



LET'S TALK PRE-TEENS

A supportive tool kit
to help parents
understand & navigate
challenging behaviours

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A supportive tool kit to help parents understand & navigate challenging behaviours

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Introduction



Hello

Welcome to our Tool Kit, thank you for deciding to give it a read, we really hope that you find it useful and that it will enable you to have honest and helpful conversations with your 9 to 12 year old. We believe that parents and carers have a really important role in keeping our children safe. We think it is essential that you know about the current issues our children are facing.

As parents ourselves, we know how valuable it can be to have tips on how to speak to our children and what we can do to help, guide and support them and to sign post you to direct specialist sources of help if you have more specific worries.

Sadly there is no such thing as a magic wand but we hope this Tool Kit will give you some insight into the issues affecting our children and the pressures that they face. This is the second Tool Kit we have produced, the first of which was for parents of teenagers and can be found at [Let's Talk Teenagers Toolkit](#).

The support you offer your child makes a massive difference in their ability to keep themselves safe. Being a parent or carer is incredibly rewarding but can also be very challenging. Supporting children can feel very lonely sometimes, but we hope the tips and techniques mentioned here can make your journey just a little bit easier. Remember to be kind to yourself as well!

To keep up to date with future online events please follow us at [South Devon and Dartmoor on Eventbrite](#).

Best wishes,

Becca

Becca Hewitt
Chair of South Devon and
Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership

Job Vacancy

abandoned vessels.

Transport Canada has abandoned or derelict vessels in coastal waters, undoubtedly an underappreciated navigational hazard. Each is, at least, an eyesore and a source of environmental contamination.

The cost to remove an abandoned vessel ranges from small change to several hundred thousand dollars, depending on complexity.

JOB VACANCY

Job Title:

Parent/Carer

Job Description:

On permanent call to love and support all the needs of a small often irrational, egocentric human

Conditions:

No guaranteed rest breaks or days off. No back up. No thanks, buy your own equipment.

Hours: 24 hours a day

Holidays: None

Training: None

Pay: None

Length of Contract: Forever

Family Diamonds



Our Family Diamonds.

To help your child shine!

Know them:

As a parent you want to give your children a good start in life and to do this you nurture, protect and guide them. This little tool kit aims to give you a helping hand with some of the challenges your family may experience.

In its most basic description Parenting is a process that prepares your child for independence.

There is no magic wand or manual that tells you what to how to manage every situation especially when the pressures are coming from so many directions, but the little things really can make a big difference, you can be the difference.

We believe that our 8-family support diamonds will help you in every situation and keep your family strong, safe and resilient.

How will you know something is wrong or worrying your child if you don't know what normal is? Look at the quick questions below and if you don't know the answers try and find out!

- Who is their best friend?
- Where is their favourite seat in the house?
- Bath or shower?
- What food do they crave when they are tired?
- Favourite Influencer/artist?
- What subject at school do they most enjoy?
- Favourite smell?
- What career do they think they will be suited to?
- What time at night do they generally fall asleep?

Nurture them:

We know you love your child. It's human nature that we all need to feel that we are loved and looked after and it's what helps our young people to thrive. Take every opportunity to show and tell them.

When they are prickly, they may not want to hear the words but show them anyway. Look at the homework they show you, pay attention when they ask for help. Make them a nice hot chocolate or grab an ice lolly out of a freezer when they want to speak to you about something.

If they're experiencing stress or going through a tricky period something as simple as opening their window for them can make all the difference. If you're working or busy and feel like passing ships in the night leave a little note on their bed when they get home to let them know you love them, or a chocolate bar, or a face mask. Make their favourite dinner or clean their shoes for them, gestures and actions are as important as the words you use.

Praise them:

Something that I'm sure was at the forefront of most of our minds when our children were toddlers, and they used the potty for the first time!

Praise is equally as important now as it was then. I'm sure we can all remember a time when our parents said something sarcastic to us when we were young after we had tried. Things like 'oh you've decided to join us at the table tonight, have you?' or 'it's nice to finally see you without that phone in front of your face'. Here we're almost giving back handed praise. We're acknowledging that they're doing something nice, but it's almost being phrased as a punishment.

Think about ways you can praise without using sarcasm. We all like to be told we've done something well, it's beneficial to our confidence and self esteem.

Give them the gift of time:

We are all busy, sometimes during the week it feels as if with work/school and other commitments we struggle to find time to really be available to our children.

It is a parent's job to find this time.

Even sitting on the sofa together watching a TV show eating a microwave meal counts. Try and show them how important they are and that you value talking to them more than flicking through your phone, really be present if they are talking to you.

If they are looking at their phone ask them to share their current favourite TikTok dance with you, or the current funny meme about something. Don't dismiss it, if you don't get it - ask!

It may feel like there is never a good time to have any difficult talks with your young person but try and start the conversation when you aren't feeling too emotional so you can calmly explain your concerns. Conversations when you are busy doing something else (but nothing important!) can be helpful so they don't feel so embarrassed or pressured. Also remember your young person is always learning by observation if you can role model to them that you can stay calm during a tricky conversation, the more likely they will also stay calm in this situation.

Role model

Your children are always watching you. If you don't want them to be smokers, don't smoke. If you don't want them on social media 24 hours a day then you can't be. Want them to eat 5 fruit and veg a day - start eating your greens.

YouTube have an old but great clip about how children really do copy their parents. Your attitudes, language and lifestyle are the first influences your child is exposed to, try, and make them positive ones.

Let them see how you react to stressful situations and difficult times; this will give them the tools to use when they face challenges.

Model that self-care, let them see you planning down time into your day and prioritizing them and yourself over outside pressures.

Listen to them.

Actively listen, don't be formatting your reply to what you think is being said, take the time to stop and really hear what is being said. The aim is to understand rather than reply and for your child to feel heard and validated and therefore more inspired to seek their own solutions. This is about anything they may tell you.

An example would be they might tell you their friend is being a bully or someone in their class drank alcohol at the weekend. It would be easy at this point to go 'oh my goodness, that's awful, what must their parents think'. However, try and remember that by using this judgemental language about their peers might make them be less likely to talk to you in the future if a similar situation happened to them, as they might fear that judgement themselves.

If they do want to talk about things, make sure you listen to them. Even if what your young person has to say makes you feel uncomfortable or even disappointed, it's important that they know they can say it to you. Reacting negatively is likely to make them cautious about being honest, so take them seriously and help them feel they can disclose things if they need to.

Young people want to feel they're being listened to, not being told, so going in hard and laying down the law is unlikely to ever lead to an honest response. You're much more likely to get through to them if you try to start a dialogue.

