

YOUNG MINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

ENTERING ADULTHOOD





ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

IF YOU ARE 16-18 YEARS OLD, THIS BOOKLET AIMS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH AS YOU LEAVE CHILDHOOD AND MAKE YOUR WAY TO BECOMING AN ADULT. IT IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MIGHT BE FEELING AND THINKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND PEOPLE AROUND YOU.

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WHAT'S NEW ABOUT BEING 16 - 18



At 16 you are legally on the road to becoming an adult. The law will let you do all sorts of things that you weren't allowed to do when you were younger.

You can:

- Leave school
- Work full-time if you have left school, although there are some restrictions on the work you can do, e.g. you can't work in a betting shop or in a bar during opening hours
- Buy lottery tickets and bet on the football pools
- Get married if your parents say you can (if your parents are married to each other, both must agree; if not married, you only need your mother's consent, unless your father has parental responsibility for you; if parental consent is refused a court may authorise the marriage)

- Have sex
- Buy cigarettes, cigars, loose tobacco and cigarette papers
- Join the armed forces if a parent says you can

At 17 you can also hold a licence to drive a car, motorcycle, scooter or tractor.

At 18 you can:

- Get married even if your parents say they don't want you to
- Vote in general and local elections
- Serve on a jury
- Make a will
- Hold a credit card
- Enter a betting shop and work in one, and place a bet
- Join the armed forces even if your parents don't want you to
- Buy and drink alcohol in a bar
- Buy fireworks
- Apply for a passport without a parent's consent
- Open a bank account
- Own land, buy a house or flat, be a tenant, and apply for a mortgage



WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT BEING 16-18?

Alongside all these new responsibilities and freedoms, you're still growing - physically and mentally. You are still exploring what your body does and what you can do with it. You're becoming much more aware of your abilities. At the same time, your mind knows more and it takes things in more sharply and quickly.

You become more questioning, more critical and you may view your parents in different ways. Maybe they are not so 'perfect' or 'horrible' as you once thought - perhaps they are just ordinary people with their own funny ways. More and more you come to see the wider world, with all its glories and its politics and wars, and realise that you're going to have to live in it and make it a better place.

**YOU BECOME
MORE QUESTIONING,
MORE CRITICAL
AND YOU MAY VIEW
YOUR PARENTS
IN DIFFERENT WAYS.**

WHAT'S THE EXCITEMENT - THE FUN?

Growing up can be fun because it's all about finding out and trying out new things in the world. You don't have to know everything right away – but it's great to find out more about things that interest you. It may be things like:

- A football team
- A song
- A pop star
- A film
- A boyfriend
- A girlfriend

It may be about learning a new job. Maybe it's finding out about a course you'd like to study or a place you'd like to visit. Whatever it is, finding out and learning more should be exciting.

Learning new things is about exploring and trying out. It's about experimenting. You never know what might come up next, or what you will find.

WHAT'S THE DOWNSIDE - THE FEARS AND THE WORRIES?

There's always a downside, somewhere - there has to be. It's true that some people always look really confident - but don't be fooled by appearances. Everyone struggles with growing up - there are just too many things to be unsure about, too many 'what ifs?':

WHAA

- I FAIL MY EXAMS?
- NO-ONE LIKES ME, OR FANCIES ME?
- I'M UNSURE ABOUT MY SEXUALITY?
- I'M NOT READY TO STUDY FURTHER OR TO GET A JOB?
- I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING CRAZY?
- I'M DIFFERENT TO OTHER PEOPLE?
- I HATE MY MUM AND DAD?
- MY FAMILY WANT TO GET RID OF ME?
- I HAVE NO MONEY, OR NOWHERE TO LIVE?
- I JUST DON'T KNOW...

IT FEELS...

MAYBE YOU...

- HAVE FALLEN DEEPLY IN LOVE
- JUST CAN'T CONCENTRATE
- FEEL A FAILURE
- THINK YOU'RE ADDICTED TO DRUGS AND CAN'T GET OFF THEM
- FEEL SO ANGRY, YOU'RE SCARED OF WHAT YOU MIGHT DO NEXT



We all worry about some of these ‘what ifs’ and ‘maybes’ at some stage in our lives. It’s good to talk them over with someone else that you can trust; then you’ve got a better chance of sorting them out. You might get some other ideas – ideas you’d never have thought of yourself and you’ll get some clues about where to go next.

But some young people get very scared or angry and don’t know who to turn to. They may have had a hard time when they were younger. Now that they are having to face up to the task of growing up and making choices about their future, they feel unsure of themselves, and scared they won’t be able to cope.

Young people who feel like this have different ways of showing it. They may hit out, steal, be loud or they may begin to give up – avoid their friends, take drugs, get lost in their computers. They may become worried about their bodies or develop eating problems.

