Welcome to the Safe Parenting Handbook.

Your job as a parent is one of the most difficult there is - it can be both challenging and rewarding. It is a job where very little training is given to prepare parents for what lies ahead.

Every family experiences difficulty from time to time and this can test the best of parents. When additional pressures come along, these can make a hard job nearly impossible. At these times it may be difficult to think about what help or information you might need.

When things go wrong it does not mean that someone has failed in parenting - things go wrong for everyone. It is often the way difficulties are handled that can make a difference to your children, both now and in the future.

There is no such thing as the perfect parent. However, there are some ways to make it a less stressful and more rewarding experience.

What is the handbook about?

It is hoped that this handbook can offer some ideas and information to help you find your way through what can be a maze of issues and advice. It gives contacts and further information you can follow up when you are deciding how to deal with your worries and difficulties. This handbook also lists some of the warning signs of particular difficulties and offers helpful tips.

This handbook has been produced by South Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in partnership with key agencies who have responsibility for children.

We hope you find this handbook helpful and worth keeping for future reference. It is also available on the following websites:

www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/childprotection
www.mgrid.org.uk/go/childprotection

Barbara Shaw
Chair, South Tees LSCB
There's no such thing as an 'average' family - they come in all shapes and sizes. Each different type of family has its own special challenges, so it's important to understand how your family make-up can affect your child, particularly when things change.

Going it alone
Growing up with one parent can be a positive experience, leading to a close relationship between parent and child. If your child does spend time with their other parent, it's important to help them understand how both of you will be part of their lives and that it's okay to love both their parents and not feel guilty.

Coping with bereavement
When we are coping with our own grief at the loss of a partner it is sometimes hard to consider how children might react when a parent dies. Every child will respond differently, some will feel guilty about surviving the parent, others will think about death and loss and who else will 'leave' them. Patience and the support of family and friends will be crucial at this time. Support agencies such as Cruse have a helpline to help parents cope and useful advice on their website (see contacts opposite).

Teenage parents
As a young parent, you'll face many extra challenges. However, all new parents struggle at times; so don't be embarrassed to ask for support and advice. Your education may have to be cut short, but don't give up on all your plans for the future; there's plenty of time. Remember to consider your own needs and try to continue enjoying some of the experiences that other teenagers do.

New families
If you enter into a new relationship, everyone will need time to get used to the new family shape, particularly if your new partner has children of his or her own. Change can make us all feel vulnerable, so it's crucial to ensure everyone feels comfortable with new arrangements. Take things slowly and carefully and try to see things through each other's eyes, imagining everyone's feelings and emotions in this time of change.

Grandparents as parents/new grandparents
Grandparents can provide a welcome extra pair of hands and are an important link to family histories and a sense of belonging. But they may need help adjusting to changes in your family situations too. They may lose access to much-loved grandchildren when relationships break-up, or have to adjust to new family members when new relationships start. Be aware that grandparents may sometimes have health issues of their own - don't burden them beyond what they can manage - they may have other commitments too.

Make contact
Whatever kind of family you are, there are many organisations especially set up to help you cope with all sorts of situations. Don't feel you have to struggle on alone. Make contact and get the help that you and your kind of family need.

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Although you love your teenager, you may not always like their behaviour. As young people grow up, they will test their own and your limits.

Anti-social Behaviour is a phrase used very regularly these days. Some of it might just be described as high spirits. Some teenagers, however, do take part in wrongful behaviour that is damaging and frightening. All people have the right to live without fear, that includes teenagers affected by the behaviour of others.

There are many causes of anti-social behaviour in our communities. Lack of boundaries in the home, living in an area with few things to do, financial struggles and few family activities could also contribute. Pressure from friends can also be a problem with peers involved in risk-taking behaviour encouraging them to join in. Problems at school or bullying may also be a factor.

Research shows that you can help to stop your child/young person’s anti-social behaviour by:

1. Helping them as early as possible when you see signs of their risk-taking behaviour, make sure they know what the risks are.
2. Working with local services who can support you, your family and your child.
3. Providing a stable and loving family home.
4. Good parenting.
5. Making sure they always attend school, training or work.
6. Encouraging your child/young person to take part in local positive activities.

The BAT team provide support and guidance to schools in the Redcar & Cleveland district area with regards to pupils up to 16 years of age, in relation to their (the pupils) ‘Behaviour’, ‘Attendance’, and ‘Truancy’ whilst at school and ways of improving these matters.

Safe in Tees Valley YIP (Youth Inclusion Programme) works in partnership with children and young people, the wider community, and local services to identify, target, prevent and reduce anti-social behaviour (and fear of).

The council’s Anti Social Behaviour Team (Redcar & Cleveland) works to support victims of ASB as well as offering parenting support. The team visit schools and youth and community groups to educate young people on the consequences of ASB.

The Pupil Inclusion Team (Redcar & Cleveland) provides early and direct support for pupils whose behaviour in school gives cause for concern, and facilitates multi-agency interventions planned between school, parents, the local authority and partner organisations (contact: pupilinclusion@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)

It is better to stop your child from ever taking part in crime. A good home life and taking an interest in your teenager will help her or him in every area of their life.
Truancy is a national problem. If your child regularly misses school it can have a big effect, not only on your child but also on you, the school and even the community.

The results of missing school are serious for your child. The more schoolwork they miss, the harder it is to catch up and the more likely they are to skip days or even want to drop out. They are missing out on building and keeping friends who are often a real support during the teenage years.

Truancy also reaches into the community, as there can be a knock-on effect of higher levels of anti-social behaviour and crime. If your teenager misses school they are more likely to come across situations where there are drugs or alcohol and are more exposed to possible sexual abuse.

Parents who allow their child to miss school need to be aware of the reasons why. Some parents need their child’s support at home more than others, perhaps they have an illness or other younger children at home. Any time away from school, even for a short family holiday can affect their education. Please consider the unspoken message you might give your child if you let them think it is acceptable to miss school.

How to stop truancy

If truancy is a problem, you need to find out why your child wants to miss school. They may find school frightening, lack self-confidence, feel they are failing or maybe they are being bullied. If you are struggling to get your child to attend school, please let the school know. The school provides a range of support for parents on tackling attendance problems.

Once you understand the causes, it may be easier to get your child to return to school. Make sure your child understands the importance that education and going to school every day has on their future. Talk to teachers about how they are getting on.

Attendance and the law

Parents of school age children must provide education for their children either by attendance at school or by other means. Where a child fails to attend, without reasonable excuse, the local authority has the power to refer the child to the children’s panel or prosecute the parents. Contact Middlesbrough 01642 201898 or Redcar and Cleveland 01287 286633. If you need any help regarding the school admission process please call Redcar and Cleveland 01642 444193.

WARNING SIGNS

Notice what times your child is around, if they should be in school and check up if they say school has allowed them out. You may not even know until you are told by the school or Police.

ACTION

Find out why your child is missing school and talk about any problems such as bullying or fear of failure. Discuss what your child wants for their future and how to reach short-term goals. If you take an active interest in their education they are more likely to talk to you when problems arise.

WHAT TO SAY

Talk to your child about any school problems and listen to their worries. Take an active interest in schoolwork or activities such as arts or sports clubs.

PREVENTION

It is your job to make sure that your child gets an education. Always take an interest in their school life and what they are doing, so your child knows they can talk to you about any problems before they get out of control.

CONTACTS

Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
www.parentlineplus.org.uk
www.ukparentslounge.com
As parents you have responsibility for the safety and well-being of your children. As a result it is important that you think very carefully about the person you are going to leave them with, whether this is a stranger, close relative or a friend.

When you leave your child in the care of someone else you are taking a risk with his or her safety and welfare. When considering a temporary carer for your child it is important that you choose someone with the abilities and high standards that you would expect of yourself. This includes someone who will make sure they are fed, changed, kept safe, given room to play, feel secure and can deal with difficulties, which may occur.

Generally a babysitter will come to your home to take care of your child. Make sure you talk to your babysitter before you leave. Let them know when to expect you back and make sure they have contact details in case of emergencies.

**Who can I leave my child with?**

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Babysitters do not need qualifications or a certificate to look after children. As a result anyone can advertise his or her services as a babysitter. The NSPCC recommend that the minimum age of a babysitter should be 16 years of age. This is based on the idea that at 16 and above, an individual is much more aware of potential dangers and risks and could seek help quickly if necessary.

This age limit is also linked with the possible action which could be taken by the Police if anything were to go wrong and an injury resulted. It is most likely that you as a parent would be held responsible if anything goes wrong if your babysitter is under 16 years of age.

Often a good babysitter will have a good reputation locally and can be recommended by a friend or neighbour. However it is essential that you meet personally with the prospective babysitter before you decide to leave your child in their care.

**Warning signs**

Children will not always be able to tell you if something is wrong, so note changes in their mood, behaviour and physical appearance. Agree with the babysitter to discuss, from the beginning, all accidents and incidents.

**Action**

Use people you trust to care for your child or ask them to recommend someone. Speak to other families who have used the babysitter you are considering.

**What to say**

Tell the babysitter all about your child’s routine and their likes and dislikes. Tell the babysitter about your rules, like no smacking. Always leave a contact number in case of emergencies.

**Prevention**

Make sure you feel completely comfortable about your babysitter before you leave your child in their care.

**Contacts**

- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) 0121 248 2000
- NSPCC National Helpline 0808 800 5000
- NSPCC Asian Helpline 0800 096 7719
- Health Visitors and School Nurses - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016

Leaving Natalie with anyone is difficult, but I really need to have a break sometimes. I would worry all the time if I could not rely on and trust the person looking after my child. I’m really glad I spent the time I did finding the right babysitter.
Bedwetting & sleeping difficulties

I felt myself getting panicky every time I put her to bed. Maybe it was a lack of proper routine, but at the time I felt so tired and had so little patience. I never praised her for going all night without wetting her bed. I just got cross when I had to change the sheets again, which didn’t really help at all.

How can I help my child?

Potty training
Your child is more likely to learn to control their bladder if you are relaxed and calm about it. Remember your child will learn at their own pace and praise rather than punishment will help. Between the ages of three and four years your child is likely to be dry during the day, with the occasional accident. Remember, this is often not an instant change but a gradual process where more and more nights will be dry nights.

Bedwetting may be a sign of a physical problem, but more often your child will learn bladder control at their own pace
Each child’s sleep pattern is different
Take time to establish a bedtime routine, including a time for your child to relax and unwind before going to bed
If your child often wakes in the night try to find out why he or she has woken, for example a bad dream or hunger

Bedwetting
It is not easy to know why some children take longer to be dry at night than others. However, bedwetting is not due to laziness or lack of will power. Although this may be stressful for both you and your child, try not to lose your patience; it is rare for a child to wet or soil deliberately. If, after the age of seven, your child continually wets his or her bed, the problem may be caused by a number of factors. Talk to your child about it and reassure them that other older children experience this too. Discuss any concerns about your child with your GP, Health Visitor or School Nurse.

Sleeping difficulties
There are many different reasons why babies and young children do not sleep through the night. Try to establish a sleep routine. Feel confident in yourself to know whether your child is really distressed or just restless.

Warning signs
There may be none, but does your child seem to be unhappy? Has something happened in the family or in your child’s life that is worrying him or her?

Action
Stay calm if your child is wetting or soil ing the bed.
Try to check whether there is a particular time when your child wets or soils. Make sure your child goes to the toilet immediately before going to bed. If you are worried discuss your concerns with your health professional. Seek support for yourself.