Respect them.

As your children grow, they will need some privacy in their lives, and this indicates a greater drive for independence.

Privacy and trust go together with keeping your child safe while developing their autonomy. This can be hard to judge at times but try to respect their needs, would you want them sitting in on your conversations with your closest friends or looking through your phone?

Rules around privacy are different in everyone's families and some are in place for safety. Researchers who have studied respect have found that not only do our pre-teens very clearly know when they are or are not being respected, but their behaviour can be shaped by these experiences.

For many respect is a powerful determinant for whether they will engage in productive behaviours or destructive behaviours. If no one cares whether they, do it or not why not do it anyway?

Try to start from a position where you understand and can show that you have understood. You may not agree but listening shows respect for their point of view.

Try to encourage and invite discussion, without it sounding as though you are laying down yet more rules.

Try to use sentences that begin with things like 'Have you thought about ...' 'I wonder if...'. 'Would it be a good idea if we...'

Showing your young person how to negotiate, present their point of view respectfully and come to an agreement is a vital life skill.

Don't miss the opportunity to teach them how to do this at home. Look at compromises so that you both come away from the conversation feeling listened to and respected.

Be aware of the language you use, try and find appropriate words to describe how you are feeling. Are you frustrated, annoyed, stressed, unhappy, irritated, wound up or let down? It can be much easier to explain how you feel if you can use the right words.

Be there again and again and again for them.

Be consistent. It's a myth that you just need to have one 'big talk' with your child when it comes to difficult conversations.

Helping them to feel that their thoughts and actions are not a taboo subject - that they can bring them up without it being a big deal can be a great comfort. It also helps them to feel they have someone to turn to if they do get stuck. This doesn't mean awkwardly shoehorning the topic into your conversations, but simply checking in from time to time and letting them know they don't need to be embarrassed if they do want to talk. Speak to them then and there about what has happened and don't put it off - the opportunity may not arise again. Remind them that you are here to listen to and support them.

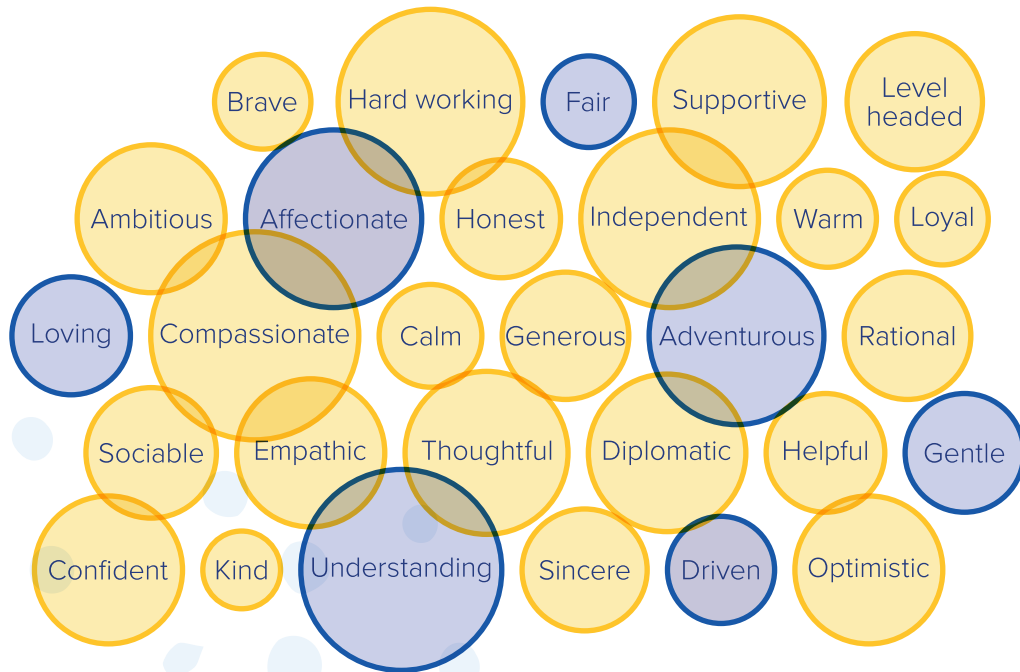
There's every chance they'll find this conversation awkward or unpleasant, (as will you). But knowing you're there to help if they need it can be a big comfort if they decide they do need it. Besides, any information or advice you're able to give can make all the difference when it comes to them making good decisions in the future.

Try not to take things too personally; it may not be you they are angry with at all.

What do I want for my Child?

What qualities would you like your child to have when they leave secondary School?

Would you like them to be...



How can we support our children to make sure they have these qualities?

- Role model ourselves as parents displaying these qualities
- Support them in surrounding themselves with peers and friends who have similar qualities
- Have open conversations about the importance of these qualities
- Help them to engage in activities that will foster these qualities
- Praise them when we see them demonstrate these qualities

Biology and puberty

So, let's look at bodies, you may not want to hear some of this but if it's not happening now it's about to!

You are going to start to see a steady increase in this large muscle development and weight gain and therefore an increase in strength. You are going to be seeing growth spurts, this generally starts earlier for girls, but it lasts longer for boys who often then end up taller.

Body proportions change, so females tend to widen at the hips and boys across the chest and shoulders, up until now both sexes have looked similar, but this may now change, they may complain of joint pain, these growing pains are real, things are happening quickly in their bodies. You are going to see very active children with a lot of energy, they can't seem to sit still.

The things your child may not like are that hair is going to start to grow, they will look more like adults than little children when this starts to develop. Under arm hair will go alongside body odour and that awareness that they might like to start using deodorant on a regular basis. Skin becomes oilier and spots will start to appear, for some this may be next to nothing and hardly worth noting, others will experience bad acne or body shaming and sometimes this can lead to a drop in self-esteem and confidence. We'll come back to this later in the Tool Kit.

In females we will see breasts developing and menstrual cycles starting and in males we will see voices start to deepen, sperm is now produced and so erections ejaculation and wet dreams are more frequent. Can you imagine or remember how scary this can seem, their bodies change so quickly, and they are expected to accept and adapt and just get on with it, it's a part of life.

Well, yes it is a part of life but sometimes as adults we struggle with things that are a part of life and hopefully we know where to ask for help and support so it's important that children and young people are able to air their worries and concerns and get the help and support that they need, which is where you come in! Take your worries right back to the 8 diamonds act on them.

Emotions and mental wellbeing



Young people entering puberty are likely to start feeling their emotions more intensely and more suddenly.