We all feel depressed sometimes. Life is full of disappointments, losses and frustrations but not everyone feels so low that they can’t break out of it, that they can’t study or work properly or enjoy friendships or get on with their lives. If you feel as bad as that, you may be suffering from clinical depression and you’ll need support from someone trained to help, like a psychologist or counsellor.

There are many other kinds of mental health problems, some more severe (like psychosis* - please see page 15) than others. About one in ten young people suffer from some type of serious mental health problem while growing up that affects their behaviour, the way they eat or sleep, their ability to study and to get on with other people. These problems can last for months and prevent you from getting on with life. In such cases specialist help should be sought from people such as psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists. Your GP, school counsellor, social worker, Connexions worker or personal adviser should be able to refer you to these specialist mental health professionals.

The person you see will want to help you – and won't think that you're stupid, mad or wasting their time. What you say to them will remain confidential – no-one else will know what you've talked about (the specialist will explain to you if they do have to tell someone else). They are used to talking to people who have all sorts of worries, even if you're not sure what to say or how to say it.

*Psychosis is a state of mind in which people lose contact with reality and their feelings and thoughts, and often become very confused. It affects people in different ways, but some of the most common symptoms are: hallucinations, delusions; loss of energy; mood swings. Remember, if you experience some of these symptoms, it doesn't always mean you are experiencing psychosis



WHAT ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, SEX AND SEXUAL IDENTITY?

Relationships can be full of fun, romance, excitement and intense feelings, but they can also be confusing, painful and an emotional roller coaster. It usually takes practice and going out with or dating different people to find someone you might be compatible with - who matches your dreams and desires. It also takes time to learn what you do and don't like in a relationship. Relationships don't always work out but it doesn't mean you are a failure - there is lots to learn from every relationship. Everyone is different and relationships develop over time as two people get to know each other. It's also fine not to be seeing anyone at all. It's just as important to spend time finding out about yourself and doing the things you like to do.

It's not unusual to be interested and excited about the possibilities of sex and curious about new experiences. You may be looking for warm, loving and good feelings, thrills and buzzes and know that there is a lot of fun to be had. The thought of new sexual experiences may make you feel excited, nervous or even feel put off.

It is important that you take your time and don't do anything that you're not comfortable with, or are against the wishes of the other person. If you're in a relationship you may feel that physical intimacy brings you closer emotionally but it is important not to rush or feel pressurised. Sex can often feel most rewarding in a loving and committed relationship that is based on mutual respect and trust.

A natural part of your sexual development and maturing into an adult is exploring your sexual identity/orientation and which sex (boys or girls) you feel most attracted to. It's quite normal to think sexually about both the same sex and the opposite sex and to experiment with the same or opposite sex while exploring your own sexuality. Some people know exactly who they fancy or feel sure about their sexual identity, while others may not be so sure. It may take time to figure out and make sense of whether you are:

**Heterosexual
(straight)**
this means you
are attracted to
the opposite sex.

**Homosexual
(Gay/lesbian)**
which means you
are attracted to
the same sex

Bisexual (bi)
which means you are
attracted to
both sexes

Transgender which means you may feel you have been born into the wrong body (e.g. you may have been born into a male body but feel more like a woman or the other way around). Transgender people may feel they are heterosexual, gay or bisexual.



It is important to feel comfortable with your feelings and know that you are not doing anything wrong. It can be hard to talk to others about your feelings and sexuality for fear of being discriminated against, particularly if you feel you may be gay, lesbian, bi or transgender - it may seem easier to keep quiet. This may be fine in the short term but you have every right to be comfortable with who you are and you may not want to or be able to hide an important part of your identity in the longer term.

Alongside the fun and excitement of developing relationships and having sex it is important to know there may be risks and consequences to having sex, such as pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Using a condom can protect you from an unwanted pregnancy and STI's such as, HIV, chlamydia, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea and syphilis.

Some STIs have no symptoms and if you don't know you're infected and don't get treatment you could develop serious long-term health problems. If you think you're at risk do contact a specialist agency and get tested. There are very good sources of specialist help such as Brook, or YouthNet which are listed at the end of this booklet and can give you free and confidential information and advice.

WHAT ABOUT DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



The excitement and the dangers of taking drugs or drinking are different from having sex. But what they do have in common is the search for pleasure, for feeling good, for finding something new about yourself. There is nothing basically bad or abnormal about searching for these feelings. But taking drugs and drinking does involve other people and does carry risks. People take drugs or drink for various reasons.

A growing number of young people try drugs at some point - usually cannabis. Most of them just try it once or twice. Some people take drugs or drink more regularly, as part of their social life. Some become addicted; this means they feel they can't cope without taking drugs or drinking excessively.