What to say
Give your child the chance to discuss their feelings with you, try to keep calm and relaxed without showing signs of anxiety or strain. Praise your child when they sleep through the night. Do not scold your child if they do not sleep through the night, or if they bed wet. Try to develop an understanding for how they feel and whether they are worried by the wetting.

Prevention
Make sure your child is aware that they can share any worries with you. If you want advice about things you can do to try to prevent wetting, discuss your concerns with your Health Visitor, GP or School Nurse.

Contacts
• Locality Health Visitors - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016/7
• NHS Direct 0845 4647
Food is an important part of our lives. For some, mostly young people, how much or how little food they eat becomes the most important thing in their lives. Eating disorders develop when food is used as a way of dealing with personal problems. How much is eaten, when, and where, can sometimes seem like the only thing they can control in their lives and have a say about.

Recognising the signs

There are two main eating disorders: Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. People with Anorexia or Anorexics weigh at least 15% less than they should. Anorexia is a serious condition, which if not dealt with, can cause life-long problems and in rare cases even death.

People with Bulimia or Bulimics tend to maintain their body weight by binge eating in secret. The main warning signs for both disorders are listed on the right.

Who is affected - and why?

Most of those who experience eating disorders are women, although young men can also have these types of problems. There are many reasons why people have eating disorders and if your teenager has a problem, you will need to try to understand what started it in the first place. For many, having control of what they eat is the only control they feel they have in their lives. Triggers may include:

- Abuse - physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- Bullying.
- Family problems.
- Parents pushing their child too hard at school - people with Anorexia are often high achievers.
- Not being able to express feelings.
- Lack of self-esteem, feelings of self-hatred or guilt.
- Wanting to look like women in magazines and on TV.
- Wanting to be popular - believing being slim will make them more popular.

How to help

People with an eating disorder are usually the last ones to recognise that they have a problem. If you think your teenager is suffering from Anorexia or Bulimia, then they need your help. Try to get them to eat sensibly, but just as importantly, try to find out what are the real problems.

If they don't feel they can talk to you, try to get them to talk to a friend, relative, Teacher or Social Worker. You should also talk to their GP, to discuss any further treatment. Counselling, self-help groups and therapy are all helpful. In very serious cases, they may need to go into a hospital or clinic.

The tell-tale signs

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Bullying is a frightening experience. It can isolate and damage a young person’s self-confidence. Some ongoing bullying can have negative long-term effects on children, leading to depression and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

School days are a time when the influence of other children is very important and fitting in is seen as essential. If children are thought of as different for any reason, they can be picked on and bullied. Sadly, we still live in a society in which to be different in any way can mean ridicule and bullying (often copied from parents) and this ensures that prejudice will continue into the next generation. It is crucial to be alert to the possibility of bullying and make sure you know the tell-tale signs.

You may think that your child is unlikely to be bullied but the reality is that bullying can happen at any time and to any child. Bullies who continually harm other children need support and help as well. They may have experienced difficulties of their own at home, which may have led to their actions. Reporting concerns may help them to get help too.

Bullying can happen anywhere but most commonly it happens in school. Bullies can take many forms, from verbal abuse to physical attack. Bullying is the repeated abuse of a child by one or several people. Bullies are not always older than the child they harm.

If your child tells you about a friend or any other child who is being bullied - listen carefully and take this seriously. That child may not be able to say for themselves what is happening.

Today all services that work with children, including schools, should have an Anti-Bullying Policy. However this alone cannot guarantee success and so it is important that parents, communities, agencies and schools work together.

Bullying can include verbal or physical abuse; cyberbullying via new technologies such as the Internet; racist, religious or homophobic intolerance; sexual bullying. It may be targeted at vulnerable groups such as children with learning or physical disabilities and children in care.

The real story

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Very few adults harm children deliberately and most often, when harm does happen, families need support, not punishment or the removal of their children.

South Tees Social Workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need some help. In some cases South Tees Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit will investigate with Social Workers to help protect children and decide whether an offence has been committed against a child.

Many people are unsure about the role of Social Workers and therefore create their own myths when concerns about child abuse are reported in the media. Keeping children safe should be seen as everyone's responsibility and myths which may interfere with this are unhelpful. It is important to remember the following:

1. **Child abuse is not easy to recognise, prevent or stop.**
   It is rarely possible to definitely say that a child has been abused or by whom. A careful assessment is needed in order to find out what has happened and what support and protection will best help the family. As a result it can be difficult to avoid some intrusion into family life. A Social Worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effect on the child. All of these factors will help to decide what should happen next to support and protect the child and family.

   Social Workers and the Police have a duty (they have no choice about this) under The Children Act 1989 to investigate concerns of child abuse.

2. **Professionals are not solely responsible for protecting children.**
   Traditionally, Social Workers have been expected to make sure that children are safe. In order to do this well, they rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community who all play an important part in identifying concerns about those close to them. This helps to ensure that they are offered support before the situation becomes far worse.

3. **Reporting child abuse rarely results in the child being removed from home.**
   This is not the main aim of child protection investigations and rarely happens. Social Workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is serious and immediate risk. In emergency situations the Police have the power to remove a child for 72 hours.
Child sexual abuse on the internet

"The first time he made me do it, it felt horrible, but he’s been really nice to me, he says he is my special friend. I’m not supposed to tell anyone, it’s a secret - or something bad will happen to me. I think my mum would be upset or angry with me if I told her."

Warning signs
Changes in behaviour or mood, inappropriate sexual activity, sleep disturbances, bedwetting and soiling, unexplained marks, problems at school, going missing, self-harm. Indirect clues, like asking about sexual experiences or leaving pornographic material, diaries, or letters where they can be found.

Action
If your child confides in you, support them. Tell child protection, youth services, child abuse or other appropriate organisations.
If you think your child has been physically injured, seek medical help.
Talk to your child about what is happening.

What to say
It is important that your child feels that you believe what they are telling you. Help and support your child, no matter what.

Prevention
Know where your child is; be familiar with their friends and daily activities.
Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong.
Listen carefully to your child’s fears and be supportive.

Contacts
• Cleveland Police 01642 326326
• Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
• Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500
• Barnardos Bridgeway Children’s Services Manager 01642 300774

● Often starts out with apparently innocent activity
● Child exploitation has devastating effects on children, both physically and mentally
● Exploitative adults are very sophisticated and well practised in how they approach children
● Children are sometimes abused by people they know
● Often children will not talk about incidents of sexual exploitation
● Be sensitive to changes in your child’s behaviour. It is up to attentive adults to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation

New technology, old problem

It is important that your child feels that you believe what they are telling you. Help and support your child, no matter what.

Child exploitation takes many forms, including child “prostitution”, child pornography and pornography on the Internet. The vast majority of children do not get involved voluntarily; they are coerced, enticed or are utterly desperate.

Sadly, children are sometimes abused by people they know within their own family or wider network. As a parent you need to be able to recognise the signs that your child might be a victim of child pornography or any other form of sexual exploitation.

Child pornography has devastating effects on children, both on those who are exploited in the actual pictures and those who view it. Exploitative adults will encourage children to view child pornography, which leads them to see pornographic acts as acceptable and normal. This acceptance can make them more susceptible to being the subject of future sexual involvement.

Child pornography places the children depicted in extremely harmful situations, both sexually and physically. It causes a sense of shame and guilt in the child and a fear that family and friends might find out and blame them. This fear often makes it difficult for a child who has been exploited to testify against a molester in court.

Preventing children from being photographed or portrayed as the subject of pornography is difficult, especially with the prevalence of webcams attached to computers. Because abusers have no distinguishing characteristics, it is difficult to warn children about what an abuser is or looks like. But you can warn children about the abnormal actions of abusers and make sure that children know that they have the right to say NO.

The Internet is a wonderful tool but Internet-related child exploitation is a major cause for concern. Remember that as you or your child moves through the Internet, you leave information about yourself. Become computer literate and get to know the services your child uses, and don’t forget your child could be contacting other people via digital games such as Nintendo and X box as well as through iPhones. Establish some Internet safety rules with your child, including never giving out personal details such as address or phone numbers or arranging to meet people they don’t really know on their own. Visit www.ceop.gov.uk or www.thinkuknow.co.uk to find out how to protect them online.

You should be aware of the indicators of sexual and physical abuse and exploitation, such as those listed under ‘Warning Signs’. Obviously there could be other explanations, but it is important to help your child no matter what the cause of the symptoms or the behaviour. For instance, you might become aware of and concerned about your child’s relationship with an older person (whom your child might describe as a friend, whether male or female) and/or frequent absences from home/school.

Local Police and Children’s Services have small specialist teams who are specially trained to interview children with the consent of their parents.
Andrew is seven, and I was very careful to visit and discuss his needs at the after-school club. It now means I can work a full day knowing his needs are being met and he is in a safe environment so I can relax and get on with what I need to do.

Childcare & early education

Warning signs
It is important to listen carefully to your child if they are not happy with their childcare. Look out for changes in their mood, behaviour and physical appearance. Some children will not be able to tell you if something is wrong.

Action
If you have a concern speak to the person in charge or call Ofsted if you have a complaint. If you want to discuss the issue before you make a formal complaint contact Family Information Services.

What to say
You can stay with your child when they start at a new daycare setting. Explain to your child where they will be going and who to go to if they need something. It is important that they know who will collect them and at what time.

Prevention
Check that childminders and daycare settings for children under eight are registered with Ofsted by calling your local Families’ Information Service. With unregistered childcare such as nannies, au-pairs and babysitters make sure you check their references and interview them carefully.

Contacts
- Families’ Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500

How do I make the right choice?
As parents you have responsibility for the safety and well-being of your children. You are often the best judge of whether a Babysitter/Childminder or Childcare Service will suit your child. It is important that you choose the childcare that best suits the individual needs of your child.

Registered providers
These include childminders, day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, after school clubs, holiday schemes and breakfast clubs for children under eight. If eligible, you can claim the childcare element of Working Tax Credit to help with childcare costs.

Look for
- A clean environment.
- Premises should be bright, cheerful and have lots of toys, books and equipment.
- Do you and your child feel welcome?
- Do the staff relate well to the children around them?
- Do the other children seem happy and interested in what they are doing?
- Do the staff listen to and answer your questions. Are you offered written details about what they will provide for your child?

Ask
- To see the registration certificate and the latest inspection report and if the provider has a quality assurance scheme.
- For a detailed breakdown of the fee structure.
- Childminders for a contract to set out what is expected by both parties.
- How the setting will support your child’s individual needs such as diet, culture, language or special need.

All registered childcare in England is inspected by Ofsted and must meet the national minimum standards

Family Information Services can offer you advice and information about finding and choosing childcare. They can also provide you with lists of childcare providers in your area

When you visit a childcare setting take a list of questions with you. Family Information Services can send you a fact sheet about each type of childcare with suggested questions and things to look for when you visit

All three and four year olds can get free early education sessions the term after their third birthday

Make sure the childcare provider knows how to contact you in an emergency and who you will allow to collect your child

How the setting will involve you and let you know about your child’s progress.

Unregistered settings
Childcare settings for children over eight do not need to be registered.
- Ask if the setting has completed a quality assurance scheme. If so you may be able to claim the child care element of Working Tax Credit.
- Ask if staff are trained and have Criminal Record Bureau Checks.

