



Caring for Teenagers

Caring for an adolescent can be difficult for anyone, but the added complications of early trauma, attachment difficulties and identity issues can make it even harder for the family. Some children appear very settled until they hit adolescence and difficulties suddenly arise. This can make Kinship Carers feel powerless but it is important to remember that it is not about being a perfect carer, but rather understanding what is behind your teenager's behaviour.

Identity

This is a major issue for teenagers. Adolescents often go through an identity quest in early teens, but it becomes more pertinent for teenagers who have big questions to ponder like, "Who am I?", "Where do I belong?" Your teen may also struggle with the added complexity of belonging in two different households. This can leave them feeling different from their peers and impact on their behaviour.

Attachment

The situation is further complicated by any attachment difficulties. Some teenagers may have struggled to attach to their carers but have reached the biological stage where they are geared to pull away. This can lead to some 'push you, pull you' behaviours which mirror the attachment/separation process of the toddler years. For example, you may experience the, "I don't need you I can look after

myself" speech quickly followed by the, "Can you come with me and help me?" plea. Traditionally, teenagers have more freedom than younger children, but some teenagers may not be ready for it. They may look like adults, but emotionally still be children.

What can carers do?

Avoid laying down the law in an effort to take control. Instead aim to stay connected with your teen so they know that whatever they do and however they express their emotions, they are still loved.

Try to avoid the following seven deadly habits:

1. Criticising: clothes, make-up, speech, cleanliness, friends.
2. Blaming: listen before blaming.
3. Complaining: hard to avoid when your teen has hurt your feelings, but it is best to resist.
4. Nagging: agree consequences in advance for not doing what has been agreed and stick to them. Make requests once, then act.
5. Threatening: agree the rules and stick to your side of the bargain. A negotiated agreement that says their allowance depends on certain behaviour is far more effective than a threat.
6. Punishing: negotiated and agreed sanctions are acceptable. Additional punishing behaviour does not help.



7. Rewarding to control: do not give rewards for studying hard for a test, for example. Rewarding someone for just being them – with love, attention or things is far more effective and connecting.

Be kind to yourself

Self-care is particularly important for kinship carers during this time. Some teenagers often try, subconsciously, to recreate their original family's chaotic atmosphere. Your teen is likely to be excellent at knowing the exact buttons to press to make you angry. Anger then becomes a common theme and it makes them feel powerful. This places you at risk of taking on this anger and trauma and it is important to set aside time to give yourself relief from it. All sorts of things can be helpful: exercise, reading, gardening – whatever gives you enjoyment. It is a really important thing that you must do for your family as well as yourself. You are protecting yourself from picking up secondary trauma from your teen as well as providing a good role model of a confident, self-assured adult who can take control of your own life, find new ways to cope and look after yourself, even when under great stress.

Look out for these warning symptoms. Take action if you are experiencing them.

- Highly emotional
- Mood swings

- Run down and frequently ill
- Can't concentrate and unfocused
- Erratic eating patterns
- Sleep disturbance – too little or too much
- Missed appointments
- Lack of motivation or pleasure
- Loss of humour and sense of self
- World appears more threatening

Useful Contacts

- Enquire the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. www.enquire.org.uk
- See me Scotland working with young people making a difference in mental health and unseen difficulties. www.seemescotland.org/
- Who Cares Scotland work directly with children/ young people who have experienced the care system. www.whocaresscotland.org
- Young Minds lists resources across Scotland for young people in crisis /mental health problems. www.youngminds.org.uk; www.youngscotlandinmind.org.uk
- Young people in Scotland Resources - Young Scot card and information, opportunities and incentives for 11 - 26 year olds in Scotland. www.youngscot.org



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Call our helpline: 0808 800 0006 (freephone)
Lines open 10am-2.30pm, Mon to Fri

Visit our website at: www.kinship.scot

Email: kinship@adoptionuk.org.uk

 [kinshipcarecas](https://www.facebook.com/kinshipcarecas)

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

www.enquire.org.uk

www.seemescotland.org/

www.whocaresscotland.org

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.youngscotlandinmind.org.uk

www.youngscot.org