

Intercept
Youth and Family Service

Help!

My child has run away from home

A resource booklet for parents



Lutheran Community Care

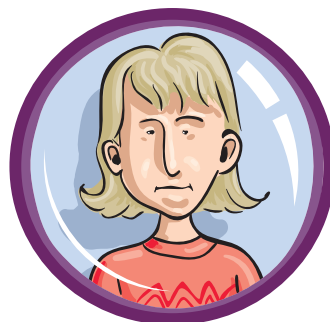
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How to use this resource booklet

This resource booklet has been put together following interviews with parents who have had children and/or adolescents run away from home. It also includes information from the different services in Moreton Bay Region who work with either families or children.

This booklet is divided into different sections and it is possible to jump to sections that may be more relevant to you and your situation, especially in a time of crisis.

However, we believe that you will find it more helpful if you read through the entire booklet. You will notice as you read through it that there are comments in each section from parents who have been in a similar situation.



Common reasons why children and adolescents run away

There are many different reasons why children and adolescents run away from home. It is important that parents think about all the possibilities and reasons and do not just blame themselves. The following list provides some reasons why adolescents leave home, but it is not exhaustive. Each child is an individual and leaves home for his or her own reasons; some of the common reasons are:

- They may believe that life at home is too restrictive.
- They may want to be with their friends or boyfriend/girlfriend.
- They may not like their parent's new partner or the partner's children.
- Drug or alcohol misuse.
- Sexuality issues (identity/confusion).
- Conflict in family relationships.
- Some leave home following an argument in the heat of the moment and feel too embarrassed or scared to return.

- They may be feeling out of control, trapped, angry, confused and may not know what else to do.
- Some adolescents leave home because they don't feel safe at home and this can be for many reasons including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

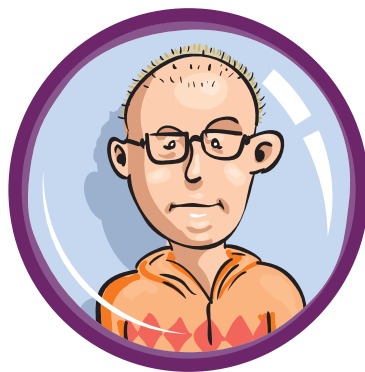
“She didn't even know why she had run away, she couldn't give me a good reason. It was just little things that added up. She needed time and space to sort her thoughts and feelings out. Giving her that space and time was a hard thing to do. But she always knew I was there at the end.”

(Parent of a 16-year-old runaway)

My child has left home! What do I do?

I don't know where my child has gone!

- Check what is missing from your child's room. This may give you an idea about where they have gone or how long they intend to stay away. However, sometimes when children or adolescents leave in the heat of the moment they do not pack appropriate belongings or take things they may need later.
- Call the police and report your child missing. The police usually cannot register someone as missing until 24 hours has passed. However, you can approach them as soon as you know your child is missing. (See section 5).
- You may want to think about whether you should contact the school. Many children who have run away continue to go to school because they need the safety and security of their friends. You may want to speak with the school counsellor, a teacher that your child is close to, or the principal. Parents have different experiences with contacting their child's school, so this is an individual decision for each parent to make.
- Your child's friends are really important to them and you may want to think about getting in touch with them. Sometimes they will know where your child is, or they may know what the underlying problem is. If you make the decision to contact your child's friends, it is important to make sure that you are not angry or aggressive with them. When you are worried sick about your child it is easy to 'lose the plot' but remember - they are more likely to help if you explain how worried you are and that your child will not be in trouble.
- Leave messages with your child's friends and other family members advising that you are worried about them, would like to see them, and that you are willing to work on the problems. It is important that they do not think that they will get in trouble if/when they return, as this may stop them from returning.
- Try to keep the communication channels open. Your child needs to know that you want them to return home and that it is safe for them to return home!