Nannies/ Au-pairs/ Babysitters
- Au-pairs/Babysitters are not registered. From April 2005 nannies’ qualifications can be verified under the Childcare Approval Scheme, and a CRB check made. For details contact your local Family Information Services.
- They are employed directly by you.
- Ask all unregistered child carers about their previous experience.
- Ask nannies about their training (babysitters and au-pairs do not usually have training).
- Always check references.
- The NSPCC and the Children’s Legal Centre recommend that babysitters are aged 16 and over.

Three and four year olds can receive five, two-hour sessions of free nursery education per week for 33 weeks of the year (usually divided into three eleven week terms). For further details contact your local Family Information Services. Visit www.ofsted.gov.uk where you can now view Ofsted inspection reports.
If a child is not ready to be left alone it can be a sad, lonely, frightening and dangerous experience. There are many possible risks, both physical and emotional, which could affect your child in a negative way.

In addition, the level of responsibility which is given to the child to look after themselves and somehow manage whatever may happen is impossible for a younger child. They may say that they do not mind being left and may find it exciting initially, but they cannot fully know the possible risks and how to handle them.

Even the relatively ordinary things that happen in life, such as hunger, a storm, the phone ringing or someone coming to the front door can cause problems. An accident, feeling ill or a power cut may occur and these are not issues that a child could deal with.

In an inner city area it is rarely, if ever, possible to leave your children and assume that someone will look out for them if necessary, as may be the case in some communities and cultures.

If they are alerted, the Police and/or Social Services may take action if they think that a child has been neglected by being left alone. Neglect happens when a parent or carer fails to meet children’s basic needs of food, shelter, security, attention or protection from exposure to danger.

The NSPCC have issued guidelines advising that children under the age of 13 should not be left alone. While this recommendation does not have force of law it is suggested as a minimum age. Children do need a certain level of maturity to be left on their own safety. Parents must assess whether they feel their child is able to take that responsibility, particularly so if they are physically or learning disabled.

As a young person reaches adolescence, leaving them alone after school, for an evening or during the day is less concerning as long as they are prepared and aware of what to do if they are worried or need anything. So preparation for this is necessary.

If your child is 13 or over and you feel he or she has the maturity and ability to deal with this, it is important that they know where you are and who to contact in an emergency.
If your child has a disability the future may seem like a daunting struggle, not just for them, but for you too. Remember you and your child are not alone - the Government, local council, health and education services as well as charities provide a wide range of benefits, facilities, support and advice for disabled children and their carers.

Legal protection
Your child is especially protected by law. The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for any service provider (including schools, businesses and organisations) to treat disabled people less favourably than other people because of their disability. It also requires them to make reasonable adjustments to make their services accessible to disabled people.

Health
From the start, your GP and Local Health Service are there for you. They'll provide the help and advice you need to discover and assess your child's disability. They'll help you plan the treatment, therapy, equipment and ongoing medical care that your child may need.

Benefits
There are several specific benefits that you could receive to help you with the costs of caring for a disabled child. These include Disability Living Allowance, Carers Allowance, help with extra housing costs and Carers Blue Badge scheme. And don't forget free dental treatment and prescriptions, help with the cost of glasses, and in some circumstances travel to hospital, school meals, and even road tax exemption.

Education
Depending on their kind of disability, your child may benefit most by attending a special school - an environment specifically designed to match their educational needs. Alternatively your child may receive the extra support they require through the special needs provisions available in a mainstream school. Your education and health service providers will help you assess your child's special educational needs and recommend the most appropriate way forward for their education.

Extra support
Your council can provide extra support for you and your child. This can include special leisure facilities, holidays, short breaks and many additional services for particular needs. Also there are many local, national and international organisations and charities specially set up to provide further help, advice and support to people just like you.

Make contact
On the left you'll find a list of contacts that you may find useful. You're not alone, so make contact today and get the support you need.

Warning signs
Some children's disabilities are diagnosed fairly early. Others take time to appear or happen suddenly.
If you think your child may have some form of disability, contact your Health Visitor or GP for advice.

Action
Don't think you have to go it alone. Get as much information as you can about your child's condition. Find out what services, support, benefits and advice is available and make contact.

What to say
There are many organisations specially set up to give support and advice to parents of disabled children. Contact them and tell your story. There will be others out there just like you.

Prevention
You can't prevent your child's condition. But you can minimise the disability they experience by ensuring that they get the best support available, and by remembering that they have rights.

Contacts
- GP, Midwife, Health Visitor or NHS Direct
- Health Visitors Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016
- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500
- Parent Partnership Middlesbrough 01642 201872 or Redcar 01642 444102
- Families’ Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
- Contact a Family 0808 808 3555 www.cafamily.org.uk
However much you love and think you know your teenager, you may find yourself feeling a range of emotions when finding out that they are gay or bisexual. You may feel shocked, worried, ashamed or horrified. Even if you had an idea they may be gay, it can still be difficult to accept the truth.

Many young people start to become aware of their feelings at age 11 or 12, but may take years to admit it to themselves or anyone else. They often feel lonely and scared. People often do not always accept people who are ‘different’. It will have taken a lot of courage for your teenager to tell you about their sexuality and now is the time they need your understanding and support.

Your concerns
It is normal as a parent to have concerns. You may feel you no longer know your teenager and that they are not the person you thought they were. You may feel you have to give up the hope of grandchildren. You may worry about the danger of HIV and AIDS, especially for men. You may worry about the problems they may have to face in their lives. You may also feel embarrassed or ashamed to tell family, friends and neighbours. All of these concerns are natural. These are things your teenager may be worried about too.

Common misunderstandings
There are many things people do not understand about homosexuality. One is that ‘it’s just a phase’. While many young people experiment with their own sex, if your teenager tells you they are gay, accept it, as they won’t have said it lightly. Another is that homosexuality is an illness that can be cured. It’s not – it is how your teenager is. Some parents also believe their teenager has been ‘turned’ by mixing with gay friends, but it is unlikely your teenager would tell you about their feelings unless they were absolutely sure. Parents should not worry that it is because of something they have done (maybe being an over-caring mother or absent father) that has ‘made’ their teenager gay.

Giving support
It may take some time for you to get used to the fact that your teenager is gay or lesbian, especially if it goes against your culture or religion. But they still need your support. Let them know you are there for them, as they may want to discuss issues or problems they are facing. You may find it easier to understand and support your teenager if you contact one of the help groups aimed at parents of gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. Make sure your teenager knows how to protect themselves against sexual diseases. Don’t make them feel that they need to keep their friendships and partners secret from you. The more you find out about homosexuality, the more you will understand your teenager’s lifestyle and be able to support them.

Is your son or daughter gay?

It took me a long time to accept it when my son told me he was gay. I still don’t like it, but it’s the way he is, and I want him to know that I’m here for him.

Coming out is a big step for young people
Accept your own feelings
Discuss your worries
Your teenager needs your support

WARNING SIGNS
Younger teenagers may not yet be aware of their sexuality. Older teenagers may feel confused about their feelings for their own sex and try to ignore them. Their actions may change as they try to come to terms with their sexuality. Others may try to give you signs that they are lesbian or gay without having to tell you outright.

ACTION
If you believe your child is gay and having difficulty either coming to terms with this or telling you, start up conversations that will give them an opportunity to bring up the subject.

WHAT TO SAY
It may be hard to accept your teenager is lesbian or gay, but their sexuality doesn’t change the person you have brought up and loved. Let them know you will be there for them and support them as they find their way.

PROTECTION
There is nothing you can do or should do to try and stop your child from being what they naturally are. Hiding feelings can only do long-term damage to their self-confidence. Encourage your child to be who they are and to be proud.

CONTACTS
- FFLAG (Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Helpline 0845 602 0311  www.fflag.org.uk
- PACE (Family Therapy Service) 020 7700 1323  www.pacehealth.org.uk
- www.outproud.org/brochure_for_parents.html
‘Back to sleep’
Unless advised otherwise by health professionals your baby should always be put to sleep on their back. This has been shown to be highly significant in ensuring babies’ safety during sleep. Never let your baby fall asleep propped up on a cushion on a sofa or chair, and don’t let anyone fall asleep whilst nursing your baby.

The safest place
A well-designed and stable cot in your own room is by far the safest place for your baby to sleep in their first six months. Keep it simple and uncluttered; avoid plastic sheets, bumpers, baby nests, wedges, bedding rolls or any ribbons or mobiles that your baby could get caught up in. The mattress should be firm, flat and clean and have a secure waterproof covering, like PVC. Cover the mattress with a single clean sheet and make sure there are no gaps between the mattress and the sides of the cot, through which your baby’s body could slip or become caught.

Temperature
Babies are prone to overheating, which is known to be a factor in cot death. Try to keep the room between 16 and 20 degrees centigrade. Avoid duvets, quilts and pillows until your baby is one year old, instead give your baby one light layer of clothing or bedding more than you are using. Never use hot water bottles or electric blankets and always position your baby in the ‘Feet to Foot’ position, with their feet at the foot of the cot so that they can’t shuffle down inside their blanket. Generally avoid covering your baby’s face or head indoors.

Sleeping with your baby
If you take a restless baby into your bed, avoid any medication or drugs that may make you sleep more heavily than usual, including alcohol. Remember that when sleeping next to you your baby will be warmer anyway; so if they fall asleep under your duvet they may get too hot. Current research suggests that infants under 11 weeks have an increased risk of cot death if they sleep in your bed with you. And be aware that they face an increased health risk if you or your partner is a smoker.

Clean air
Never let anyone smoke near your baby and if you or your partner is a smoker you should seriously consider the many benefits of giving up now. Tobacco smoke is known to be present in the breath of a smoker for a considerable time after they have been smoking.

Make contact
If your baby seems unwell or if you have any concerns about safe sleeping or cot death, seek medical advice immediately.
The teenage years are a difficult time and young people have a lot of changes to deal with physically and emotionally. While every young person feels highs and lows, for some, this can develop into depression. Young people can be more vulnerable and sensitive to what is happening to them and are less experienced at being able to deal with problems and anxieties.

There are a number of reasons why a young person can become depressed, such as: parents divorcing or separating; illness or bereavement; feeling ignored and unloved or not being listened to; losing friends; changing school or moving home; worrying about appearance, sexuality, health, exams or bullying.

What may seem like small problems or worries to an older person can seem like a much bigger problem to a young person.

What are the signs?
While young people can sometimes seem unhappy and quiet, you may feel that this is more than just a phase. Signs may include being unable to sleep; eating too much or too little; mood swings; staying in the bedroom all day; giving up interests and hobbies; crying; avoiding friends and family; finding it hard to do their schoolwork; loss of energy; loss of self-confidence or not caring about what they look like. They may even talk about death or have suicidal thoughts.

To escape from their feelings or let them out in the only way they know how young people may start taking drugs or drinking, not going to school, becoming violent or carrying out crimes such as shoplifting.

How to help
If your teenager's symptoms seem severe or go on for a long time they will need help. Don’t ignore their worries and take any talk of suicide seriously. You need to listen. Try to understand what they are going through and get professional help if you need to. Encourage them to talk about their worries.

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Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse takes many forms from emotional, financial, to physical or sexual abuse.

Where there is domestic abuse there may be child abuse.

Children will often blame themselves for domestic abuse.

Children may often feel obliged to lie for their parent and are reluctant to speak to other adults about the situation.

Where there is domestic abuse there is more likely to be cruelty to animals.

Women are often most vulnerable during pregnancy.

How does it affect children?

Domestic abuse is a crime and a major social problem affecting many families. It is a controlling behaviour and a misuse of power, and includes all kinds of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse.