Not only are our young people experiencing hormone changes as they enter their teen years, but there is also a lot of pressure on them including peer pressure and academic pressure. Teenage years involve a lot of change, uncertainty and confusion which are likely to impact on how they feel.

Some signs you may see if your young person is struggling with their mental wellbeing (Please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- Changes in School performance
- Negative self-talk
- Withdrawal from socialising
- Ongoing sleep difficulties or lack of energy
- Trouble concentrating
- Changes in behaviour
- Frequent stomach aches and sickness
- Persistent low mood
- Lack of motivation
- Changes in eating habits

Pre-teens are still learning about emotions and might still be struggling with their emotional vocabulary, meaning that they might not actually be able to tell you how they're feeling.

Let's help them with this!

Let's have open conversations about emotions and how closely they can link to how we physically feel, a good place to start might be a body map (see next page).

Mark on the body map where they feel emotions in their body.

Do they get a tummy ache when they feel down?

Do their shoulders become tense when they're angry?

Maybe they have shaky legs when they're worried?

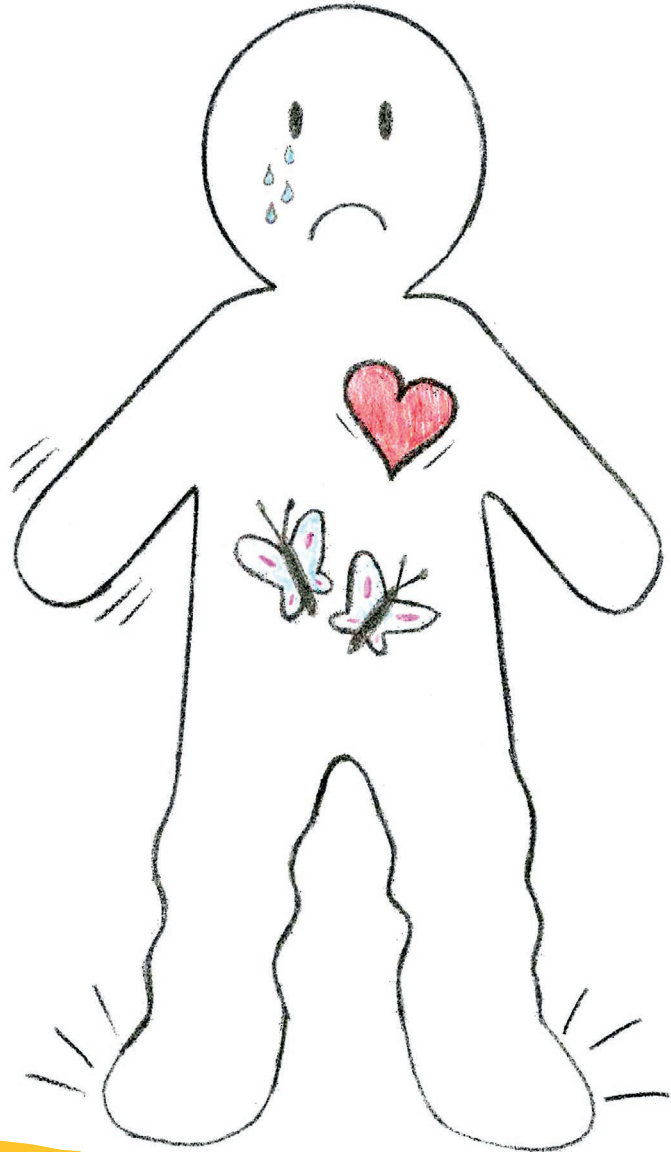
By linking the physical sensations to the emotion, it can help your child to understand their emotions more. It can also spark a conversation with them, which could lead onto a discussion about how they could help themselves to feel good.

Here are some self-care suggestions they might like to try, to get the conversation with them started:

- A bubble bath and a candle
- Being active
- Having a good sleep routine
- Cooking a new meal with you
- Games night as a family
- Hot chocolate in the winter, ice lollies in the summer
- Watching their favourite movie
- Writing down their feelings
- Time with friends
- A sing along to a song played loud

Emotions and mental wellbeing

Use this template as a starting point to talk about emotions with your child.



Anger and difficult emotions



Anger is an important, natural and often useful emotion.

Anger helps us to motivate change, anger has been important in our survival, in keeping us safe and is so important in our fight or flight response when we are exposed to a threat.

Anger, in itself is not a negative emotion. However, how anger is expressed can make it seem like a negative emotion, for example if violence is used as a way of expressing this emotion.

Anger can often be expressed in 'outward' or 'inward' ways:

Examples of unhealthy inward expressions of anger	Examples of unhealthy outward expressions of anger
Negative self-talk	Physical violence
Not meeting own basic needs	Slamming doors

Sometimes it is thought that inward expressions of anger are much less worrying than outward expressions, but often that isn't the case. If young people learn to inwardly express their anger, they will continue to adopt this approach into adulthood,

learning that anger shouldn't be expressed and instead be taken out on themselves. But equally, we don't want to teach them that physical violence is the answer to expressing anger. Let's instead help them learn healthy ways to express their anger:

Examples of healthy inward expressions of anger	Examples of unhealthy outward expressions of anger
Deep breathing	Body movement (exercise, shaking limbs, walking, dancing or stretching)
Writing down what's made them angry	Singing along to loud music

Substances, alcohol, smoking and vaping



The teenage years are most prone to addiction and dependency on drugs and alcohol.

This is because children's brains will not be fully formed until they are around the age of 25, so they are more comfortable in taking risks. Research also shows us that 90% of addictions started before the age of 18 years old.

There are many reasons that young people may be drawn into experimenting with drugs, alcohol, smoking or vaping, including peer pressure or the sense that 'everyone does it'. However, it has been found that one of the main reasons that young people are drawn to drugs and alcohol is due to feeling a lack of sense of belonging. So, keep them busy!

Help them to find their identity!

Help them find clubs they may like to join or support their hobbies by looking into equipment and supplies they may need.

Try not to be scared to talk to your young person about drugs, alcohol, smoking and vaping.

There's a common misconception that if we talk to our teenagers about something, they're more likely to do it. But actually, this isn't the case.

We know that simply telling young people not to do something won't work, so knowledge really is power here. Here are some conversation starters:

- "What have you learnt about smoking/drugs/alcohol at School?"
- "What are your thoughts about what you've learnt?"
- After watching videos or seeing drugs/alcohol/smoking/vaping on TV you could say "What do you think about that?"

Your child may want to start going to parties during secondary School and may want to experiment with alcohol, so help them to safety plan around this (see [page 45](#) for safety plan).

Body image



Children’s opinions of their bodies start to form at a very young age.