I know where my child is

- Think about whether your child is safe at the place they are staying. If they are with a friend, can you contact the parent(s) and speak with them?
- If you believe that your child is at risk of being harmed where they are staying, you can contact the police or Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (see 'Police' section page 6) and 'Department' section page 10).
- Where possible, leave messages for your child where they are staying letting them know that you are willing to work on the problems and that you want them to return home.
- Try to keep the communication channels open. Your child needs to know that you want them to return home and that it is safe for them to return home!

What should I not do?

- Do not be rude, aggressive or demanding of their friends. This may stop their friends from giving you vital information. This may also stop your child from telling friends where they are or from keeping in contact with them.
- Do not make threats about what you will do when they return home as this is likely to create a hostile environment and may make your child too afraid to return home.
- Do not reward their behaviour if they return (i.e. giving them presents, or agreeing to whatever they want) because you fear that they will leave again. If you do this you may find there will be problems in the future when you say they are not allowed to do something.

What if my child has gone to stay with their mother/father who does not have custody of them?

- If there is a legal agreement/court order as to why the child should not be staying with the non-custodial parent, or should have only supervised access (in the case of physical/sexual/emotional abuse) the police and Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services must be informed.
- Often when children and adolescents live with their non-custodial parent, they find out that it is not as much fun as when they visit and that both parents have rules and expectations. Often your child will return home when they realise that home was not as bad as they initially thought.
- Sometimes your child will decide to stay with the non-custodial parent. If there is no risk of harm, let them know that it is their decision and that you will support it. Try to keep the communication channels open and let them know that if it doesn't work out that they will be able to return to you but that you will have rules for them to live by.

“Not knowing exactly what I was supposed to do next, where I could go to get help... That was overwhelming me.”

(Parent of a 15-year-old runaway)

What if I am angry with my child?

- Your child running away may be the result of a fight that you have had, or an ongoing family conflict. You may be feeling really stressed, angry and ready to give up on them.
- Most parents will experience a range of emotions, and it may feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster. Many parents have reported feeling so frustrated that they just wanted to give up and stop contacting their children.
- If you feel like this, try to keep these feelings separate for the moment. It is important to confirm that your child/adolescent is **safe** and to let them know that you love them and that they can return home.



- Your feelings of anger and frustration are important and will need to be addressed; you will need to make decisions about how to do this. Talking things through with a counsellor can often be helpful. If you give up on your child, they may interpret this as you 'not caring' and may be even less likely to return home.
- As hard as it is, if you want your child to return, you must be willing to work on these problems together.

“It really, really hurts. You feel rejected at first, you think ‘What have I done or not done?’ But then I realised we were both feeling confused and hurt. We got through it in the end.”

(Parent of a 14-year-old runaway)

The police

At what stage do I call the police?

You can call the police at any time. It is a good idea to call them as soon as you realise your child is missing. Usually the police cannot record someone as officially missing until 24 hours have passed. However they will still consider the child/young person as missing and will try to help you find them. In the case of a child under the age of 12 years, or if there are suspicious circumstances, they will investigate immediately.

Try to give the police as much information as you can. It is important to stay calm.

Think about the following:

- When did you last see your child?
- What have they taken with them – money/ clothes/food?
- What are their friends' names, phone numbers and addresses where possible?

- Do you have a recent clear photograph of your child smiling (where possible)?
- Can you think of any suggestions/ideas about where they might go?
- Do you know what clothing your child may be wearing.

Police advice

The police advise that if there are two parents in the family home, that one parent looks for the child while the other parent stays near the telephone in case the child calls. If there is only one parent, it is best that the parent stays at home near the phone and that another family member or friend goes to look for the child. It is best if the person who is looking for the child has a mobile phone with them.

It is important to keep in touch with the police if you hear any further information about your child.

Police Community Liaison Officer

Most police stations have a Community Liaison Officer (CLO). Families from different cultural backgrounds may find it useful to contact the CLO for support and assistance.

What will the police do?