Children may be affected in different ways from witnessing domestic abuse both in the short and long-term. Even if a child is not in the same room when the abuse occurs hearing the ill treatment of another person can still harm them.

The emotional effects of a child living in a violent household should not be underestimated. They can potentially include:

Younger children
- Bedwetting.
- Nightmares.
- Feelings of guilt and blame.
- Fear and insecurity.
- Emotional confusion.
- Problems at School.

Older children
- Copying the abuser’s behaviour.
- Being depressed, anxious or fearful.
- Becoming very demanding.
- Turning to drugs and/or alcohol.
- Running away.
- Having problems at School.
- Aggressive behaviour and demonstrations of anger.

Leaving an abusive relationship is often a long process. A combination of fear, love, cultural values, the risk of homelessness and financial issues can make it very difficult for partners with children to leave, and some may not want to.

Domestic abuse can also affect a parent’s ability to meet their child’s needs. This may include:
- Loss of confidence as an individual and a parent.
- Inability to bond with the child.
- Not knowing what to say to the child.
- Inability to deal with the child’s behaviour.
- Feeling emotionally and physically drained.
- Feeling undermined as an individual and a parent.

If you are worried about domestic abuse and the effect it is having on you and your children, you can call one of the helpline numbers in this section.

If you are violent and have children, you can get support to stop what is happening. You can call the Respect Phone line on 0845 122 8609.

If you would like details of solicitors in your area who deal with family law, contact the Law Society on 020 7242 1222 or look in the yellow pages.

Warning signs
Any type of abuse between adults will have a negative effect on a child. Seek support and advice as soon as possible. The longer it lasts the more damaging the effects are.

Action
If you are a victim of domestic abuse you can seek support from one or more of the agencies set out in the Contact list. If you are worried about the affect the violence is having on your child you can get support for them too.

What to say
Children need time to discuss the feelings they have about the violence. They need to know that it is not their fault, and this is not the way relationships should be.

Prevention
A violent partner can seek support in stopping their abusive and violent behaviour.

Contacts
- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services 01642 771500
- Cleveland Police Domestic Violence Unit 01642 303170 or 01642 303168
- National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247
- Middlesbrough Refuge 01642 225969
- My Sister’s Place (Women’s Advice Centre) 01642 241864
- Panah Black Women's Refuge and Outreach Service 0191 284 6998
- Redcar & Cleveland Women’s Aid 01642 490917
- Middlesbrough Domestic Violence Forum 01642 223360
- Homeless Emergency Advice 01642 726050
- South Tees Out-of-Hours Emergency Duty Team 08702 402994
- NSPCC National Helpline 0808 800 5000
- NSPCC Asian Helpline 0800 096 7719
- Police/Ambulance 999 (EMERGENCY ONLY)
**Don’t shake the baby**

“Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated when they will not stop crying due to colic, illness or feeding difficulties. On average a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful. One in ten babies cry much more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty managing this. Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. Parents/carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and more likely to give in and shake the child. However there are many alternatives to try and people to talk to. Some very rough play with a young child can also cause similar injuries so never shake a young child.**

**What damage can shaking cause?**

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that his or her head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child’s neck muscles are not strong enough to hold their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce. Never ever shake a baby for any reason.

**Why do people shake babies?**

Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated when they will not stop crying due to colic, illness or feeding difficulties. On average a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful. One in ten babies cry much more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty managing this. Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. Parents/carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and more likely to give in and shake the child. However there are many alternatives to try and people to talk to. Some very rough play with a young child can also cause similar injuries so never shake a young child.**

**Ways to cope with a crying baby**

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby. Some of the ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself to calm down.
- Hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby-carrier so that they are close to your body in order to help soothe them.
- Go for a walk or a drive to help them sleep.
- Make use of a helpline in times of crisis.
- If necessary walk out of the room for a short time, ensuring that you are nearby.
- Ask someone else to take over for a while.
- Consider using a dummy.

**Warning signs**

A range of signs can indicate if a child may have been shaken, including feeding difficulties, lethargy, eye injuries, vomiting, irritability, speech and learning difficulties, developmental delay, seizures and paraplegia.

**Action**

If you are worried about your child, take him or her to see your GP, Health Visitor or to the casualty department. Seek support, including the helplines listed under Contacts.

**What to say**

Develop communication with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby’s needs when he is having difficulties.

**Prevention**

It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter or any other carer to be made aware of the dangers.

**Contents**

- Cry-sis helpline 0845 209 669
- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304934 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01642 304094
- District Health Visitors - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01642 304076
At first I thought it was just a teenage thing. Paul just wanted to be out all the time. He started to come home late, a row always started and he’d storm off to his room. He was losing weight and looked terrible.

**Warning signs**

In general terms if your child’s appearance, behaviour or financial situation changes dramatically you should include drug and alcohol use in your list of “I wonder if…” questions.

**Action**

Observe and talk to your child if you are worried. In an emergency contact an ambulance immediately. If your child is not in immediate danger, talk with them about their substance use at another time when they are not using.

**What to say**

Use every opportunity to discuss alcohol and drug use, for example, when drugs are mentioned in a television programme. You can give accurate information regarding the risks of substance use at an early age.

**Prevention**

Ensure that you are informed about alcohol and drug use and the effects of different types of drugs. There are many helpful guides available from the helplines listed below.

**Contacts**

- FRANK (information and advice on drugs) 0800 77 66 00 www.talktofrank.com
- Platform (DISC) Middlesbrough Young Person’s Substance Misuse Service (confidential, under 19s, alcohol & drugs) 01642 246241 www.platform-online.org.uk
- Crest (DISC) Redcar & Cleveland Young Person’s Substance Misuse Project (confidential, under 19s, alcohol and drugs) 01642 495737
- Lifeline Middlesbrough (adults, drugs) 01642 225479
- On Track Redcar and Cleveland (adults alcohol and drugs) 01642 516716
- Middlesbrough Alcohol Treatment services (adults, alcohol & drugs) 01642 516351
- Albert Centre (adults, alcohol & drugs) 01642 221484

Many parents worry that their child may use alcohol or drugs
- Make sure you know about drugs and alcohol and their possible effects
- Talk to your children about drugs and alcohol from a young age
- Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland schools teach drug and alcohol education in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)
- FRANK offers advice or information to young people and their parents or carers on alcohol and drugs
- Some parents use drugs and alcohol themselves and need to seek help - contact the specialist services listed in this section

**How would I know?**

Signs possibly linked with using alcohol or drugs are:
- Seeming panicky, tense or drowsy.
- Complaining of sickness, lack of energy, skin problems, lacking concentration or seeming depressed.
- Changes in relationships with family and friends, behaviour and/or performance at school/work, financial situation or personal possessions ‘disappearing’ or being sold.

Remember that in young people these signs are easy to misinterpret and are often simply ‘typical’ adolescent behaviour. So don’t jump to conclusions - try to make sure that your child feels able to talk openly with you - this is their best protection.

It is vitally important that children are aware of the risks of alcohol, drugs and solvents and can make informed choices.

**Drug and alcohol use amongst young people - How widespread is it?**

Nearly half of all 10 to 15-year-olds in England have tried alcohol, a survey for schools’ inspectors suggests.
- One in seven 12 to 15-year-olds has tried illegal drugs and a fifth have been drunk, the Ofsted research on lifestyle, habits and concerns shows.
- 15% of children aged between 12 and 15 said they had experimented with illegal drugs, most often cannabis, but also heroin, cocaine and ecstasy.
- Nearly half (48%) of 10 to 15-year-olds said they had consumed alcoholic drinks, with one in five claiming to have been drunk at least once in the past four weeks.
- One in six 14 and 15-year-olds admitted to getting drunk at least three times in the previous four weeks.

**Why do people use alcohol and drugs?**

Curiosity, wanting to break the rules, relaxing, escaping reality, coping with difficult situations or feelings, because they enjoy the effects or their friends do it.

It is important to discuss alcohol and drugs and when talking to young people it is important to:
- Talk about attitudes and values in relation to drug and alcohol use - this means exploring your own views about what is acceptable.
- Tell them about the risks involved - accurate information and support will help them to decide what to do.
- Discuss drugs in the wider context of their use as medicines and legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco.

**Drug and alcohol use by parents**

Not all parents who misuse alcohol and drugs are bad parents but problematic use by parents/ carers can seriously affect the care and well-being of their children. It is estimated that at least 2-3% of all children under 16 years of age are affected in this way.

Many parents will need specialist support and treatment to enable them to continue to care for their children properly and sometimes other family members such as grandparents have to take on the parenting role to ensure the well-being of the child/ren.

Although adult treatment services work with the child they will also need to consider the welfare of any children associated with them and ensure sufficient support is offered by relevant agencies.
Friendships are very important to teenagers. Having a close friend or group of friends and belonging to a group helps them feel good about themselves, learn to deal with people and develop their own identity. This helps them learn about the values and ideas of others.

The meaning of friendship
Girls tend to have smaller groups of friends. Fitting in with a group and sharing secrets is very important, and how you look, what band you like and the length of your hair all needing to be just ‘right’.

Friendships are important to boys too, but they usually form larger groups of friends. They may play sports with some mates or just hang out with others. Boys want to look good but they don’t talk about fashion as much as girls do. Worries about who’s ‘doing it’ and who’s not are more important!

Peer groups
Peer groups (or groups of teenagers of the same age) often form in school or at after school clubs. Belonging to a group is very important. Young people may want to be part of a group because their friends are, even if they don’t really like what everyone else does. As they get into their later teens, they will probably make up their own minds rather than going along with the crowd.

Putting on the pressure
Many teenagers feel under pressure to do things they are not happy about because they don’t want to stick out from the crowd. This might mean wearing certain clothes or shopping in the right places. On a more serious level, this might mean being absent from school, trying alcohol or drugs, shoplifting or going further with a boyfriend or girlfriend than they feel ready to.

Worried about friends
You may feel worried about the effect certain friends are having on your teenager. They may be worried about what they are doing and do not know how to talk to you about it. Support your child by letting them know they can talk to you and that you will help. You can show your teenager how to trust their own feelings and values, building up an emotional strength that will help them as they get older.

WARNING SIGNS
If your teenager is unusually quiet or seems unhappy, there may be friendship problems. Suddenly having money or new clothes, unusual behaviour that you think may be caused by drink or drugs and not wanting to tell you about what they are doing are all signs that your teenager may be getting into trouble. It’s unlikely that they’re doing it alone.

ACTION
Find out if your teenager is having any problems at school or with friends. Ask if there is anything you can do to help and let them know you are always there for them. If the problem carries on, talk to the school or a Social Worker.

WHAT TO SAY
Talk to your teenager calmly and try not to judge them, as this will only make it less likely that they will talk to you and feel they can trust you. Problems or friendship break-ups that may seem small to you are very important to your teenager.

PREVENTION
Even though you may not be the first person your teenager turns to when in trouble, your support is still important. To help stop your child from keeping problems in, let them know you are always there for them when they need you.

CONTACTS
• www.bbc.co.uk/parenting
• www.raisingkids.co.uk
• Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222  www.parentlineplus.org.uk
Babies and young children learn by exploring their surroundings. Babies do not automatically know what is dangerous. Babies need active protection to keep safe at home. Remove as many potential dangers from your home as possible. Watch your child and remove them from danger. Explain about safety to your child from an early age.

Making your home safe

Babies and young children learn about their world by exploring it. This means that, as soon as they are able to, they will crawl, touch and grab at whatever is in their line of vision. They are curious by nature and need careful and gentle guidance from a young age about what danger is and what to stay away from. Shouting at or smacking children will not teach them about safety.