There are many things that influence how children see themselves and as Parents and Carers you can play a critical role in helping children develop a positive body image and self-esteem.

It can be difficult to escape the “ideal” body image that is promoted in today’s media no matter how much you try to shield your children from it, the message is likely to come through. This can happen at school as they interact with friends or as they observe the adults in their lives.

As adults we struggle sometimes with the idea that the “perfect” body doesn’t really exist, at least not in the way it is defined in the media. Photos are often edited to make models thinner or to enhance their features. So, chasing the “perfect” body can end only in disappointment.

Body image is a big part of your child’s self-esteem. If children don’t like the way they look or are dissatisfied with their bodies, their self-esteem will suffer.

How they see themselves can affect every aspect of their lives - either negatively or positively. It affects their short- and long-term choices. It can impact their ability to meet people and make friends. It can prevent them from wanting to try new things or even seek higher education. These social consequences often last a lifetime.

There are health consequences, too. People with low self-esteem are more likely to be depressed and have anxiety. Experiencing and being treated for depression can cause weight gain, which makes low self-esteem even worse.

Another common inappropriate way to cope is to develop an eating disorder. Each of these can have a negative impact on your child’s health.

Back to our diamonds, your role modelling can make such a huge difference to the way your children think about their bodies. Something as small as frowning in the mirror or sucking your stomach in for photos will be noticed, reinforcing the opinion that you are not perfect enough. Don’t wait until you think it becomes an issue, have the conversations now and start changing habits in your home.

Also, your instinct may be to shield your child from TV shows that focus on perfect people. Instead, watch TV with your child and discuss what you see. Talk about how people are being portrayed. This gives you a chance to focus on character traits that are more important than outward appearances. You can remind your child of a time when they showed the same good character trait.

 Try not to	 Instead try to
Say dieting	Say healthier eating
Exercise for weight loss	Exercise for strength
Insist they finish their plate of food	Acknowledge when they say they are full
Shy away from being in a photo (my hair is rubbish, I look fat today)	Be in the photo!
Make all the decisions	To let them choose foods they enjoy and have discussions about them
Limit the variety of food	Eat a full variety of different foods
Focus on outer appearance	Praise your child on their inner attributes.
Dismiss worries	Take every opportunity to open a conversation



Moving from 'little School' to 'big School' also comes with some big changes!

Maybe one of the biggest being all of the new people, and potentially new friends.

As parents of primary School children, we often know loads about our children's friends. But as they enter secondary School, we can be left feeling a little in the dark with who they are spending most of their days with.

We also now have less control over who their friends are; however, it's okay to still want to know who is involved in their lives.

Ongoing conversations about their new friends show that you care and will give you a small insight into their world.

How can we support our young people in making and maintaining friendships?

- **Be supportive of their new friends** (as long as they are positive friendships). Encouraging them to invite their friends over, or go out with them can really support the blossoming friendship.
- **Give them space.** If and when you get to meet any new friends try not to bombard the friend with questions, get to know them, but also give your young person the space with their friends. They might want to spend all evening in their bedroom with the door shut, and that's okay!

- **Be non-judgemental.** Try not to pass comment on their friends, (unless you're really worried about the friendship, for example that their new friend is not a positive influence). Making negative comments about their friends is never likely to have a positive outcome, it could distort their thinking about their friends or could result in them shutting down and not being open with you.
- **Be the secure base.** If anything goes wrong, make sure that they know that they can come to you. Whether that's for advice about a falling out with their friend, to something more serious like bullying; even though they're becoming teenagers, they still need you.
- **Role model.** It takes a lot of skills and hard work to maintain friendships. Show them how you're a good friend and how to be a good friend. Role model nurturing your own relationships, spending time with friends, being supportive, and forgiving where appropriate

Bullying





Bullying is when “one person, or a group of people deliberately hurts another person (emotionally or physically), usually more than once”.

Bullying is often very hidden; your young person may feel shame and not want to approach you directly with what they have been experiencing.

But there are some signs that you can look out for, that might suggest your child may be being bullied:

- **Change in behaviour**
such as becoming more withdrawn and quieter.
- **Appearing scared**
such as to go to School or out with friends.
- **Unexplained frequent illnesses**
this could be an excuse to get out of going to School or they could actually feel physically unwell due to the anxiety of having to go into School.
- **Disturbed sleep**
they might be struggling to get off to sleep due to feelings or worry or anxiety.
- **Appearing anxious whilst online, or not wanting to go online**
this could be a sign that they are experiencing cyber bullying.
- **Poor School performance**
the bullying may be impacting on their concentration in class.
- **Significant emotional changes**
for example being tearful easily or **lashing out in anger**.
- **Missing or damaged possessions**
that often they are unable to explain or put it down to a peer ‘joking around’.

What you can do if you’re worried your child is being bullied:

 Try not to	 Instead try to
Expect your child to approach you straight away	Speak to your child in a neutral environment, like the car, about your worries
Ask them if they’re being bullied, completely out of the blue	Start gently by telling them what you’ve noticed. You could say ‘I’ve noticed you don’t seem yourself recently’ or ‘I’ve noticed you don’t seem very happy coming home from School’
Assume you know what the bullying is like	Ask them gentle questions to find out the facts about how long the bullying has been going on, and what it looks like
Approach the bully or their parents	Ask your child what they want to do about it, or what help they want from you
Talk to the School about it without your young person knowing	Ask your child if they want School to know, how they would like School to know and how much they want School to know.
Blame them	Reassure them that there is no justification for bullying and what they’re going through is not okay
Remove their devices	Remind them of features they can use to make their online experience more positive such as blocking or muting the bully

Romantic relationships



As your children progress through secondary School you may find that they start forming romantic relationships.

But starting up those conversations about healthy relationships **before** they enter into relationships is so important.

TV shows can be a good starting point so that it doesn't feel too embarrassing or uncomfortable for your child (or you!).

After watching a video clip or programme on the TV you could talk about the following:

- Would they like to be treated in this way?
- Why or why not?
- What would they do in that scenario?
- What could the couple on the TV show do differently?
- What qualities would they like in a partner?

If your child does have a relationship, **talk to them about it.**

Try and think about what you need to know such as how they met or how old they are. But also show interest to encourage ongoing open discussions and making them aware that they can come to you, if they need it.

You could ask your child questions like 'how do they treat you?' 'what is it you like the best about them?' and 'what do you like doing with them?'.

Unhealthy relationships



Unhealthy or 'toxic' relationships are important to be aware of as parents as our young people enter into romantic relationships...

Why?