The police will broadcast to other police stations to ensure they look out for the child. If the child has separated parents, the police will send a car to the non-custodial parent and will check with your child's friends and school to ask about recent behaviour. The police will keep searching until the child is located and, if the police officers on duty finish their shift, they will pass the details of your child onto the next shift. The police will gather other resources as needed.

Will the police bring my child back home?

If the police find your child they will usually bring your child back to the police station and interview them. They will either ring you to let you know, or drop your child back home.

What happens if the police find my child but my child doesn't want to return home?

If your child is aged over 15 years and does not wish to return home, the police will check for any risk of harm where they are staying. If there appears to be no risk, they are unable to do anything. If your child appears to be at risk they will bring your child back to the police station and interview them. The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services will be notified and the police will need to find a nominated safe place for your child for the night. This can be a safe place nominated by yourself (the parent) or by your child. The police will take your child to the nominated safe place and ensure your child will be safe there. Child Safety will interview your child the next day.

Do I tell the police if/when they return?

Always let the police know if your child returns. They may wish to speak to them.

"I called the police every time he ran away. At first I didn't want to because I thought they would judge me and my husband, but they were so supportive. They reassured us that other families were going through the same struggles. It's good to know you're not the only one."

(Parent of a 16-year-old runaway)

Legal rights of parents

If I know where my child is, can I go and get them and bring them home?

You can go to where your child is and ask them to return home with you. It is easier to persuade a young child to return home with you, and some adolescents will flatly refuse to return home. If your adolescent refuses to come home with you, and you force them to, chances are high they will run away again at the first opportunity. Instead, let them know you care about them and that you will be there for them no matter what.

Will the police bring my child home if I ring them?

Refer to the 'Police' section (page 6), as this depends on the age of the child. However, as mentioned above, there is often no way of keeping your child at home; the chances are high that your child may run away again at the first opportunity unless the problems at home are addressed. Mediation and counselling services can be useful for trying to address the problems at home.



What if my child is keeping 'bad' or 'dangerous' company?

As a parent, this is one of the most worrying aspects of having a child. However, you cannot control whom they choose as friends. Adolescents in particular are known for rebelling against being told who they can spend time with. It is possible to say that certain friends are not allowed in your house but, if your child is not living at home, you are unable to monitor who they are spending time with. This can be very frustrating for parents who know that peers are negatively influencing their child.



Legal rights of children

Right to safety

All children, regardless of age, have the right to safety; to live in an environment free from emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse, or risk of any harm.

Leaving home

A person under 18 years has no absolute right to leave home, although a person over 16 years would not normally be forced to return home against their wishes.

Youth Allowance from Centrelink

Youth Allowance is for young people who are aged between 16 and 24 years old who are living independently (e.g. in refuges, care etc). To qualify for Youth Allowance, Centrelink will need to assess that it is unreasonable for the young person to live at home because of extreme circumstances. In some extreme cases, children under the age of 15 years may receive special benefits if they are living independently.

Leaving school

Children aged between six and 16 years old must attend school.

Work

Children can apply for work at age 14 years 9 months.

Access to medical or dental services

There is no legal age for when a young person can visit a doctor alone. A doctor is not required to inform parents that a young person has come to visit them.

Medical emergency

In a genuine medical emergency, medical treatment can be carried out at any age without the parent or guardian's consent.

Sexual intercourse

The legal age for sexual intercourse is 16 years. However at 14 years and older, girls are able to see their GP for the contraceptive pill without their parents' consent. There is no legal age requirement for buying contraceptives from chemists e.g. condoms or spermicides.

Marriage

The legal age for marriage is 18 years. However, with parental consent, marriage can occur at 16 years.

Drinking alcohol

The legal age for drinking and purchasing alcohol is 18 years.



Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

Who are Child Safety?

Child Safety focuses on the safety and protection of children and young people. A child is defined as someone 'under the age of 16 years', and a young person as someone 'over 16 years but not yet 18 years.' Child Safety works under the requirements of the Child Protection Act 1999.

What does Child Safety do?