Most accidents happen in the home and this is why it is important to ensure that your home is safe for all your family especially for young children. An example of one danger is that there are many situations each year in which children have overdosed on their parents' drugs and medicines. Another danger may be house fires so ensure that your home is fitted with smoke detectors, talk to your local Fire Brigade about home safety checks which may be free.

Some dangers around the home:
- Make sure that all medicines and drugs are locked away well out of reach and your use of them is private to avoid your child copying you. Find out if your local PCT or Fire Brigade are able to supply you with a lockable box if anyone in your home is a heavy drug user.
- Beware of pets around young children. Even trained and good-natured animals can be tested when children are around.
- Make sure that irons, saucepans and hot drinks are kept out of the reach of children. Scalding and burns are common and avoidable accidents.
- Do not leave small children alone in the bath and always test the temperature of water before immersing them in it.
- The home you live in is full of dust and this can trigger or make worse any allergy your child has such as asthma. Keep your home as dust free as you can.
- Inhaling cigarette smoke is bad for children's health. Children will be affected by passive smoking and your smoking may encourage them to smoke when they are older.
- Check toys for safety marks. Ensure that your child does not play with toys that are not suitable for his or her age, especially if the pieces are small enough to choke on. Unsafe toys can be very dangerous.
- Talk to your local Children's Centre or Families Information Service about accessing safety equipment, some of which may be free depending on the area you live in.

Warning signs
Spend some time exploring your house as if you were a young child. This will show you the many potential dangers which, if not removed, could harm your child.

Action
Make a list of these potential dangers and remove them to protect your child from them by using safety devices. Talk to the contacts listed if you are unsure about this.

What to say
With very young children the tone of your voice and facial expressions alongside explanations are extremely important. Children will begin to sense the warning tone in your voice over time.

Prevention
Remove dangerous objects like drugs, syringes, medicines and household chemicals out of the reach of children and lock them away safely. Do this before your child is exposed to any hazard.

Contacts
- Talk to your Health Visitor or Midwife
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) 0121 248 2000 www.rospa.co.uk
- Child Accident Prevention Trust 020 7608 3828 www.capt.org.uk
- Health Visitors Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016
- Families Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
Milk, milk and more milk!
For infants under six months milk is pretty much all they need. Breast milk provides exactly the right mix of healthy ingredients and it can help protect your baby from illness and allergies. However, if you can’t breastfeed, formula milks can give your baby perfectly good nourishment. Cows’ milk should not be given to babies under one year old. Babies can be given water to drink - tap water is perfectly safe - but for babies under six months it should be boiled and cooled first.

Solid foundations
It is recommended that you do not give your baby solid foods until he/she is six months old - they are not sufficiently developed to cope with solid food before this time. Different babies adapt to solids at different speeds. Some are choosy, whilst others will eat almost anything. It’s vital to go at your baby’s own pace and not make mealtimes a stressful experience for both of you. Here are some useful tips to make introducing solids easier:
- Spoon out the amount you think your baby will eat and heat this.
- Keep a close eye on your baby to make sure they don’t choke.
- Encourage your baby to help with feeding; allow them to make a bit of a mess.

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- Encourage your baby to help with feeding; allow them to make a bit of a mess.

Warning signs
Your Health Visitor or GP should be able to alert you if your baby is not gaining weight as expected, appears malnourished, or is displaying symptoms of food allergies, failure to thrive or Gastro-enteritis.

Action
For the first six months stick to either breast milk or formula (breast milk is preferable). After that, gradually introduce solids at your baby’s own pace. Aim for a healthy balance, including protein and fresh fruit or vegetables. Provide a varied diet. Allow them to enjoy their food.

What to say
Don’t feel pressured if friends or relatives make comments about your baby’s eating habits. Every baby is different. Follow a varied, healthy diet and let your own child discover food in their own way.

Prevention
Don’t add salt and sugar to your baby’s food and avoid choking hazards such as nuts or small, hard pieces of food. Honey is also to be avoided in the first year.

Contacts
- Families Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
- Health Visitors - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016

Getting a healthy start

What’s on the menu?
Making your own is a lot cheaper than buying baby food, plus you will know exactly what’s in it. You could simply mash up portions of your family food, but avoid adding sugar or salt to your baby’s meal. Preparing larger quantities than you need and freezing small portions, for example in ice cube trays, for later can save time and effort. But beware: microwaves can heat food unevenly - one spoonful can be luke-warm, the next scolding hot. Always mix thoroughly and test the temperature before feeding.

The recipe for healthy eating
Eventually, from around two years of age, you should aim to give your child at least five portions of fruit or vegetable every day, as well as a good amount of protein (found in fish, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu, soya mince and Quorn). Cows’ milk can be used from one year onwards, but it should be full-fat milk, at least until they reach two years old.

If you are bringing up your child on a vegetarian or vegan diet, two portions of different vegetable proteins, such as peas and lentils, daily will ensure an adequate supply of nutrients.

Feeding worries?
If you have any queries or worries about your baby’s diet, ask your Health Visitor or GP for advice, or use any of the contacts listed to get more information and support.
The loss of someone or something special is difficult for everyone. The death of a loved one can seem too much to take. The death of a pet who has been a part of the family for many years or the loss caused by a close friend moving away can also cause distress for young people.

Teenagers are able to understand death in the same way as adults. However, they may find it hard to put feelings into words and may not be able to show how they feel openly. They may worry about upsetting others.

Young people may need a lot of support and understanding to help them work through their grief. There is no right or wrong way to react and everyone handles things in different ways. There could be a range of feelings your teenager is likely to go through including disbelief, anger, guilt, fear or sadness.

Their behaviour may change as they deal with their emotions and try to come to terms with their loss. They may find it hard to cope with day-to-day life. They may take their anger out on you, get into trouble at school, find it hard to do schoolwork or want to go out with friends more, pushing the limits and maybe experimenting with alcohol or drugs, as a way of forgetting. Not sleeping well is common at this time too.

How you can help
It is easy for young people to think they are the only ones who have lost someone and that no one else understands them. But talking to other people will help. Talk to your child about what has happened and as much as they want to. They may find this hard, so encourage friends or a teacher to be there for them too. It may help if they talk to a bereavement counsellor.

If you too are suffering, then it is going to be especially hard for you to not only deal with your own feelings, but those of your children too. Try to keep talking to each other, so you can share your grief, rather than each of you grieving alone. Working through this together will help.

WARNING SIGNS
Depression; loss of appetite; inability to sleep; fear of being alone; withdrawal from friends; deterioration in school performance or denying that the person has died could all indicate that further help may be required. Everyone reacts to death differently and it takes some people longer than others to come to terms with a loss. Give your child as much time and patience as they need, but if you think they are having long-term difficulties, you may want to think about talking to a Bereavement Counsellor.

ACTION
Take your cue from your child. You may not be the person they feel is easiest to talk to, especially if you are grieving too, so encourage other family members or friends to be there for them. Make sure they know that you care and are still there for them if they need you. Seek professional help if you feel they are not coping with their loss.

WHAT TO SAY
Your child may think it’s too painful for you to talk about a loved one who has died. Let them know the times when you feel able to talk. Don’t be afraid to express your own sadness. Remember to let them know it’s okay to still laugh and have fun.

PREVENTION
Keep the lines of communication open as the more you talk, the easier the healing process will be. You may want to talk to them about someone you know who died, and how you felt. There are a number of very helpful books for talking with children about death that may be available from the local library.

CONTACTS
- Cruse Bereavement Care Helpline 0844 477 9400
  www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- www.rd4u.org.uk
- www.winstonswish.org.uk
- Parents Advice Service (a local drop-in service for parents who may have concerns about their child’s emotional well-being. Redcar & Cleveland 01642 286944

Back to Top of Page
I was shocked when she ran away although, looking back, she was more of a loner than her brother. I now know that she had been missing school quite a bit. We stopped talking when my partner moved in but had been really close before that.

From home and school

The law says that parents must ensure that their children receive a proper, full time education and they can be prosecuted if their child does not attend school regularly and on time. Children who miss school are much more likely to have problems with their learning and getting the job or college place that they would like. They will often find it harder to make and keep friends and they are at much greater risk of getting into trouble in and out of school.

If they are skipping school or lessons, they are more likely to come across adults or other young people who might want to cause them harm.

When children miss school without their parents knowing, this is called truancy. Children who truant regularly often do this because they are worried about something. There might be something happening on the way to or from school that is causing them concern. They might be being bullied. They might be finding some lessons or subjects too hard (or too easy) or they might be having problems in completing their homework. Sometimes, children will be reluctant to leave home because they are worried that their parent might come to some harm whilst they are at school.

Children from all sorts of backgrounds run away from home for a variety of reasons. Many of us will remember planning to run away when we were younger because we felt unable to cope with our problems, that nobody cared about us or because we had been treated unfairly. Usually, if a child does go missing from home, it will be for a very short period - usually until the child thinks that the parents have noticed. Often, they will turn up at the home of a friend or relative.

When children run away, they are not being naughty - they are trying to tell us that they are unhappy or trying to find out just how much we do care about them.

If your child goes missing and you don't know where they have gone, contact the Police.

Warning signs

There may be none but does your child seem to be unhappy? Are you sure that they are not truanting from school?

Has anything happened in the family that you haven't talked to your child about?

Action

If you think your child might be skipping school, talk to the school or an Education Welfare Officer. Contact the Police if your child goes missing and you don't know where they have gone.

What to say

Make sure that your child knows how important they are to you. When you have to tell your child off, tell them that it's their behaviour that's the problem - not them. If something has gone wrong in the family, don't let your child think that it's their fault.

Prevention

Be alert to any unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.

Spend time with them and be interested in their lives and worries. Do you know who your child's friends are? Be very careful about their access to the Internet and 'chat rooms'.

Contacts

- National Missing Persons Helpline (24hrs) 0500 700 700
- Runaways Helpline (24 hours free and confidential) 0808 800 70 70 or TEXT 80234
- Cleveland Police 01642 326326

Make time for your child to talk to you about their worries - even when you have to tell them off

You know how important a good education is - let your child know this

Only keep them off school if they are too ill to attend - not for days out or shopping trips

Be honest about things that might be happening in the family

Look for early signs that your child might not be happy and talk to their school about these

Help is available - please don’t be too embarrassed or afraid to ask
Playing is a natural way for your child to learn about the world around them. Children learn through play at home, at nurseries and playgroups, with their friends, at school and beyond. Play is a vital part of your child’s development and you have an important role to play.

Early learning through everyday experiences
Children who are encouraged to express themselves freely through play tend to be more able to adapt, learn skills and perform better at school. As a parent it’s important to spend time playing with your child, providing stimulation and interaction. Involving children in daily activities such as shopping, laying the table or cooking will provide ‘real life’ opportunities for children to learn. From birth your child begins to learn through play about using their senses, social interaction, language and mobility.

Of course safety is most important, so please see the chapter in this booklet about Health and Safety. Also see the chapters about Babysitting and Childminding and Daycare, as these carers have a role to play too.

A helping hand
The government set up an initiative called Sure Start to improve the range and quality of services for young children and their families. In most areas these have now become Children’s Centres and offer all sorts of programmes, covering a wide range of services and support, particularly when it comes to play and learning.

Toys are a key role
They say you experience second childhood when you get old. I experience it every time I play with my child. I’d forgotten what fun it can be!