Because research shows that:

- Young people aged between 13 and 24 are at the highest risk of domestic abuse
- 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 to 14 thought that hitting a partner would be 'okay' in some scenarios
- 25% of girls and 18% of boys aged between 13 to 17 years old reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner

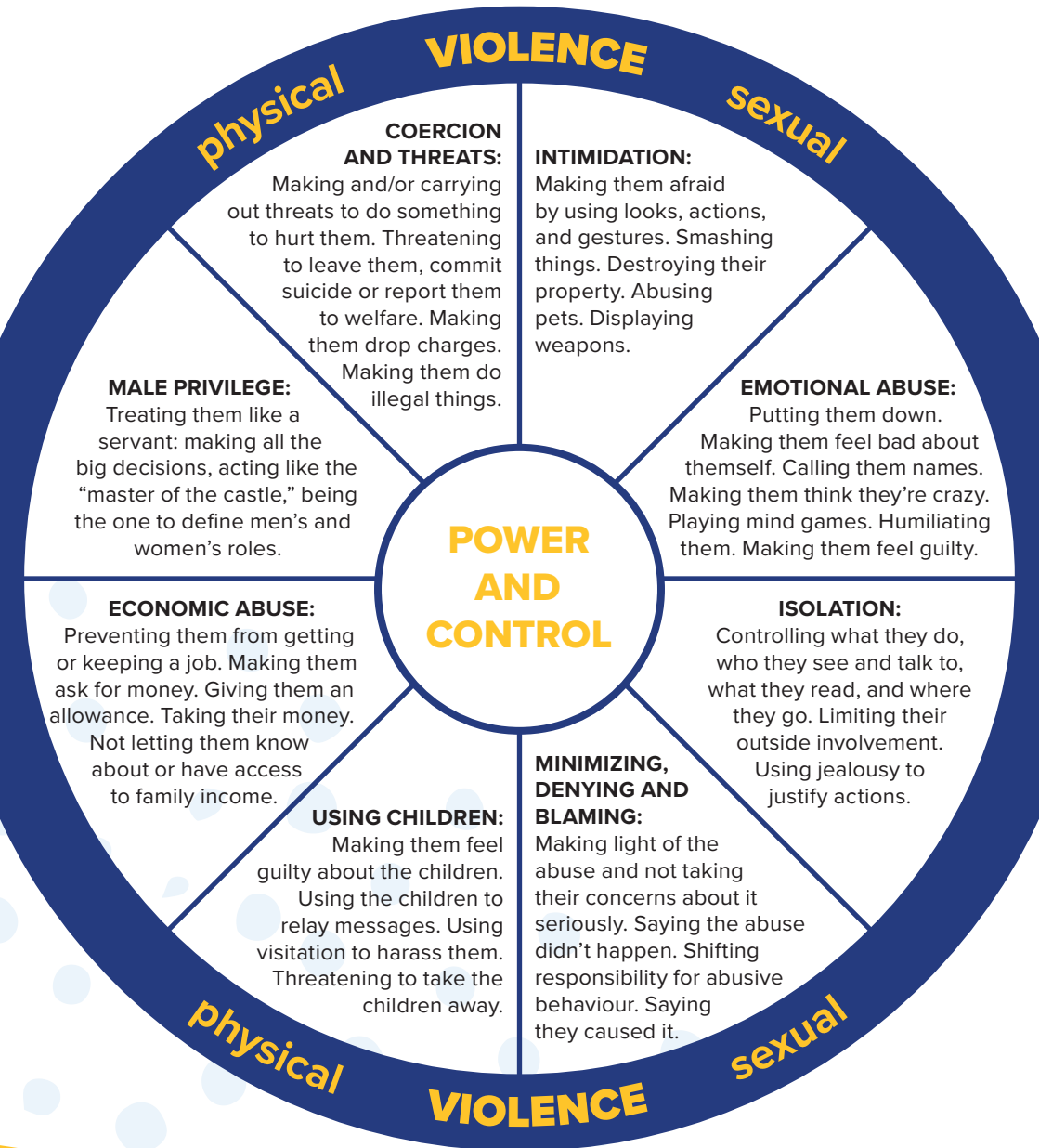
You'll notice that these statistics all start with the age of 13, which hopefully your young person has not quite reached yet if you're reading this Tool Kit. So, the key is **prevention**.

Start having those **open conversations** now about how they deserve to be treated, and how they should treat other people.

Try not to shy away from the subject and educate them on some signs of an unhealthy relationship.

On the next page is the power and control wheel which shows all of the different ways that abuse may be perpetrated within an intimate relationship.

The Power and Control Wheel



Gender stereotypes

Definition: A gender stereotype is “a generalized view about the characteristics, or the roles that should be possessed or performed by women or men.”

Gender stereotypes are harmful as they could limit a person’s identity such as choices they make about their life, like their career.

Research shows that 90% of girls and over 70% of boys report experiencing sexist name calling at some point during their time at secondary School. Gender stereotypes are heavily ingrained in society after many years of being reinforced, so they won’t be changed overnight. However, having conversations with your young person about their ideas about gender can be a powerful tool in starting to motivate change.

Use the statements below as a conversation starter with your young person to generate a discussion about gender stereotypes. However, make sure to gently challenge their ideas if they do agree with any of the below statements. Remind them that regardless of their gender, they can be interested in whatever they want to be, which includes hobbies and future career possibilities.

“Girls can’t play rugby”

“Boys shouldn’t cry, it shows weakness”

“It isn’t okay for boys to go to ballet lessons”

“Only women should stay at home and look after the children”

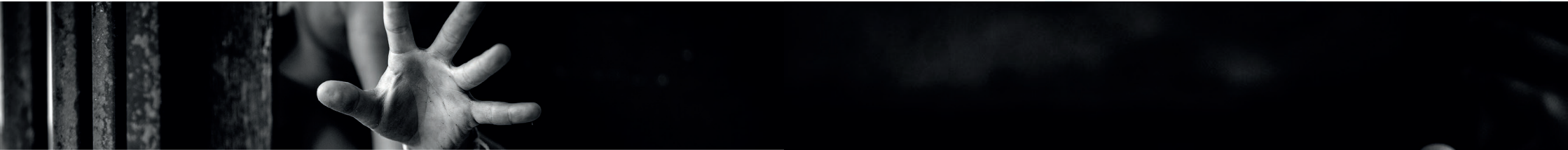
“Men shouldn’t be nurses”

“Women shouldn’t lift weights in the gym”

“Soldiers in the army should always be men”

“Only women should do the laundry”

Exploitation - the main worries



Although the types of exploitation and the language we use can change, the basic premise stays the same.

An adult targeting a child and abusing their power for their own needs.