THE MAIN RISKS OF TAKING DRUGS ARE THEIR EFFECTS ON YOUR BODY AND BRAIN

They may already have a mental health problem such as depression, and begin to feel that drinking or taking drugs helps, but in the end it only makes things worse. Some don't care, but most feel trapped and controlled by their addiction. They know that it is holding them back and that they are doing something they don't feel right with. They need help from specialist drug or alcohol treatment services. You find these by going to your GP, or Connexions adviser. You could also contact one of the places mentioned at the end of this booklet.

The main risks of taking drugs are their effects on your body and brain, and the risk of getting into trouble with the law. The effects of the chemicals on the brain can be very serious and they exist, in varying degrees, in all drugs like cannabis, alcohol, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, solvents, heroin, LSD or tobacco.

You can also get into serious trouble with the law for having illegal drugs on you. Even if you mean to share them with someone else, the law may see this as drug dealing.

**BETWEEN
16 AND 18
YOU MAY FEEL
YOU'RE NEITHER
A CHILD
NOR FULLY
AN ADULT.**

WHO IS WORRYING ABOUT YOU?

Legally, you may be able to do adult things, but emotionally you may feel you have a long way to go. Or maybe it's the other way round? You feel grown up, but trapped because you don't have enough freedom.

Your parents, carers, teachers, mentors and friends are all a big part of your life and you are a part of their lives. You are still in the process of becoming more independent of them. You may feel you have to disagree with them, rebel against them or ignore them. As much as you may love them, you may have to make your point that you are, and feel, different. But you will most probably still need them for money and somewhere to live.

In many families with teenagers there is a fair bit of tension about. And you may feel annoyed that your parents and carers are worrying about you for nothing.

They may ask all sorts of questions:

- **ARE YOU DOING YOUR HOMEWORK?**
- **WHY SO LONG ON THE TELEPHONE - IT COSTS MONEY?**
- **WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THAT COMPUTER?**
- **ARE YOU SURE THAT BOY ISN'T A DRUG DEALER?**
- **WHY DID YOU COME IN SO LATE LAST NIGHT?**
- **WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO FOR A LIVING?**

All of these just mean they care about you. Sometimes though, people have the opposite problem and feel no-one worries about them. If you feel like this, it's important to get some help from other people around you.

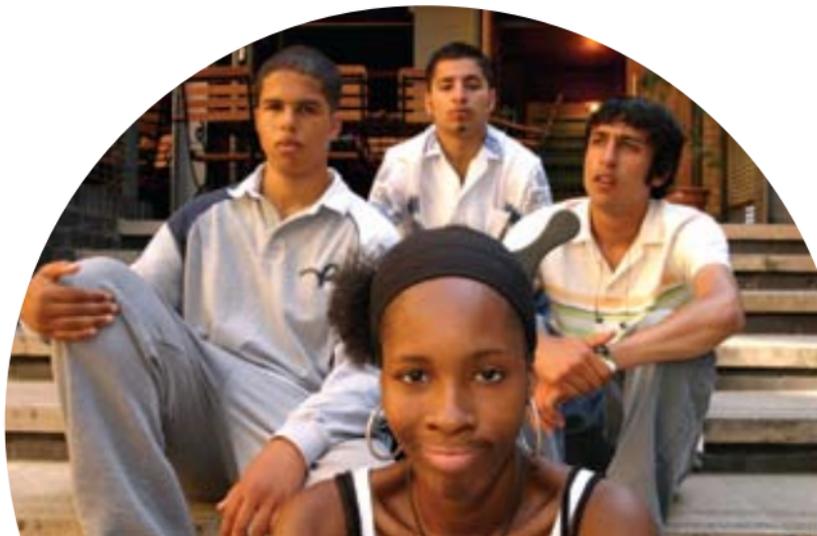
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN ADULT



Adult means simply 'grown up'. But the question is - how grown up? If you are to face all the responsibilities of standing on your own two feet and having others be dependent on you – like children, employees or friends and family – you have to develop in a lot of different ways and this will take time. The more you know yourself, the easier it is to be 'grown up'. It might help to ask yourself some questions as you go along. Don't worry if you don't know the answers to all these questions - most of us don't, but they are useful to think about. This is because they may tell you about what parts of yourself you may want to change, and what parts you may want to keep the same.

You may ask:

- Who am I?
- Who are my parents and grandparents?
- What am I good at...what am I not so good at?
- what do I like about me...what don't I like?
- How well do I stand up for myself?
- How am I different to other people...or how am I the same?
- How do I affect other people?
- How well do I know my strengths and weaknesses?
- Do I try to see other people's points of view?
- Do I try to help my friends when they need it?
- What could people trust me with?
- Am I clear what I want to achieve?



WHERE'S THE FUTURE



The big questions for 16-18 year olds are:

- Where am I going?
- What am I going to do to get there?
- How am I going to make my money?