Child Safety investigates and intervenes as necessary in situations where a child or young person is at risk of harm from physical, emotional or sexual abuse, domestic violence, serious psychological harm or neglect. This includes when a child or young person runs away from home.

Reporting to Child Safety

If you believe your child/young person or another child/young person is at risk of harm, (meaning you have current concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person) you need to make a report to Child Safety.

How do I make a report to Child Safety?

Child Safety has a helpline that is available for general enquires across Queensland free call on 1800 811 810. Child Safety after hours service centres across Queensland can be contacted on free call 1800 177 135.

A worker will ask for your details, and the details of the child or young person that you are concerned about. It is possible to make an anonymous report if you wish to, and your details will remain confidential. The identity of a person who makes a report to Child Safety cannot be disclosed to anyone without their consent.

What will Child Safety do?

When Child Safety receives your report a worker will assess it and determine what the appropriate course of action is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person. Make sure you ask what their plan is and what action will be taken. If a child is over

16 years they are allowed to leave home, so Child Safety may not be able to do anything. When Child Safety receives a report of homelessness they may assess and arrange appropriate services, including residential accommodation.

Child Safety phone numbers

Child Safety contact details for Queensland - North Coast Region (which covers Moreton Bay).

During normal business hours contact the Child Safety Regional Intake Service, North Coast Region, based at Caloundra on 1300 703 921 (local call cost). Regional Intake Service receives information and child protection concerns from community members, government and non-government agencies during business hours (from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday).

To follow up on a notification, or if unable to make contact with the Child Safety Regional Intake Service, contact the Child Safety Service Centre that is closest to the location of the young person.

Caboolture Child Safety Service Centre

Level 2 Town Square Precinct
33 King Street (Cnr Beerburrum Rd)
Caboolture Qld 4510

P 07 5490 1000

Redcliffe Child Safety Service centre

59 High St Kippa-Ring Qld 4021

P 07 3884 1388

Strathpine Child Safety Service Centre

328 Gympie Rd Strathpine Qld 4500

P 07 3881 7600 or free call any centre on 1800 811 810.

After hours and on weekends -

Contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on **07 3235 9999** or freecall **1800 177 135**.

The service operates 24 hours per day.

Communicating with your child after they have run away

- Many parents have reported that communicating with their child was the most difficult thing they have ever had to do. Your emotions can be all over the place - high stress levels mixed with sadness, guilt, anger and fear. At times you may feel like just giving up!
- Try to stick with it. It is important to keep the communication channels open. Even if your child is acting as if they don't care about you or the rest of the family, or being abusive whenever you call ... they too are feeling sadness, guilt, anger and fear and they need to know that you still love them regardless of what they have done.
- It is important to try to separate your child's behaviour from your child as a person; bad behaviour does not make them a bad person. For example, you may be angry at your child's behaviour but still love your child. It is important that your child knows you care about them.
- As hard as it is, if you can't speak with them directly or they refuse to speak with you, leave a message or write a note just to let them know you are thinking of them and you care. This will help to resolve the problems at a later date.

“When I tried to call him he would shut his phone off. I kept trying though. I'd call or send a message telling him I loved him and that everyone has a fight, but we're still family. It took three months, then he ended up calling me! I was so happy I cried. He seemed surprised I was so happy to hear his voice.”

(Parent of a 16-year-old runaway)



Self Care - looking after yourself and other family members

- Many parents report that they have become so focused on the child or young person who has run away that they seem to forget everything else.
- It is important to look after yourself! This is an incredibly stressful situation and as a parent you will need some help to get through it. Talk to your friends and family for support. Think about seeing a counsellor, as sometimes it is good to have an outsider to talk to who is there just for you.
- Make sure you continue to look after yourself and try to do the things you normally do. A sense of normality in your life will make it slightly easier to cope. Try to set time aside for yourself and do something that you enjoy (even though you may not feel like it). Activities that can help you to unwind and de-stress are particularly good, e.g. relaxation, yoga.

