnerable when they drink alcohol and the [Drink Aware](#) website offers interesting statistical information and useful advice. Commonly it is not the alcohol but the behaviour whilst under the influence which is potentially more destructive.