Whether it is sexual exploitation, labour exploitation or criminal exploitation and county lines children should never be blamed for the abuse they experience.

The child's behaviour and response is not the crime. Child Exploitation is the crime.

When a child or young person is exploited, they're groomed by being given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection.

This is usually in exchange for carrying out a criminal activity, or performing sexual activities, known as Child Sexual Exploitation



What is the worry?



Criminal Exploitation and County Lines

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns. It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse. These criminals befriend children, (often online) then manipulate them into drug dealing. The 'lines' refer to mobile phones that are used to control the young person.

We know that young people aged 14-17 are the most likely to be targeted but there are reports of children as young as 7 being groomed into County Lines. Primary school children are seen as easy targets as they are less likely to come to the attention of the police and much less likely to get caught. It doesn't matter where you're from or your social background, children from any community can be groomed into county lines. However,

those from poor households, who regularly skip school or have problems at home may be more at risk. Do you know where your child is right now? County lines operations are often hard to spot, but the signs are visible. We could all be in a position to stop it.

Once they have identified a child, the gang will make some form of contact and the grooming process will begin. This could be in person or via mobile phone. Social media profiles may also be used to glamourise gang life and entice young people. Some children are groomed through family members, for instance if they have a sibling or relative who is already involved with a county lines gang. County lines gangs offer money and status to attract young people. Children may also be attracted to joining a gang by the prospect of belonging to a 'family' that will protect them if their own family feels unstable or unsafe. Some children are forced to transport

drugs in ways that are invasive and harmful to their bodies. Young people may be forced to swallow bags of drugs to transport them, which could potentially be life threatening. The practice of 'plugging' is also common, whereby drugs are inserted into a child's rectum or vagina. This is a form of sexual abuse and in some cases, it can cause a child's death (Ofsted et al, 2018).

Sexual exploitation is also used in gangs to exert power and control over members or initiate young people into the gang. Sexual activity can also be used for status or protection or used as a weapon and inflicted as sexual assault. They might also offer something in return for the young person's cooperation, for example money, food, alcohol, clothes and jewellery, or improved status, but these gifts will usually be manipulated so that the young person feels they are in debt to their exploiter and have no choice but to do what they want. Once a child is part of a county lines gang their loyalty and commitment

will be tested. The gang will begin to trap the child by making them feel powerless to leave. This might include threats of violence if they leave, making the child feel like they are betraying their new 'family', or telling the child they will get in trouble if they seek help because they have committed a criminal offence (Children's Society, 2019).

Sexual Exploitation

Media and social media coverage of sexual abuse investigations has greatly increased though the high-profile cases of celebrities and footballers but every year in England it is reported that over 75,000 children each year are raped or sexually abused. This includes children who have been abducted, trafficked, or coerced and threatened into having sex. Child sexual exploitation is again when adults use their power over young people, this power may result from a difference in age, intellect, money, or a position of higher authority.

People often think of child exploitation in term of organised crime, but it also covers domestic abuse and may involve informal exchanges of something a child wants or needs such as gifts, money, accommodation or attention. Many children are groomed by partners who then force them into sexual activity with friends or associates. This leads to shame and embarrassment around reporting, as many children (and adults) don't see this as a crime.

This is part of the challenge around sexual exploitation, does your child understand consent and what that means?

Consent is a really difficult concept to define, but has been defined as “a person agreeing to something by choice, with freedom and capacity to make that choice.”

When it comes to consensual sex this means that the individuals involved must agree to the sexual activity by choice and have the freedom and capacity to make this choice. Consent can be withdrawn at any point throughout the sexual activity.

To make this clearer type into YouTube 'consent and a cup of tea (clean)' and watch the short video clip. Encourage your young person to watch it and then discuss this with them afterwards.

What will you see?

The following signs may indicate that a child is being exploited:

- Leaving home suddenly without an explanation or returning home unusually late or staying out all night - do you know where they are?
- Unexplained injuries or suspicion of physical assault
- Persistently going missing or being found in areas away from home which they have no connection to. Think about train tickets or hotel key cards lying around.
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Meeting with unfamiliar people, lots of new friends who you don't know - are they being picked up from school in a flash car?
- Becoming isolated from peers and old friends
- Unexplained absences from school, Loss of interest in school and decline in performance
- Sudden changes in lifestyle, change of clothing style and brand - if you aren't paying and they haven't got a job where is the money coming from?
- Significant changes in emotional well-being - recurrent virus's, tummy aches, depression and anxiety, eating worries.
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive and violent behaviour
- Using sexual, gang, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour such as over familiarity with strangers or sending sexualised images (nudes or sexting)
- Mis-use of alcohol or drugs
- Receiving an excessive number of texts or phone calls and answering/responding immediately - never letting their phone out of their sight
- Change in appearance and looking after themselves.

This list is not designed to scare you as parents and carers, however the indicators for exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours' and ignored. Share this with your child as early as you can and open up these discussions.

What can you do

We have split the following into 2 advice columns, the first is around prevention, what can you do right now to help protect your child and then if they disclose something to you what can you then do.

Prepare

- ✦ **Be honest with your children around their bodies and sex.** Answer questions in an age appropriate way. These conversations can happen at any time so try and be prepared for them!

There's every chance they'll find this conversation awkward or unpleasant, (as will you). But knowing you're there to help if they need it can be a big comfort if they decide they do need it. Besides, any information or advice you're able to give can make all the difference when it comes to them making good decisions in the future.
- ✦ **Develop an open and trusting relationship** using the diamonds so your child can talk to you about anything. Never react badly if you hear something you don't like, it will make them less likely to share with you again.

React

- ✦ **Be open about your worries** and what you are seeing, you are not expected to have all the answers. If you 'feel' that something is wrong, then you are probably right and you need to act on it. A simple conversation may make things clearer. Try not to take things too personally; it may not be you they are angry with at all.
- ✦ **Listen.** You may not like what you hear but it is important to really hear what your child is telling you. Try not to react as this may be the only time, they tell you something, if you respond negatively it gives them the message that you are not a safe person to share things with.
- ✦ **Tell them that they've done the right thing** by sharing with you and that it is not their fault.

Prepare...

- ✦ **Differentiate between safe secrets** (a birthday party) **and unsafe secrets** (makes them feel scared or uncomfortable) and make it ok to tell them.
- ✦ **Respect boundaries** around changing/bathing, etc. As your child grows into a teenager, they will become more self-conscious and want privacy, accept that this is normal and respect their wish.
- ✦ **Ensure safe use of the internet**
- ✦ **No means No** - ensure your child knows that they can say no to any unwanted touching, even if it's from a favourite Aunt or Uncle. They have the say over who touches their body.
- ✦ **Talk about Consent** - and make it a regular conversation.
- ✦ **Safety Plan**
It's important that everyone feels safe, our safety plan on [page 45](#) will help with this.