These are hard questions - more so for some than others. You might know early on what you want to do. Or you might not be so sure, and you need as much guidance and help as you can get. Many of you might say, "I don't know what I am going to do...", which is quite normal.

**YOU HAVE SO
MANY IDEAS
AND DREAMS
AND ABILITIES
(EVEN THOUGH YOU MAY THINK YOU HAVE NONE!)
THAT IT'S NOT SURPRISING
THAT YOU MAY NOT
BE TOO SURE
WHERE YOU ARE GOING.**

All you can do is keep on thinking about it. Make a list of the things at school, and outside of school, that you:

- Like
- Think you are good at
- Know other people think you are good at



Try and put them in order – write down which are the most important. It may also be helpful to talk to your friends about what you are thinking; they will probably be going through something similar. Talk to your parents and other adults - like relatives and teachers, and listen to their advice (you don't have to take it, but it may be helpful).

Get in touch with a Connexions personal adviser – through your school, college or local youth centre. A Connexions personal adviser's job is to support you and provide information about courses, work opportunities and places that can support you in other areas, and help you link up with other organisations. There are details on pages 29 – 31 about them and the Internet is a good way of finding information.

**TAKE YOUR TIME.
DON'T PANIC, JUST
BECAUSE YOU
DON'T KNOW YET.**



THE FOLLOWING PLACES CAN OFFER YOU MORE INFORMATION, SUPPORT OR ADVICE:

YOUTHNET

Website:www.youthnet.org

YouthNet is an on-line service that provides information, signposting and frontline emotional support via the internet. These services are mainly provided through two websites: **www.TheSite.org**, a guide to life and a range of issues for 16 to 25 year-olds; and **www.Lifetrack.com** which can help young people take the next step in learning, training and work.

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YOUTH ACCESS

Signposting Service:

Tel:020 8772 9900

Website:www.youthaccess.org.uk
(Mon – Fri, 9.30am – 1.00pm, and 2.00pm – 4.30pm)

Email:admin@youthaccess.org.uk

Can tell young people up to the age of 25 where their nearest advice and information service is, but does not provide direct advice.

GET CONNECTED

Freephone:0808 808 4994

(7 days a week, 1.00pm – 11.00pm)

Website:www.getconnected.org.uk

Connects young people to organisations that can help them, whatever the problem,.

FRANK

Freephone:0800 77 66 00

(24 hour service. Also provides language interpreting service for non-English speakers.)

Minicom:0800 917 8765 (24 hours)

Email:frank@talktofrank.com

Website:www.talktofrank.com

Confidential information and advice for anyone concerned about their own or someone else's drug or solvent misuse.

CONNEXIONS

Tel:080 800 13 2 19
(7 days a week, 8.00am – 2.00am)

Text:07766 4 13 2 19

Website:www.connexions-direct.com
(includes online email service and details of personal advisers in your area)

Connexions can offer 13 – 19 year-olds information and advice on issues relating to health, money, housing, getting legal advice, relationships with family and friends, careers, and learning options.

NHS DIRECT

Tel:0845 46 47
(24 hours a day)

Website:www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Gives confidential advice and information on any health issue and medication, and can tell you where you can register with a GP and dentist.

BROOK

Freephone:0800 018 5023
(Mon – Fri, 9.00am – 5.00pm)

Recorded information line:020 7617 8000
(24 hours)

Website:www.brook.org.uk
(website includes online enquiry service)

To find out where your nearest Contact Centre is, text BRK followed by your postcode to: 07762 904 208. Brook provides free confidential sexual health advice, contraception, pregnancy testing and counselling to young people under 25.

SAMARITANS

Helpline:.....08457 90 90 90 (24 hours)

Minicom:.....08457 90 91 92 (24 hours)

Republic of Ireland helpline: ...18 50 60 90 90

Or write to: Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA

Email:jo@samaritans.org

Website:www.samaritans.org

Confidential 24 hour emotional support service for any person in distress, crisis or at risk of suicide. If you email them they will aim to email you back within 24 hours.

SHELTER

Shelterline:.....0808 800 4444 (24 hours)

Website:www.shelter.org.uk

Shelter provides free, professional and independent advice to anyone with a housing problem.

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LIKE IT IS

Website:www.likeitis.org.uk

Website that looks at sex, relationships and sexuality.

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NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

Website:www.nusonline.co.uk

Information for students over 17 on money and debts, education, housing, drugs, health, education, sex, disabilities and careers.

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE

Website:www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Provides information for young people, parents, carers, and professionals on all aspects of child law. Information is available in a 'frequently asked questions' format.

YOUNGMINDS

48-50 St John Street
London EC1M 4DG

Tel: 020 7336 8445

Fax: 020 7336 8446

Email: yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

**YoungMinds
Parents Helpline:**
0808 802 5544

**YoungMinds
Parents Forum:**
www.shareyourstory.org.uk

YOUNGMINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

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