Parents have reported that they have sometimes become so caught up in the runaway child that they forget about their siblings. Remember that your child's siblings may be worried too, and if they are younger they may not understand what has happened. Allow them the opportunity to talk about it as well. Try to keep their normal activities going so that they have a sense of normality in their lives too.

“If you're not looking after yourself, how can you look after your kids?”

(Parent of a 16-year-old runaway)

Looking after yourself is probably the last thing on your mind but it is very important and it will help you to get through this.

What do I do if my child does not want to return home?

U	Understand that they may feel confused and scared and may not know what to do at this point in time.
N	Never try to scare or frighten them into returning, as they are more likely to leave again next time something goes wrong.
D	Do let them know that they can return at any time; the door is always open for them.
E	Ensure that you keep the communication channels open. Let them know you want to keep in touch with them and are worried about their safety and wellbeing.
R	Remember that relationships sometimes improve between children and their parents when they live in separate houses.
S	Support them emotionally but try not to tell them what to do.
T	Treat your child with respect and understanding.
A	Allow them to visit you or meet them in a neutral place
N	Negotiate a way to keep in touch with your child. Can you write to them? Phone them? Visit them? Email or text?
D	Do not encourage them to return by offering them whatever they would like. You will need to have a situation that involves both parties compromising and discussing the situation. If your child gets everything they want, there are likely to be difficulties next time a problem occurs at home.

There are services that offer family counselling to help you with managing this situation. If you can, encourage your child to attend counselling with you as sometimes a neutral party can help you resolve these difficulties.

Refuges and alternative accommodation options

Many parents feel terrified by the prospect that their child may live somewhere else such as a refuge or an accommodation service. However, often this gives both the child and the parents some space from each other and this can help when trying to work things out.

Types of accommodation

- **Short stay/crisis accommodation refuges**

These refuges are for young people who require immediate accommodation. These services have staff 24 hours per day. The most common age group for these refuges is 15–18 years of age. The usual length of stay can range from one day to three months.

- **Medium-to long-term accommodation**

This is accommodation for young people who have developed some stability in their lives. These services are typically for young people aged 16 and over, as they frequently only have staff on-site during the day.

- **Semi-independent and independent accommodation**

Young people often move to semi-independent accommodation after being in medium to long-term accommodation. They may still receive staff support in areas such as health, budgeting, living skills, legal advice, family reconciliation and emotional support. However, the goal is to help young people find the appropriate accommodation for their situations. Sometimes this involves returning home and sometimes it means living independently in the community.

Do I have to pay money to the refuge?

Most of the youth refuges in Queensland will only take young people from the age of 16 and will require the young person to pay board. Accommodation can be refused if the young person is unable to pay board.

Can I visit my child at a refuge?

This would normally depend on the reason why the child or adolescent is at the refuge. The refuge staff and Child Safety are likely to decide whether parents can visit the refuge.

If you have the refuge phone number it is a good idea to have a discussion with your child's key-worker or case manager about the best course of action. In cases where a child is at risk of harm from a parent, only supervised access to the child may be allowed and this is unlikely to be at the refuge.

Is my child safe at a refuge?

Most refuges have rules and curfews that children and young people need to follow in order to stay there. They will not be allowed to wander the streets at night and will be expected to help with chores, dinners etc. Where there are people under 16 years of age, refuges are staffed 24 hours per day and staff are available as needed. In some refuges for people over the age of 16 years, staff may not be on site 24 hours per day, but are generally on call for the residents if there are any problems.

What support do they get?

They will have a key-worker or case worker who will help the child or young person to make plans/goals, stick to them, and work towards achieving the goals. These goals can and often include mediation with family, and daily activities (school or work).

“You want them home but if they're not ready then being in a shelter is the next best thing. At least you know they're safe!”

(Parent of a 15-year-old runaway)

What happens when my child wants to return home?