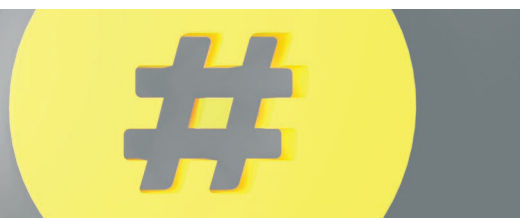
React ...

- ✦ **You may not need to fix anything immediately.** Put the kettle on, grab both of you a biscuit and start unpicking what you have been told. Make sure that your child knows that you are taking this seriously but that you are not about to confront the gang/abuser and will include them in all next steps.

What does your child want to happen? We don't want to make life any harder for them. Be child led as much as you can.

There are obviously times when you must fully take on the adult role and act, but your child needs to feel that they have a voice in this. Other people are taking their power away, don't do this too.
- ✦ **Report/Research**
Contact the police on 999 if you need an immediate response or 101 if not urgent - they will also signpost to support in your local area. Consider reporting to the safeguarding lead at your child's school.

Social media guidelines



All social media sites have a responsibility to keep their users safe and to ensure that all reports of cyber-bullying and abuse are dealt with effectively, however we and our young people as users of such sites, also have a responsibility to make sure they are using them in a safe, respectful and appropriate manner.

Although the law and guidelines are there it is important to acknowledge the immense pressure our young people are under to use social media, share their location, send explicit images, upload the best photographs, be ready and available to chat to friends 24/7, be on group chats ... the list goes on.

Did you know that most social media sites have age restrictions?



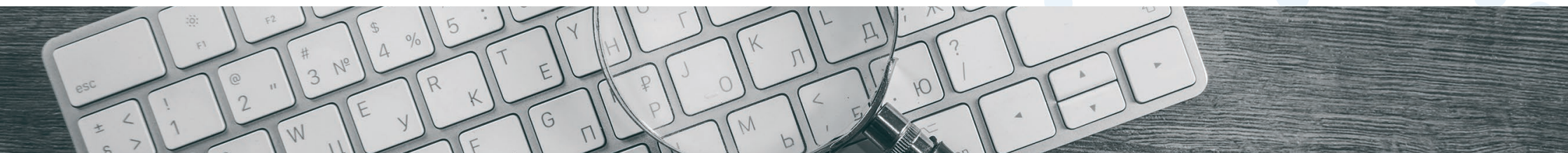
Site	Age	Safety
WhatsApp	16	<p>Once you install the app, it checks your address book and connects you automatically to anyone else you know who is using the App.</p> <p>You can block and delete a contact who may be bullying you through WhatsApp:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on their name then using the dropdown menu, 2. Choose to 'block' the person <p>You can find out more by emailing WhatsApp at support@whatsapp.com</p>
Instagram	13	<p>Instagram's advice is to block and unfollow the person who is being abusive.</p> <p>To block someone on Instagram, tap their username to open their profile, tap the three dots and press the option to 'Block User'. Under this same menu there is also the option to restrict a user which means no one else will see their comments on your posts, their messages will go into your message request folder and they won't be able to see if you're online or have read their messages.</p> <p>This feature is good to use if you feel that you need space from someone, rather than if you're experiencing online abuse, harassment or bullying. If someone is being abusive you can report them by going to the '...' menu on their profile, press 'Report' and follow the next steps.</p>
TikTok	13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To block someone; Go to the user's profile that you want to block Hit '...' in the upper right hand corner of their profile. Select 'Block' 2. The user will not be notified when you block them; however, if a user is blocked, they will not be able to follow you or view your videos. <p>Blocked users cannot see your TikTok videos or comments.</p> <p>When they try, they will see a message that says 'You cannot view this user's videos due to their privacy settings'.</p>

YouTube	13*	<p>You can report users, inappropriate background images, or inappropriate profile avatars using the reporting flow located on the bottom of every channel.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sign in to YouTube. 2. Go to the channel page you want to report. 3. Click 'About'. 4. Click 'Report'. 5. Select the option that best suits your issue. <p>To block someone ; Click 'About' on their profile, then hit the flag button. In the drop down menu, you'll see an option 'Block User'. Once you confirm your decision to block this commenter, they won't be able to send you direct messages, or be able to comment on your videos or your channel.</p>
Snapchat	13	<p>To block a 'friend'. Tap the Menu icon, Select 'My Friends', Locate their name in the list and swipe right across their name: press Delete.</p> <p>To block someone who added you on Snapchat: Tap 'Added Me' on the Profile Screen, Tap their name and tap the 'Wheel Icon' next to their name. Press 'Block'. This will prevent them from sending you Snaps or Chats or from viewing your content.</p> <p>If a person is bullying or harassing you or you receive an inappropriate image report it by pressing and holding on their username, tap 'Manage Friendship' and then tap 'Report'</p>

Site	Age	Safety
Twitter	13	<p>If a person sends you a tweet or replies to a tweet with a comment that you don't like, you can unfollow that person.</p> <p>To stop them from further contacting you, you can block them. If you receive unwanted replies or abuse or threats from someone on Twitter you can report them direct to Twitter.</p> <p>To do this, go onto their profile tap the '...' on their profile, Press 'Report' and follow the next steps.</p> <p>You can protect your tweets so that people can only follow you if you approve them first.</p> <p>Do this by going into the 'Settings' menu, then 'Security and Privacy' and ticking the 'Protect My Tweets' box.</p> <p>To remove or block someone on Twitter, click on the button with a head icon on it next to the 'Follow' button on a user's profile.</p> <p>When you click on this you will see a menu with the options to 'Block' the user to prevent them from seeing your profile and you can also 'Report for Spam', which will alert Twitter to any users who are abusing the service.</p>

* 13 with parent's permission, 18 without parent's permission

Pornography - what is the worry?



Just 6 clicks away

Research shows that anyone on the internet can be 6 clicks or less away from seeing inappropriate or harmful content on the internet.

Try it out ...

Type in something totally appropriate that your child may search for. Follow links and see where it takes you.

The sole purpose of these sites is to make money, not to protect children from harmful exposure and whilst illegal sites are shut down as quickly as possible it is estimated that over 30% of internet use is a porn search.

Research commissioned by a children's safety group showed the strength of algorithms used by social media companies based on a user's activity. So, whilst a teenage boy may be targeted with age-appropriate material such as college courses or sportswear, he is also likely to be targeted with highly sexual contents.