Warning signs
If your child isn’t receiving enough stimulation from you or from other carers, they may not be getting the opportunity they need to learn. It could seriously affect their development and future attitude to learning.

Action
Make time to have fun playing with your child. Make sure other carers have a positive attitude to play and learning. Find out about playgroups and other play activities that are available in your area.

What to say
Just go with the flow. Introduce as many different experiences as you can. Try to discover what sort of play interests your child and play along with them.

Prevention
Avoid letting your child get bored. Spend time with young children - keep them stimulated. Try to think up new activities for your child, especially ones for rainy days.

Contacts
- Families Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
- Middlesbrough Children Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500
- Health Visitors - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016
- Toy Library Service Middlesbrough 01642 354303

School years
Primary schools recognise the value of play and employ it as a crucial learning tool throughout the school day. At home your child will begin to play more on their own or with friends, but it is still vital to be involved in your child’s play activities, as well as any hobbies, artistic or sporting interests that they may develop as they grow. Giving your child time and encouragement is of even greater value than new toys or games, and being involved in their play means that you are part of their personal, social and emotional development.

As they grow older you will need to establish ground rules about playing out and visiting friends. Try to find a way of encouraging your child to get out and interact with others, whilst ensuring that you know where they are and that they are fully aware of dangers and threats to their safety.

As children, we all enjoyed playing once - perhaps we still do. Learning to play again with your child can be great fun. It will bring you closer to your child and play a vital role in preparing them for a full and active life.
Positive parenting is about bringing out the best in your child, by listening and understanding, praising and encouraging their efforts, noticing and rewarding good behaviour and doing things together that you both enjoy.

In trying to be helpful, it is often easy to point out where a child is going wrong and forget to notice the things that go right. By doing this you are unwittingly giving your child lots of attention for negative unwanted behaviour, rather than for the good behaviour you would prefer them to develop. It can also undermine your relationship with your child. Parental attention and praise is one of the biggest motivators for children so you need to use it in the right direction! Not only will this influence your child’s behaviour in a positive way, it will also make your child feel happy, loved, wanted and secure and this is the basis of life-long confidence and self-esteem.

A sense of self-esteem is your child’s best protection from peer pressure. You can help to foster this in many ways, for example by being a positive role model, giving positive accurate feedback, being consistent, identifying and redirecting your child’s inaccurate beliefs and by being spontaneous and affectionate. Make them feel great!

Teenagers have to learn to make their own decisions and establish their independence from their parents. Unfortunately their decisions might not always agree with yours. That is why tension is normal. Choose your battles and let some go! Be friendly and supportive and let them know you have been through it and that you are always willing to talk. The main concern for adolescents is whether what they are going through is normal. Remember to give them the practical information they need about the physical changes and reassure them that their physical development is perfectly normal. Promoting the health of your child is a task that most parents do without thinking. Whether it involves encouraging your child to brush their teeth or reminding them to pay attention to personal hygiene, you are an important source of information and advice and an influential role model for your child.

Eating is an important part of everyone’s life. Encouraging your child to eat healthily does not mean denying them food they enjoy. Healthy eating is about having a varied, balanced diet and enjoying lots of different foods. Younger children often refuse to eat certain foods and teenagers may go through food fads. These differences are normal. But some eating problems are more serious and if you are recognising signs of difficulties, contact a health professional for advice and support.
Self-harming or hurting yourself can take many forms. This may include: cutting; burning or scalding; hitting; picking skin; head banging against a wall or other object or taking an overdose.

Girls are more likely to self-harm than boys. While the aim is to hurt, it is not usually to kill themselves and it may carry on for years without getting any worse.

People who self-harm often use it as a way of dealing with problems, such as depression, bullying, abuse or feeling unloved. Young people who self-harm say it is a way of being in control and use it to help them cope, as the physical pain takes their mind off their problems.

Self-harm is not just about getting attention, as it is most often carried out in private and kept secret from family and friends. What they are doing is a sign that they need help. Those who self-harm usually think badly of themselves and need even more attention and support. Young people who self-harm often do not get help for themselves because they may be worried about what you will think of them and their self-harming. Hurting yourself is a serious problem, even if the person only lightly cuts themselves. A person who self-harms can't just decide to stop - they need help to get over their problem. Most cases of harming do not lead to death, but can be a sign that your teenager may be thinking about more serious harm or even suicide.

How you can help

If you know that your teenager hurts themselves on purpose it is normal to feel very upset, angry and powerless. Your teenager needs your understanding and support. Listen to what they are telling you without judging them and try not to show you are angry or upset or try to force them to stop. If this is their way of handling problems then other ways of dealing with them need to be found and tried before they can stop harming themselves. Helping them learn to deal with stress and stopping the things that cause them to self-harm in the first place will be more useful.

If your teenager finds it difficult to tell you about their feelings try to get them to talk to another family member, friend, Teacher, Youth Worker or Social Worker.

Make sure your teenager can get first aid supplies to treat injuries and stop infection. If a wound looks serious or your teenager has taken an overdose however small call 999. You should also try to get your teenager to call you or the Emergency Services if they ever self-harm and hurt themselves seriously.

Try to get your teenager to talk to their GP, who can tell them about other ways of dealing with stress and who can tell them where to get more help. One-to-one counselling, support groups and practical support can all help.

Understanding and support

Self-harm could be a sign of deeper problems

Understand the reasons why your teenager self-harms

Find out how to help your teenager

WARNING SIGNS

Look out for injuries such as cuts, burns, scalds or bruises. Your teenager may try to hide them from you.

ACTION

Try to find out if your teenager is self-harming. Think of reasons why they might be doing this so that you can talk through problems and find out ways of dealing with them.

WHAT TO SAY

You will be upset but try not to judge them, show them you are angry or try to force them to stop. Make time to really listen to them and try to get them to talk about their problems. Suggest they see their GP who can get them more help if needed. You could ask your teenager if they would like you to go with them or maybe try talking about things as a family.

PREVENTION

People, who self-harm feel lonely and unloved. Giving your teenager time to talk to you, discussing difficulties they have and letting them know you are there for them will help. Your support will make them feel better about themselves.

CONTACTS

• ChildLine 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
• The Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 (24-hour helpline) www.samaritans.org
• Action for Children www.actionforchildren.org.uk
• National Self-Harm Network www.nshn.co.uk
• The Site www.thesite.org.uk
Warning signs
Young people are starting to have sex younger and younger. Don’t assume that this won’t happen to your teenager. By the time you see the warning signs it may be too late to give them the help they need. Make sure they learn about sex early on.

Action
There are many leaflets, books and websites that can give you advice on how to tackle the subject of sexual health with your teenager. The more you read, the more comfortable you will be talking to them about it.

What to say
Rather than sitting down and having a one off talk about sex, STIs and relationships it may be better to have regular chats, like when doing the washing up, for example. Use magazines and TV programmes to help bring up subjects and to use as examples.

Prevention
The more your teenager knows about sex, the longer they are likely to wait for their first time. They are also more likely to use contraception to stop STIs and pregnancy. Young people want their parents to talk to them about sex so make sure you have the information to help them.

Contacts
- Teenage Pregnancy & Parenting Support Service - Middlesbrough 01642 245539 or Redcar & Cleveland 01642 479324
- Sexwise Helpline 0800 28 29 30
- Ask Brook 0800 018 5023 www.brook.org.uk
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- Sense CDs www.sensecds.com
- British Pregnancy Advisory Service 08457 30 40 30 www.bpas.org

Know the Facts

Why should I talk to my son/daughter about sex?
Young people receive many different messages about relationships and sex. They get information from TV, magazines, friends and Sex and Relationship Education.

Some of this information will be accurate, other bits will not. As a parent you have an important role in ensuring that your son/daughter learns about relationships and sex and that the information they get is age appropriate and factually accurate.

Even though it can be difficult to talk about sex with your child - it is important. Not having accurate and/or sufficient information about relationships and sex can result in negative outcomes for your son/daughter.

Good parent-child communication about relationships and sex can help delay the onset of sexual activity and reduce these negative sexual health outcomes. Young people who talk to their parents openly about relationships and sex are more likely to practice safer sex when they do become sexually active.

It’s important that your son/daughter learns about relationships, love, sex, STIs and using contraception before they have sex. Although the law says that both boys and girls can have sex at 16 one third of young people under this age are already having sex. Therefore it is important to start talking to young people from an early age to make sure they are informed.

Young people should know that it is okay to say no to sex even if their friends say that they are doing it, but they should also have information on where to go for advice and support and for testing and treatment.

The more young people know about sex, the longer they are likely to wait for their first time. They are also more likely to use contraception to stop STIs and pregnancy. Young people want their parents to talk to them about sex so make sure you have the information to help them.

How to talk to your son/daughter
Answer questions your son/daughter has with simple, clear, accurate answers. If you are not sure about something they ask be honest - tell them you don’t have the answer but that you are happy to try and find out or maybe suggest that you find out together. Use magazines and TV programmes to help bring up subjects and to use as examples. Remember there are plenty of useful books and leaflets, as well as websites for both parents and young people that can help you.
How can it happen?
It may be hard to imagine how any child could be drawn into prostitution. The sad fact is that those who benefit from the sexual exploitation of children use sophisticated methods to lure their victims in, and keep them there. It can begin with an ‘exciting’ new relationship with an older boyfriend who may in fact be, or become, a pimp. The child may receive expensive gifts and be introduced to alcohol and drugs. Before long, the pimp creates a loyal and dependent relationship with the victim and can then persuade or force them to make money for him by providing sexual services to others. But this is not a business relationship - it is an illegal form of sexual abuse, which puts the child involved at risk from severe physical, emotional and psychological damage.

The damage
Children who are sexually exploited can become victims of serious physical and sexual attacks, which can sometimes be fatal. They can easily become addicted to drugs and alcohol and face a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The emotional and psychological damage can be devastating and can lead to self-harm, severe depression and suicide. It can also lead to young people entering the adult world of prostitution when they are 18.

How to spot it
There are some warning signs detailed on the opposite page that could indicate that your child is at risk from or is a victim of sexual exploitation. If all or even some of them apply to your child, you should consider that they might be at risk.

How to stop it
Keeping or getting children out of sexually exploitative relationships can require specialist help. A close and positive relationship with your child can reduce their vulnerability. Ensuring that they have high self-esteem and feel good about themselves can prevent them falling prey to abusive relationships. However, even with the best parents in the world, some children will find themselves vulnerable to this form of abuse. Parents can often feel powerless to intervene in what can be a complex and threatening situation.

There are some agencies (some detailed on the opposite page) who work with families to combat child sexual exploitation. If you feel your child is at risk they can provide information and support for you and your child to help avoid dangerous relationships. If your child is involved in prostitution they will work with you and your child to form an individual plan and package of support to ensure that they are no longer left vulnerable to those who wish to exploit them. It is never too early or too late to get help.

WARNING SIGNS
Absence from home or truancy from school; unexplained money, clothes, jewellery or other gifts; new relationships with older men; evidence of drug or alcohol abuse; changes in mood or behaviour; loss of contact with former friends and new relationships with an older age group; lack of self-esteem.

ACTION
Try to encourage your child to confide in you about their situation; avoid alienating your child or making them feel that they are to blame; get in touch with information and support agencies that can help you and your child.

WHAT TO SAY
Make sure that your child knows that you are there to help them, no matter what they have experienced. Assure them that they shouldn’t feel ashamed, that they are victims of abuse and that you understand how difficult it must be for them.