If your child agrees to return home:

- Listen to your child's feelings on the situation.
- Understand what your child is saying. Ask questions to clarify what they mean and how they feel.
- Compromise – you and your child will both need to compromise and listen to each other to work things out. Sometimes it is helpful to access a counselling service to help you with mediation and/or counselling to determine how you can both compromise and manage future conflicts
- Kindness – your child needs to feel safe and needs to know that you care and want the best for them. A calm attitude will encourage them to be open to talk.
- You will also need to explain your feelings to your child about the situation. They need to understand how scary the situation has been for you.

Do I discipline my child for running away?

It is up to each parent to decide whether to discipline their child if they return. However, there are some things to keep in mind:

- Harsh discipline is likely to increase rebellion. If you plan to use discipline, ask your child what they think is reasonable. This will help them to take some responsibility for their actions.
- The child may have left due to not liking the discipline at home, so more discipline may not help the situation.
- Threats such as “if you leave again, don't bother coming back” may increase the distance between you and your child and push them further away.

- It may be more helpful to sit down and discuss with them why things went wrong and what you both can do to make it better. Depending on your child's reasons for running away, it may be more reasonable to devote your time and energy to resolving the conflict through compromise, rather than punishing your child.
- Be clear about your rules and expectations for your child. Giving in to them and giving them everything that they want may not be helpful in the long run.

The rules at home

Always check before setting any rules. Are they:

1. reasonable?
2. similar to the degree of freedom other children of the same age have?
3. the same for their friends?
4. age appropriate?

Many parents have suggested that it has been helpful to sit down with children who have been repeatedly breaking the house rules repeatedly to discuss them. Ask your children what they think the rules should be (within reason) and try to come to an agreement together. You may want to talk about how the rules can change as the child gets older or behaves appropriately. If children have been involved in rule-setting, they may be more inclined to follow the rules.



Tips for managing difficult behaviours in adolescents

Even though advice given by parents is usually right, most adolescents need to explore the world, make their own decisions, and often make their own mistakes. This is one of the hardest parts of being a parent but sometimes you have to let them make the mistake so they can learn (unless they are doing something that is going to place them at high risk of harm).

Using the concept of 'natural and logical consequences' is the most effective way of managing an adolescent's difficult behaviours. Natural and logical consequences give the child the responsibility for their behaviour, rather than the parents. It also means that children and adolescents learn for themselves which behaviours are appropriate, rather than from being told by their parents. The consequences must be logically linked to the behaviour in order to be effective.

Some examples of this include:

Refusing to do homework

If your adolescent has homework, remind them that there is a natural consequence for not doing their homework: they may not pass school. You cannot force them to do homework and the more you try to force them, the less likely they are to do it. Parents can say 'I trust that you will make the right decision about your homework and that you will get it done on time. If you don't do your homework the consequence is that you may fail school and may have trouble getting a job'.

Untidy room

Parents need to express their feelings, but it is always best not to lecture adolescents or they will switch off! Give the adolescent the responsibility for their actions to let them know they are moving into the adult world. E.g. 'I want your room to be tidied, but from now on in this area of your life I feel that you should take responsibility. I will back off from telling you what to do. You need to make choices about the way you keep your room. I know you are responsible enough to make your own decisions.'

Leaving clothes lying around on the floor

Parents can explain to the adolescent that he/she needs to take responsibility for his/her own belongings. Explain that if the clothes are not in the laundry, or in a specified place, that the consequence is that they will not be washed.

Curfews

If your child repeatedly comes home after the set curfew, you need to look at the curfew. Is it reasonable? Is it consistent with what other teenager's 'curfews are? Negotiate this time with your adolescent. If the curfew is reasonable and the adolescent repeatedly comes home late then you need to calmly speak to them. 'I have said that I expect that you will be home by 12 and I trust that you are responsible and that you will do the right thing. I worry when you come home late, but I know that you need to make your own decisions about this. However, if you are not responsible you will not be able to go out next time'.

Drugs and alcohol

It is important that you try to be open and honest with your child about their use of drugs and alcohol. Merely telling them that they are making a mistake or yelling at them is unlikely to help. You can find information about drugs and alcohol on the Queensland Health Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATODS) website www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/. Alternatively you can Contact ATODS on freecall 1800 177 833. It is a good idea to talk through the information with your child. If they refuse to discuss it with you, leave them a copy of the information so that they can read it in their own time.

