

Parenting isn't always easy and this applies to parents, step-parents, grandparents and carers alike. Although it is often amazing and rewarding to watch the children you care for grow, and to help them learn to be independent, it can also be really hard work.

If you think your child is unhappy or if you are worried about their behaviour, it's easy to be hard on yourself and think you aren't doing a good job.

The following tips for any parent or carer who is worried about their child, or their own parenting skills are taken from the Parents area of the Young Minds website:

www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/parent_helpline

You can also phone the Parent Helpline on: 0808 802 5544 (open Mon-Fri 9.30 to 16.00)

YOU AND YOUR CHILD

- Make sure they know you love them and are proud of them. Even when things are busy or stressful, and it feels like you are in survival mode, a word or a hug can reassure them a huge amount. Praise them for what they do well, and encourage them to try new things
- Be honest about your feelings – you don't have to be perfect. We all get things wrong and shout or say unkind things from time to time. If this happens, say sorry to your child afterwards and explain why it happened. They will learn from you that it's OK to make mistakes and that it doesn't make you a bad person
- Be clear about what is and isn't acceptable – and tell them why. Children need to know what is OK and what isn't, and what will happen if they cross the line. Follow through on what you say as otherwise they may get confused or stop respecting the boundaries
- Own your own role – you are the parent, so don't be afraid to take tough decisions. If your child sees you are scared of their reaction and always give in to them, it can make them feel very powerful, which can be frightening. Children need to know that you are there to keep them safe.

HELPING YOUR CHILD

- Worrying or difficult behaviour might be short-lived, so give it some time. All children go through stages of feeling anxious or angry and they can show this in lots of ways, for example, tantrums, crying, sleeping problems or fighting with friends or siblings. They might be adapting to a change in the family or in their school life, or just trying out new emotions, and will generally grow out of worrying behaviour on their own or with family support
- Talk to your child: Even young children can understand about feelings and behaviour if you give them a chance to talk about it. Take it gently and give them examples of what you mean, for

example, 'When you said you hated Molly, you looked really angry. What was making you so cross?', or 'When you can't get to sleep, is there anything in your mind making you worried?'

- With older children, they might not want to talk at first. Let them know you are concerned about them, and are there if they need you. Sending an email or a text can work better if this is the way your child likes to communicate
- Ask your child what they think would help – they often have good ideas about solving their own problems
- If you can, talk to your child's other parent about your worries, when the child is not around. They might have a different take on what's going on. Try and sort out how to deal with the behaviour together so you are using the same approach, and can back each other up. Children are quick to spot if parents disagree, and can try and use this to get their own way

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- If your child is having problems, don't be too hard on yourself or blame yourself. Although it can be upsetting and worrying if your child is having a bad time, and it makes your relationship with them feel more stressful, you are not a bad parent. Children often take it out on those closest to them, so you might be feeling the effect of their very powerful emotions
- If you had a difficult time growing up yourself, or have had emotional problems or mental health problems, it can be very worrying to think that the same thing might happen to your child. But the love and care you show them and the fact that you are trying to help will protect against this. Getting help for them and perhaps for yourself too can give them the best chance of feeling better
- If things are getting you down, it's important to recognise this. Talk to someone you trust and see what they think. Many people go on struggling with very difficult situations because they feel they should be able to cope, and don't deserve any help
- Friends and family can often help – don't be afraid to ask them to have your child for a bit if you need some time out to sort out your own stuff. You can repay them when things get better for you!
- It's easy to say take some time for yourself but in reality this may not feel possible. You might be too busy, exhausted or hard up for exercise or hobbies. But even a night in with a friend, a DVD box set or your favourite dinner can help
- Go to your GP if things are really getting on top of you. Asking for some support from your doctor or a referral to a counselling service is a sign of strength. You can't help your child if you are not being supported yourself. Some people worry their parenting will be judged and their children will be taken away if they admit they are struggling to cope. This should only happen if a child is being abused or neglected and the role of professionals is to support you to look after your child as well as you can.

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

- You can take your child to see your GP for further support and advice
- You can refer your child (or they can refer themselves) to see one of the school counsellors to talk about their issues in confidence
- [Counselling referral form](#)
- If your child's problems are very serious and you feel you need more help than family, your GP or the school can offer you can ask your GP or the school for a referral to CAMHS - the specialist NHS service for children and young people's mental health

Below are suggestions and links to useful websites to help you support your young person with some of the more common problems you will probably encounter as a parent/carer

EXAM STRESS

Exam time can be very stressful for young people and their families. You can support them in the following ways:

- Encourage and support them but don't put too much pressure on them to do well
- Arrange with them when they can have their own quiet time and space in the house without being disturbed
- Offer to help them with revision but don't be offended if they don't accept your offer
- Let them know you are there if they want to talk to you
- Provide healthy meals and snacks and encourage them to eat breakfast before an exam
- Encourage them to get plenty of sleep
- Make sure they take regular breaks from revision and have time off to relax or do something they enjoy

For further information and advice go to:

www.childline.org.uk/Explore/SchoolCollege/Pages/exam-stress.aspx

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/coping-with-exam-stress.aspx

www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/worried_about_your_child/schoolwork_exam_stress

SLEEP PROBLEMS

It is very common for young people not to feel tired at bedtime and to take a long time to get to sleep, consequently they are tired and don't want to get up in the morning. One theory is that during adolescence the body does not start to produce the 'darkness hormone' melatonin, which is responsible for making us feel sleepy, until about 1 AM whereas in adults this happens at about 10.00pm.

The other theory is that young people spend too much time on their mobiles, tablets and laptops. There is evidence that the blue light produced by these devices overstimulates the brain. Also they may be so busy checking social media or playing video games that they don't give themselves time to relax.

Whichever theory is true, not getting enough sleep can affect mood and the ability to concentrate in class.

What you can do to help:

- Help your child to develop a healthy bedtime routine. Encourage them to wind down for example by having a hot bath, having a warm milky drink, reading or listening to music
- Try to make sure computers, TVs and mobiles are switched off by an agreed time
- Try to ensure their bedroom is warm but well-ventilated, comfortable and as quiet as possible (of course this may not be possible if they share a room)
- Agree with them a reasonable bedtime during the school week and be firm about them sticking to it

For further information and advice

<https://www.childline.org.uk/EXPLORE/MYBODY/Pages/problems-sleeping.aspx>

www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/body/articles/lifecycle/teenagers/sleep.shtml

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/sleep/Pages/sleep-home.aspx