PREVENTION
Offer a positive and supportive home environment. Watch out for low self-esteem and other warning signs. Get information and support from local agencies if you feel your child may be at risk.

CONTACTS
- Cleveland Police 01642 326326
- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500
- Barnardos SECOS 01642 819743
- NSPCC National Helpline 0808 800 5000
- NSPCC Asian Helpline 0800 076 7719
- Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222

The prostitution of children is a form of sexual exploitation and abuse
This issue affects both boys and girls
Children can be sexually exploited by manipulative adults who wish to make money
Adults who abuse children should be held responsible, rather than blaming the children
Children who have been sexually exploited face devastating physical, emotional and psychological risks
It’s never too early or too late to get help

Drawn into prostitution

"I used to blame myself. How could I be so stupid to get into this! Now I know better. I was 13; he was twenty. He said he loved me, but all along he knew exactly what he was doing."
It is important that children learn how to behave and control their own behaviour as they get older. Parents have a very important job as a role model for their children in helping them to learn how to do this.

Teaching children from a young age by setting limits and explaining reasons for these limits helps to instil discipline. Discipline is more about rewarding good behaviour than punishing bad behaviour.

Have you ever smacked your child? The answer from many parents reading this will be yes. It’s not so surprising, as smacking may look to have the desired effect - it may stop the behaviour in its tracks, maybe your child cries or seems apologetic, it may even release tension or frustration for parents. But it can have a downside, and some undesirable long-term consequences.

There is a lot of research now which shows that smacking children can increase a child’s level of aggression, can have a negative effect on a child’s mental health and can damage the relationship between the parent and the child.

The great debate

It is important that children learn how to behave and control their own behaviour as they get older. Parents have a very important job as a role model for their children in helping them to learn how to do this.

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Smacking does not teach children self-discipline
Smacking gives attention to a child’s bad behaviour
Children learn best by attention to things they do well
There are many positive alternatives to smacking
Smacking teaches children to hurt others
When self-discipline is taught, smacking becomes unnecessary

WARNING SIGNS
A child who flinches when they fear they will be hit.
Smacking a child in frustration with a force, which in hindsight was unnecessary.
Leaving bruises and other marks on a child.

ACTION
If you are concerned about your own or someone else’s smacking get support from the organisations listed under Contacts. If it is someone you know, offer practical help and suggestions about alternatives.

What to say
Tell your child they have crossed boundaries or broken family rules.
Use your tone of voice and facial expressions to help them understand.
Explain your reasons why.

PREVENTION
Make it a general rule not to smack your child. Use other ways to discipline; set clear limits and explain them, be firm and consistent, ignore trivial bad behaviour and reward good (perhaps use a star chart).

CONTACTS
• Health Visitors Middlesbrough PCT 01642 320000 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016
• NSPCC National Helpline 0808 800 5000
• NSPCC Asian Helpline 0800 096 7719
• Barnardos 020 8550 8822

BACK TO TOP OF PAGE  BACK TO CONTENTS PAGE
Talking with your teenager

I’ve learned to give him the privacy he needs and he’s learned that there are certain things he needs to tell me so I don’t worry.

Warning signs
If your child refuses to listen to you and never wants to share what is going on in their life, avoids spending any time with the family and refuses to do as you ask, you need to act now to re-build your relationship.

Action
The teenage years are tough for your child, so try to understand what they are going through. Accept that friendships, music, their own opinions and most other things are more important than you right now! Despite this, knowing that you are there for them, gives your teenager the confidence to try new things.

What to say
Learn to listen as well as talk to them. Show that you are interested in what they have to say, even though you don’t have to agree with it. Talk when you know your teenager has time to listen and you are more likely to get a better response.

Prevention
Teenagers don’t have to be moody and uncommunicative. A good relationship can be built up by talking about what’s going on in their life without asking too many personal questions. Always let your teenager know you are there for them, without judgement, whatever they have done and they will be more likely to turn to you when they need to.

Contacts
• www.ukparentslounge.com
• Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222 www.parentlineplus.org.uk
• www.raisingkids.co.uk
• www.bbc.co.uk/health

Build a better relationship

Many parents worry about how they will cope with the ‘difficult teenage years’. Learning to listen and talk to your teenager can make all the difference to your relationship.

Why your teenager is changing
The teenage years are not easy for your child. As well as increased schoolwork, they are dealing with hormones, developing deeper relationships, peer pressure and sexual feelings. They are also trying to work out their own identity and developing their own opinions and views.

To cope with all this, teenagers need privacy. They need space to think through thoughts and feelings and what physical changes are happening to them. Teenagers also find it hard to say what they are thinking and feel that adults always seem to have the answer, so prefer to say nothing at all. This may be difficult for you when you have been used to sitting and chatting and walking into their room whenever you feel like it.

How to listen
When your teenager does talk to you, let them have their say without interruption. Give them time to express themselves - they often find it hard to find the right words. Their way of seeing things and their views may be different to yours, but they are important to them. Teenagers value being listened to, having their opinions asked and their thoughts and feelings recognised.

How to talk
Trying to get a reply out of your teenager as they are getting ready to go out or are listening to music isn't going to work. Choose your time carefully when there are things you need to discuss. Be flexible and offer options - 'is now a good time to talk or do you want to wait until you've finished what you're doing?' - rather than demand an immediate response. Try to talk in a calm and reasonable way, even if you don’t feel like it. If you start by shouting, your teenager is more likely to respond in the same way.

If they find what you have to say dull, don’t be offended. It’s natural at this age to be more interested in their friends’ lives than yours. You probably acted in the same way when you were a teenager!

Home isn’t always the best place to talk. Taking your teenager to a cafe or going for a walk gives you one to one time together and may help them to talk about matters they don’t want to bring up in front of other family members.

Understanding your teenager’s feelings

Listen as well as talk

Communication is the key to good family relationships

Your teenager is developing their own identity
It's our responsibility to let our children know our values about sex. Although they may not adopt these values as they mature, at least they'll be aware of them as they struggle to figure out how they feel and want to behave.

Try not to give the message that sex is necessarily a problem.

Be prepared to talk about sexuality, even if it seems difficult.

Try not to be judgmental, but don't be afraid to say if you think an activity may be unhealthy or could put your son/daughter at risk.

One of the issues you may have to confront is the pressure on young people to start a sexual relationship at what you consider is too young an age. They may feel unsure how to deal with the situation - and what's right for them. It may help to use 'lines' like:

'Putting off sex for a while can help you feel more in control of your life.'

'Just because you're saying 'No' for now doesn't mean you always will.'

'It's not unusual for someone of your age not to be having sex.' or 'Most people aren't having sex yet even though they may say they are!'

Children will learn about sex whether you want them to or not. Sex is everywhere around us - in magazines and newspapers, in advertisements and soap operas. Children and young people also learn about sex from each other - and what gets passed on in the playground may not be accurate or what parents want them to hear!

All these confusing messages may lead young people into situations they don't know how to deal with. As a parent you have an important role in making sure your child has the right information and skills to cope with these pressures.

You might feel concerned that by discussing sex and relationships, particularly at an early age, you will encourage your children to start having sex when they're very young. But research has proved that the opposite is true. In fact, teenagers from families where parents talk frankly about sex wait until they are older than others before they start having sex. And when they do have sex for the first time, they are more likely to use contraceptives.

Most teenagers are sexually active before they leave school or college. It is shocking to know that some young people are sexually active as young as 11 or 12, although the average age for first sex is 17. You can’t always stop your teenagers from having sex and many of them will do it anyway. What you can do is to educate them about sex, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and contraception.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about talking about sex with your children, don’t worry – this is a common reaction. But don’t let it put you off. Sex education shouldn’t be a one-off talk but a gradual process of communication. If your children grow up knowing it’s ok to discuss sex and the feelings they have with you, then they’re much more likely to come to you for support when they need it.

The UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe and sexually transmitted infections are increasing among young people. Giving your children support, information and help to feel good about themselves can lessen the chances of both.

A number of pharmacists can provide Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) to girls 18 years and under free of charge. Contact your local PCT for details.
Temper tantrums

Not only has he learned to walk and talk, but now he’s learned to stamp his foot, argue, scream until he’s bright red and embarrass me in public on a regular basis. What’s happened to my baby?

Why temper tantrums happen

Tantrums may start around 18 months, are common around two years old and become much less common at four. Very young children are often not able to express themselves as much as they want to and their frustration may come out as a tantrum. Tantrums are especially likely to happen if a child is tired, hungry or uncomfortable. Tantrums also often happen in busy, public places, which can be highly embarrassing and add to the parents’ stress.

If you are worried about your child’s behaviour discuss your concerns with your Health Visitor or GP.

Dealing with temper tantrums

• Keep calm. Getting angry and shouting at your child will only make things worse.
• Your child might be tired or hungry so rest or food might help. Or they might just need some attention or comfort.
• Try to find a distraction. Finding something else interesting to do or look at can help. If you’re in a busy or noisy place try to go somewhere quieter.
• If none of the above works, try to see things from your child’s point of view and understand what they actually want. Try offering them a choice, as this gives your child a sense of control and can be more effective than simply saying “no”. Always try to offer a positive way out.
• If you’re at home you can try ignoring the tantrum, perhaps walking away into another room if it’s safe to do so. Encourage your child to cool down on their own and talk more calmly about what they want.
• After the tantrum, praise your child for settling down. Even though they may no longer be angry they may still be upset, so give them a cuddle and make it clear that you still love them no matter what.

Avoiding temper tantrums

You can reduce the likelihood of a tantrum by planning ahead.
• Try to avoid your child becoming hungry or overtired.
• Make sure your child is getting enough personal attention and affection.
• Make sure your time together is quality time together especially if you work for most of the day.
• Keep shopping trips and outings as short as possible.
• Try to plan a regular method that you’ll use to deal with tantrums when they do happen.

Remember, temper tantrums are normal and do not usually lead to serious problems. As your child gets older they will learn to deal more calmly with the stresses of everyday life.

Warning signs

It could happen anywhere, but watch out for a tired or hungry child in any situation when they want something that you have said “No” to, especially when out shopping, or during a social event or a day out.

Action

Keep calm, consider whether your child needs food or rest. Give your child attention and if possible, find a quiet place or some way of distracting their attention. Don’t give-in, but do try to understand your child’s feelings.

What to say

Try to offer your child a choice or a positive way out. Be calm and understanding. Keep it simple and clear. Praise your child for calming down afterwards.

Prevention

Avoid long shopping trips or tiring days out. It often helps to give your child extra attention and affection. Try to foresee possible causes for tantrums in the day ahead and find ways to avoid them.

Contacts

• Health Visitors - Middlesbrough PCT 01642 304094 or Redcar & Cleveland PCT 01287 284016
• Families Information Service - Middlesbrough 01642 354200 or Redcar & Cleveland 0800 073 8800
All parents experience difficulties at various times that can be helped by other family members or close friends. If someone you know is having difficulties, you could offer the following:

- A listening ear.
- Ideas to cope with problems.
- Encouragement to get some help.
- Practical support (childcare/shopping).

However, there may be times when a child may be at risk of significant harm and professional support needs to be provided. How would you want other people to act if your child was being harmed?

- Would you want them to mind their own business?
- To report their worry to a professional who could help?

When we suspect, witness or are told of a child that is being hurt, we can react in many different ways. We may feel guilt, anger, disbelief or denial. Some of these reactions can prevent help getting to a family who need it. Remember that some children who have died may have been saved if more people reported their concerns.