Swearing / verbal Abuse

If a verbal disagreement has occurred between you and your child, and your child is swearing or verbally abusing you, it is important to ensure that you are not swearing back at them. Try to contain their behaviour before it gets to this point. They may be trying to provoke you and may want you to react, so it is important not to overreact to this behaviour. If they get a reaction from you, they are more likely to repeat the behaviour. Let them know that you will not tolerate this language or behaviour and that there is a consequence for it. Remember that you are the adult and often you have to be the one to walk away when conflict starts to escalate.

Agreement between parents

If there are two parents at home, both parents need to agree. Don't give your child the opportunity to play one adult off against the other!

Dating

Talk to your adolescent about what they think healthy and unhealthy relationships involve. Helping your adolescent to understand these

differences may help them to make better choices when they are dating. If you say that you do not approve of the person or the relationship, you are likely to drive your adolescent even further into the relationship and you may also drive them away. Open communication is the key when it comes to all relationships. When your adolescent starts to date, keeping open communication with them is even more important.

Peer group

An adolescent's friends are most important to them. Parents need to be aware of this and be careful not to make their adolescent 'lose face' with their friends. Talking to your adolescent about what they think healthy and unhealthy friendships involve may help. Helping your adolescent to navigate this can help them to make better choices within their peer groups.

Repeating yourself

Repeating something over and over means the adolescent is likely to switch off and think that you are just nagging them.

Renegotiation with your teenager

The problem: Parents sometimes find themselves in a situation where they have tried everything and still cannot seem to get through to their teenager. You love them but don't like some of what they say or do. You are worried about them, want them to learn a lesson, but don't want them to get unnecessarily hurt in order to learn it. You find yourself resorting to their level of thinking and behaviour, battling with them on their ground.

Your situation: If you are reading this, it is likely that you are in some turmoil or predicament where you feel your teenager is calling the shots. She or he may have left home temporarily, is threatening to leave, or is simply not responding to any rules or directions in the

home. Your fear may be that you will lose your son or daughter, or that they will find life outside of home to be much more attractive.

Towards solutions: You are probably wishing that there was some way you could get through to your teenager. Your attempts to talk, tell, convince etc., are all seen as nagging. Our suggestion is that if what you are trying is not working, try something different. Our aim is to offer you a few ideas to keep you on track as a parent. After all, your aim is to show love and care to your teenager; not to end up screaming and shouting, or feeling frustrated and angry that they are not listening.

Step 1 - Offer an invitation

You are the adult here; you have the maturity. Say you want a short and straight talk, not a nagging session. If direct contact is not possible, a phone call or even a written note will do.

Step 2 - Opening lines

Face your teenager with a sense of the reality. For example, if they are over 14 years old, they can choose to live elsewhere. They can choose to not attend school, or to continue to steal if they wish. You don't want this, but if they choose to do this, you have a responsibility to allow them to experience the consequences of their choices. You love them and don't want them to come to any harm; you would love them to accept the rules of your home, but if they can no longer do this, then it appears that they are making a decision to leave.

Step 3 - Being an adult means...

Now proceed to let your adolescent know that you (and your partner) want them to stay and continue to be part of the family. Tell them that they are loved and wanted, and that you too want the conflict to stop. What you also want is for meaningful conversation, like adults, to start. After all, they are almost ready to join the adult group of the family. They are asking for adult freedoms. You would like them to behave like an adult, so that you can then start treating them as one (you really want that to happen). Adults have freedom to make many decisions, but they have responsibilities which come with those freedoms. You are prepared to discuss and negotiate the freedoms as well as the responsibilities with them.