Your 11-year-old clicking on a recipe labelled healthy eating may be targeted with diet tips and eating disorder sites totally distorting their image of a healthy body.

Pornographic content harms children. Exposure to pornography at a young age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes.

Among other risks, when children view pornography that portrays abusive and misogynistic acts, they may come to view such behaviour as normal and acceptable.

It's hard to think about how something that your child sees at age 11 may have terrible consequences in his or her marriage 20 years from now, but that's the reality when we are talking about pornography.

What can you do

Straight back to our diamonds, this may feel awkward and embarrassing but if they can't talk to you or another close and trusted family member or friend then someone else not so trusted might fill in the gaps.

The average age of a child viewing their first online pornography is now 9 so you can never have these conversations too early and don't let the awkwardness build until it becomes a taboo subject.

If you have managed to build that safe and open environment that we discuss, then your child may come to you with questions way earlier than you expect them to. Try to be casual, give age-appropriate answers, it's ok to say that some things are only for adult viewing but don't let them think that this makes it ok.

Do not tell them off if you find that they have accessed porn, and do not instantly take away their device as punishment.

Try and remember that what they have seen might have scared them and be reassuring about the confusing emotions your child might feel after seeing explicit content. It's OK to be curious and that this is a normal part of growing up. But also, be prepared to challenge views that may arise from watching adult content.

Reinforce the message that sex and bodies, as depicted in a lot of porn, are not realistic.

Explain that porn can make things like non consensual sex appear 'normal' or 'OK' but it is not.



Radicalisation

This is when someone starts to believe or support extreme views, and in some cases, then participates in terrorist groups or acts. It can be motivated by a range of factors, including ideologies, religious beliefs, political beliefs and prejudices against particular groups of people.

People may be radicalised in many ways, and over different time frames from as little as a few days or hours, or it may take several years.

Anyone can be radicalised, but factors such as being easily influenced and impressionable make children and young people particularly vulnerable.

There's a chance that your child may meet people online or visit websites that could lead them to adopting extreme views or experiencing radicalisation.

Curiosity could lead your child to seek out these people, or they could groom your child. They could then encourage your child to adopt beliefs or persuade them to join groups with extreme views and actions. The signs are like any kind of online grooming and things to look out for include:

- Becoming more secretive, especially around internet use.
- Spending increasing amounts of time communicating with friends they have met online.
- Becoming isolated from family and friends.
- Developing a fixation on a particular subject.
- Expressing intolerance or hatred of other people or communities.
- Changing appearance to reflect association with a group or cause.
- Expressing thoughts about harming or using violence towards others.

If your child becomes radicalised it can endanger their safety and welfare, and the safety and welfare of those around them. By intervening early, you can ensure that they receive support to keep them safe, preventing them from further radicalisation. Back to have the conversation early, use the Diamonds.

If you suspect that someone is about to put themselves in danger by travelling to join a terrorist organisation or appears involved in plans to commit a criminal offence, please inform the police immediately by calling 999.

You can find out more about helping identify and prevent radicalisation on [Safer Devon](https://www.saferdevon.co.uk) website. Or by clicking on <https://www.internetmatters.org/>.

The [Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre](https://www.ceop.police.uk/) (CEOP) investigate cases of grooming on the Internet and sex abuse and incidents can be reported by clicking the red button on the top right hand corner of their website <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre>

Online safety plan

Day-to-day safety plan



Tip:
if they haven't completed an action encourage them to leave it blank until you've helped them complete it.



Help your young person to fill in the table below.

They can write down the sites they use in the left-hand column and use the other columns to tick once they've completed the actions.

The social media sites I use are:	My account is private	I have not shared any private details on my account <i>e.g. my School or address</i>	I know how to block an account on this site	I know how to report an account on this site	I know all of my followers personally

What can I do if I feel upset or unsafe online?

- Tell a trusted adult (*e.g. my parent, a teacher, or*)
- Block the account that has made me feel this way
- Report the account that has made me feel this way
- Use the 'help' section of the site and read the helpful tips

Use this safety plan with your young person and help them fill it in, or use it as a conversation starter.

When I go out and about I will let know where I am.

I will do this by

I will make sure to have my phone on me and make sure it's fully charged.

Places I feel safe:

-
-
-

But, if I feel upset, or unsafe I can:

- Leave the situation and go to
- Phone and tell them what is happening.
-
-

In an emergency I can call 999.

Other important things to remember:

- I deserve to feel safe and happy.
-
-
-

Signposting



[Lets-Talk-Teenagers-Toolkit-for-parents-and-carers-of-teenagers.pdf](#)
(saferdevon.co.uk)

Childline
Phone support to children and young people
www.childline.org.uk
0800 11 11
Open daily, open 24 hours a day

Kidscape
Practical support and advice to challenge bullying and protect young lives
www.kidscape.org.uk
Parent advice **020 7823 5430**
parentsupport@kidscape.org.uk

KOOTH.COM
Online counselling for young people
www.kooth.com
Monday - Friday 12.00 - 10.00pm
Saturday - Sunday 6.00 - 10.00pm

PAPYRUS
Prevention of young suicide
www.papyrus-uk.org
0800 068 4141
Text: **07860 039967**
9.00am - midnight everyday

Shout
24/7 confidential text support service for anyone who is struggling to cope
Text: **85258**
www.giveusashout.org

Young Minds
National support for young people's mental health
www.youngminds.org.uk
Parent's helpline
0808 802 5544
Monday - Friday 9:30am - 4.00pm
There is also a parents webchat available for support on their website

Action for Children Parent Talk
1:1 online chat feature for parenting advice
parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/
We're on hand to support parents, when they need us. Find answers to your questions in our advice articles, or speak to one of our parenting coaches.

Our Family Contract

We need to spend more time

Once a week, the family promises to

At dinner we will

At dinner we won't

Every weekend, we will try to

After school, we should spend some time

.....

Our family game night will be on

Once a week, we would like to eat

or

Before we go to bed, we should always

We can use technology for a day.

We want to try to bring the following ideas into our family:

.....

.....

.....

Signed

.....

Date

Let's Talk Pre-Teen



The Tool Kit has been produced by the South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership. If you are interested in finding out more about the Let's Talk programme or would be interested in a local version of the Tool Kit please contact communitysafety@teignbridge.gov.uk



Safer Devon Partnership

saferdevonpartnership@devon.gov.uk

<https://saferdevon.co.uk>



Safety and Resilience Consultancy

safetyandresilienceconsultancy@gmail.com

LET'S TALK
PRE-TEENS