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### Should you mind your own business?

#### Warnings signs

There are many possible signs of abuse, ranging from physical injury to changes in behaviour. Alternatively, you may witness an incident or a child may tell you that she/he is being harmed.

#### Action

- If you think that a child has been harmed, contact the Duty Social Worker or the Police. You can do this anonymously if you prefer. If you are not sure, you can speak to a confidential helpline, such as the NSPCC.

#### What to say

- Explain exactly what you have seen or been told.
- If you can, keep a note of dates, injuries and the exact words used. These will help you.

#### Prevention

- Make sure your child knows who they can share worries with, if and when they need to. Listen carefully to children and be alert to changes in them.

#### Contacts

- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children’s Services Department 01642 771500
- Cleveland Police 01642 326326
- NSPCC National Helpline 0808 800 5000
- NSPCC Asian Helpline 0800 096 7719

### Should you mind your own business?

### Protecting children is everybody’s business

### Adults have a responsibility to report abuse

### Consider offering some support if you are worried

### If in doubt share your concerns about children

### Reporting concerns rarely leads to a child being removed

### Act now – long-term abuse is damaging for children

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### Should you mind your own business?

Every day I hear the young child next door crying. her parents constantly shout at her. Yesterday, in the street, I saw her mother hit her hard across the side of the head. This is probably none of my business but I am worried and not sure what to do.

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### Protecting children is everybody’s business

### Should you mind your own business?
Bringing up young children is not always easy, and getting access to friendly, professional advice when you need it can make all the difference. Health Visitors are here to help families who have general or specific concerns about their child's health or behaviour.

You may be struggling with sleep patterns, eating problems, over-activity, tantrums or crying. Or perhaps you are finding it hard to cope with the stress of bringing up a difficult child. Health Visitors can offer a range of solutions to help resolve your problems and make parenting easier and more enjoyable. They can also signpost you to other supportive services.

One popular service, which may be available is Baby Massage sessions. Baby Massage can help you make a very positive change in your relationship with your baby and your baby's relationship with you. By learning to massage your baby and by meeting other parents with similar difficulties, many parents find their confidence in handling their baby is increased and they feel more able to discuss their anxieties openly.

Naturally, not all solutions will work for everyone. Each baby, parent and family is unique, so the Health Visitors will work closely with you to find a problem-solving plan which is specially designed to suit your family's circumstances. You can call a Health Visitor to make an initial appointment (see the contact details on the opposite page) or you can attend your local drop-in clinic.

Following this contact, you will continue to have help and support. Sometimes things work out quickly, sometimes more time and support is needed to help your family resolve your particular problem. The Locality Team will work with you, at your pace, and you decide what you can manage.

Many parents struggle with young children. In your area there are certainly other parents with exactly the same problem. So, remember if you feel you can't cope, you are not alone. Get in touch with your Health Visitors - they're there to help.
Many people need special care provided in their homes. They may be ill, disabled or elderly, or they may be experiencing drug or alcohol problems. Receiving care from a member of the family can be one solution. However, when the carer is a child or a young adult, it is especially important to make sure that their needs are properly cared for too.

If your child carries out any caring role, either for yourself or another member of their immediate family, it is essential that their well-being does not suffer as a result of their responsibilities. Most importantly, tell your local Children's Services about your situation. You don't have to cope alone; they can help you and your child get the support and advice you both need.

**Education**

Naturally you will want your child to do well at school. Whilst many young carers achieve good results, national research has shown that caring can have a negative effect on a child's education. To help prevent this, it is essential that your local children's services and your child's school be informed of their caring role. That way they can allow for the needs and pressures that your child may be under and offer sensitive advice and support.

**Health**

Sometimes young carers can be so busy looking after others, that they forget to look after themselves, and can become ill, stressed or depressed. The best way to avoid this is to get help from your GP and local health services. Let them know all about your individual situation so that they can provide the help and advice that both you and your child need.

**Extra support**

Your council can provide extra support for carers. This can include special breaks for carers and additional support services for particular needs. There are also many local and national organisations, specially set up to help young carers and their parents.

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**Warning signs**

Late homework, absence from school, over-tiredness and behavioural problems may be signs that your child is struggling with their caring role. It is vital that you talk to, and listen to your child and take the action needed to help them cope.

**Action**

Don't think that you and your child have to deal with this situation alone. Get as much information as you can and find out what services, support, benefits and advice is available. You're not alone - make contact!

**What to say**

Make sure your local children's services, health services and your child's school know about your situation - keep them up to date if things change.

**Prevention**

Being a young carer could have negative effects on your child's health, education and well-being. You can help prevent this by ensuring that they get the best support and advice available.

**Contacts**

- The Junction Young Carers Project - Middlesbrough or Redcar & Cleveland 01642 756000
- Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 01642 726004
- Redcar & Cleveland Children's Services 01642 771500
- South Tees out-of-hours 08702 402994
- www.youngcarers.net
- www.youngcarer.com
Darren’s dropped all his old mates and started hanging out with an older crowd. Now he’s buying clothes, games and stuff, but he won’t tell me where he’s getting the money from. Should I be worried?

Criminal damage, theft and handling are the most common offences committed by young people and the peak age is 16/17 years.

Young men commit ¾ of all recorded offending.

The main reasons young people give for offending is boredom and peer group pressure. Young people also say that the two key deterrents to offending are:
- The fear of being caught
- Their parents reaction

Research into the lifestyles and experiences of young offenders tells us that the following factors matter most in keeping young people out of trouble:
- A stable and supportive family home
- Consistent parenting

How to help

The Youth Justice System

The Youth Justice System in England and Wales is made up of all the institutions and public services that work with young people that offend. Including Courts, Police, Probation, Prison Services and local Councils. Youth Offending Teams coordinate local delivery of Youth Justice services.

South Tees Youth Offending Service

The South Tees Youth Offending Service is a multi-agency team, working across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland supervising young people between the ages of 10 and 17 years who are subject of Court Orders and Police Final Warnings. The aim of the YOS is to prevent offending and re-offending by young people.

In partnership with Safe in Tees Valley, the YOS works with young people who have been identified as being at risk of offending and some who are subject of Police Reprimands.

YOS assess young people and their families and other agencies to develop a package of interventions to address the issues and behaviour that have contributed to the offending.

Supporting parents

Parents In Parenting (PiP), part of Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning offers a support and guidance service for parents and carers whose young people are offending or are at risk of offending.

They work with families to help them make changes and increase awareness of the services open to them when their young people are experiencing problems.

One of the most important pieces of work that can be done with teenagers is to help them develop positive self-esteem. Usually when self-esteem is raised there is an improvement seen in behaviour, standards of work and relationships with others.

PiP provides a framework for problem solving that parents can use to develop more positive and co-operative relationships with their young people. It explores areas of young people’s behaviour which parents find difficult to address such as non-school attendance, offending and anti-social behaviour. Parenting group programmes are also on offer and are a very good way of meeting with other parents in similar circumstances.

There are also regular informal drop in sessions, themed sessions when various types of offending and challenging behaviour are discussed, coffee mornings and parent support groups.

Whilst PiP works with the majority of parents to help prevent offending by their children, there are times when PiP works with parents in a more intrusive way by managing court directed parenting orders.

The approach however is consistent and the worth of all parents is valued, whatever their circumstances.

CONTACTS

- Youth Justice Board for England and Wales 020 7210 3033
- South Tees Youth Offending Service 01642 501500 or 01642 354000 or 01642 513900

WARNING SIGNS

There are many warning signs which might indicate something is wrong.

Your child may come under the influence of negative group of friends, staying out late, new clothes or other items appear which cannot be explained, the use of drugs and alcohol.

ACTION

Raise your concerns with your child. You can seek help and advice from the local Youth Offending Service. Don’t ignore the problem. Spending more time with your child in diversionary activity can be effective.

WHAT TO SAY

Try to stay calm, all children break the rules from time to time, some more than others. Be consistent in what you say and do. If you do impose a sanction stick to it.

PROVISION

It is important that you take an active interest in your children. Know who their friends are and how they are doing at school. If you suspect something is wrong do something sooner rather than later.

CONTACTS

- South Tees Youth Offending Service
Helpful national organisations

- **Ask Brook**
  0800 018 5023 Helpline
  www.brook.org.uk

- **Barnardo’s**
  020 8550 8822
  www.barnardos.org.uk

- **Beating Eating Disorders**
  0845 634 1414
  0845 634 7650 (Youthline)
  www.b-eat.co.uk

- **Child Accident Prevention Trust**
  020 7608 3828
  www.capt.org.uk

- **ChildLine**
  0800 1111
  www.childline.org.uk

- **Community Legal Advice**
  0845 345 4 345
  www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

- **Cry-sis Helpline**
  08451 228 669
  www.cry-sis.org.uk

- **Daycare Trust**
  020 7840 3350
  (Parents Helpline)
  www.daycaretrust.org.uk

- **Family and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (FFLAG)**
  0845 652 0311
  www.fflag.org.uk

- **Family Rights Group**
  0800 731 1696
  (Confidential Advice Line)
  www.frg.org.uk

- **FRANK**
  0800 77 66 00
  www.talktofrank.com

- **Kidscape**
  08451 205 204
  (Parents Advice Helpline)
  www.kidscape.org.uk

- **Missing Persons Helpline**
  0500 700 700 (24 hours)
  www.missingpeople.org.uk

- **National Day Nurseries Association**
  01484 40 70 70
  www.ndna.org.uk

- **National Domestic Violence Helpline**
  0808 2000 247
  www.womensaid.org.uk

- **National Missing People Runaways Helpline**
  0808 800 7070 (For young people to get some support or a message to their parents)

- **NHS Direct**
  0845 4647
  www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

- **NSPCC**
  0808 800 5000 (24 hours)
  www.nspcc.org.uk

- **NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline**
  0800 096 7719 (Mon to Fri 11am-7pm).

- **Ofsted**
  08456 40 40 45
  www.ofsted.gov.uk

- **One Parent Families/Gingerbread**
  0800 018 5026
  (Lone Parent Helpline)
  www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

- **Parentline Plus**
  0808 800 2222
  (Confidential 24 hour Helpline)
  www.parentlineplus.org.uk

- **Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)**
  0121 248 2000
  www.rospa.co.uk

- **Sexual Health Direct Helpline**
  0845 122 8690
  www.fpa.org.uk

- **Young Minds**
  0800 018 2138
  (Parents Helpline)
  www.youngminds.org.uk

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NHS LifeCheck is an online health service that will help people assess and manage their own health through the major life stages and beyond.

Do you have a child aged between 12-15 years?

Then get them to take a look at www.nhs.uk/teenlifecheck

Or

Is your child aged 5-8 months?

Then take a look at www.nhs.uk/lifecheck

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Families’ Information Services
Supporting Parents... Supporting Families

For information, advice and guidance on:
- A wide range of family services available locally
- Finding Childcare
- After school and holiday care
- Sport & leisure activities for young people
- Tree Nursery Education for 3 & 4 year olds
- Child and working tax credits
- Sure Start Children’s Centres
- Activities and events for families
- Directory of services for children, young people and their families

Middlesbrough Families’ Information Service

For your local information contact your local service:
Redcar & Cleveland: 0800 073 8800
Middlesbrough: 01642 354200

FREE

Keep your family safe from FIRE
Call 01429 874063 for:

- a FREE home fire safety visit
- One-to-one young fire-setter counselling
- Free first aid training for the whole family

BE A SAFER PARENT
Cleveland Fire Brigade