**Step 4 - Negotiating the 'OK' list**

Ask your adolescent to consider that if they also want everyone to be able to live together more successfully as a family, then together you can work this out. You should lead the way by stating clearly, or better still, writing down:

- Some points which you feel are the most important ones. These may be house rules or responsibilities which are expected of people living in the house, including those which apply to your teenager. It is best to start with just a few points which cover the bare minimum of what you are able to live with. For example, this may include 'saying hello to each other in the morning', 'everyone to be home by the agreed time on the weekend' or 'everyone to be responsible for washing their own clothes.' Also include some privileges you think your adolescent would like.
- Ask your teenager to read your points, see if they think they are grossly unfair and to comment if necessary. If they do comment, show them that you listen to what they have to say and be flexible. They may make a good point, one that can lead to a change in what you have written down.
- Ask your teenager to write down their own points, responsibilities and freedoms they think are fair and reasonable. This gives you the opportunity to see how they think and feel about important things for them. You may learn a lot from this.
- As with any negotiation, both sides need to give and take and meet in the middle. So although both parties may have given in a little, both have also gained what is most important to them.
- Finally, together you can put together a final list of points that you both agree upon. This list is a starting point and one that can be re-negotiated as needs change.

Hints and tips

During all times in your renegotiating remember to be an adult, and don't allow your adolescent to draw you in to their negative behaviours. Keep giving a clear message that you love them and want them to be part of the family. You want to be a parent, not an enemy. Give yourself time to rehearse how you will say things, and use another person to practice this with. Remember, at all times, you are demonstrating how an adult communicates. Speak to your child clearly and calmly. Be firm, yet remain loving and caring. Listen to what your child is saying. If you follow the above steps you are likely to get a positive response. In fact, this could be the start of a new relationship with your teenager.

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Adapted by Lutheran Community Care

Intercept Youth and Family Service (Reconnect Program) 2015

Support services available in the Moreton Bay Region

Child and family counselling services	
Intercept Youth and Family Service Reconnect, Specialist Youth Homelessness Program Unit 1, 11-13 Bertha St Caboolture, 4510	5428 1684
Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service (YOS) Lawnton 27-29 Lawnton Pocket Rd, Lawnton, 4501	3285 8522
Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre 9 George St, Caboolture, 4510	5495 3818
Lifeline Caboolture 344 King St, Caboolture, 4510	5428 4200
Carinity Communities - Narangba 2-6 Ryder Court, Narangba, 4504	3888 6400
Deception Bay Neighbourhood Centre 24 Endeavour St, Deception Bay, 4508	3204 2022
Deception Bay Community Youth Program Bay Youth and Sport Centre, 100 Maine Terrace, Deception Bay, 4508	3404 0277
Redcliffe Area Youth Space Corner of Anzac and Oxley Ave, Redcliffe, 4020	3283 8769
Bribie Island Neighbourhood Centre 9 Verdoni St, Bellara, 4507	3408 8440
Private psychologists (Contact Australian Psychological Society for a list of psychologists in your area)	1800 333 497
Private counsellors (Contact Australian Counselling Association for a list of counsellors in your area)	1800 784 333
Relationships Australia 16 Mecklem St, Strathpine, 4500	1300 364 277
Encircle (formerly known as Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre) 1 Lamington Drive, Redcliffe, 4020 730 Gympie Rd, Lawnton, 4501	3284 3081
headspace Caboolture Suite 38 The Lakes Centre 8-24 King St, Caboolture, 4510	5428 1599
Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) Caboolture and Redcliffe CYMHS Pine Rivers CYMHS	5316 3100 3817 6380

Helplines

Missing Persons	1800 017 744
Parent Line	1300 301 300
Domestic Violence Hotline	1800 811 811
Lifeline (24 Hours)	13 11 14
Men's Line	1800 600 636
Homeless Hotline	1800 474 753
1800Respect National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service	1800 737 732

Police telephone numbers

Emergency	000
Burpengary	3491 2444
Bribie Island	3408 8200
Caboolture	5495 0444
Deception Bay	3385 4000
North Lakes/Mango Hill	3482 1444
Redcliffe	3283 0555
Policelink	131 444