



**EXPRESS
YOURSELF!!**

A Teenager's Guide to...



...Fitting in

Getting involved

Finding yourself







If you're a teenager, or about to become one, you have a lot to look forward to. Maybe more than at any other time of life, your world is wide open and the possibilities are endless.

Of course, just as in other times of life, you will have both bad and good experiences.

The ideas in this booklet can help you learn to deal with the tough times and enjoy the good times by finding the people and places that are right for you. You might find these ideas useful in your everyday life. Or read them to see if they might be helpful to a friend.




Freedom, and Responsibility Too

The teenage years are full of change. You might get a job to earn money of your own. You may get a driver's license and graduate from high school. You also might begin...

-  Questioning more of what you hear
-  Learning the skills you'll need to pursue a job or a career
-  Spending more time with your friends and others outside your family
-  Hearing from teachers, parents, and other adults about taking more responsibility

Those changes don't mean that your teenage years have to be harder than others. In fact, this can be the time when you get what you need to have fun and be happy now and in the future.

Obviously, what you go through will depend on...

-  Whether or not the adults responsible for you are loving and supportive
-  Whether or not the neighborhood you live in offers you many opportunities
-  Whether or not you feel close to people your age, and are connected with your school and community

That means everyone's experience is different. But no matter what your experience, you still can figure out how to be happy.

One thing that most people find satisfying is figuring out what they do well.

Deciding what you do well often is a matter of knowing what you like to do. Most people like to do what they are good at.

So, think about what you enjoy. Then try asking people how you might get involved in those activities. You might talk to your parents, other relatives, friends, and neighbors. Check with people at your school like a teacher, a guidance counselor, or the school librarian.

Or, if school is not the most comfortable place for you, get help at the public library. Look on the Internet. Or check the newspaper.

Get connected.

Better yet, get involved in a youth organization.

Youth agencies exist across the country. Their mission is to support young people and link them with activities they're interested in. Wherever you are, one of these organizations usually is close by.

Youth organizations have all kinds of programs. Some offer activities. Others can give you support when you have a problem or are in trouble. Or they can be helpful when you just need someone to talk to.

Youth agencies like the Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H Clubs, and the YMCA can help you find...



Recreational activities



Volunteer opportunities



Other people who share your interests

To learn more about youth agencies in your area, call them.

Below are two ways to locate a youth organization near you. (If there's not a youth organization where you live, find one in a nearby area.)

1. Check the Yellow Pages. Look under "Youth Organizations," "Youth Centers," or "Teen-Age Activities."
2. Contact the national offices of youth agencies to find their local organization. On the next page are three you can start with.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Phone: (404) 815-5700

E-mail: <lmclemore@bgca.org>

Home page: <www.bgca.org>

National 4-H Council

Phone: (301) 961-2800

Home page: <www.fourhcouncil.edu>





(Note: If you are 12 years old or younger, 4-H requires you to involve your parents when you contact them.)

YMCA of the USA

Phone: (312) 977-0031

Home page: <www.ymca.net>

When you call, tell the person you talk to your age and your area of interest. Ask questions to find out more about their programs, for example:

-  What types of programs and activities does your organization offer for someone my age?
-  Do these programs cost anything? What if I do not have money to pay a fee?
-  Do I need my parents' permission to become involved? What if I would like to join but cannot get a signed permission slip from my parents?
-  What do I do next to get involved?

**READ ON TO FIND OUT
MORE!**

The best youth organization for you has people you feel comfortable with.

One of the bonuses of being involved in a youth club or program is meeting all kinds of people. Some agencies even have “mentoring programs.” These link you with someone your age or an adult. You can discuss ideas with that person and learn about new ways to deal with everyday problems. Or you can try out new activities together.

In fact, getting to know people is often what makes life fun and interesting. And the best people to have around are those who do care about you. They can be helpful when you feel pressure to do things that you don't want to do. They can offer advice on how to be yourself and still fit in.

On the next pages are signs that a person does care about you, and questions to help you identify those signs.

**Think about how
real friends treat you...**

They're interested in your well-being, not in something that you might give them or do for them.



Do they value your health and safety (including never asking you to do something that puts you in danger or is illegal)?



Do they suggest that you do things that help you, not them?



Do other people you respect and trust also trust this person?

They listen: they care about what you have to say.



Are they paying attention to you when you talk to them?





Do they ask questions when they don't understand something you tell them?




Do they make sure they understand your situation before they offer advice?




They're interested in your success, and are happy for you when things go well.

-  Do they praise you when something good happens or you've done something well?
-  Do they ask about your goals and interests?

They say they're sorry when they make a mistake.

-  Do they admit when they are wrong (just as you or anyone else should be able to do)?

They don't expect you to be perfect.

-  Would you feel comfortable telling them when you've made a mistake and need help knowing what to do next?
-  Do they help you recognize and work through mistakes? (Or do they use words that make you feel ashamed or worthless?)
-  Do you have a feeling that no matter what happens, they will look out for your well-being (since everyone makes mistakes)?

When they give you guidance, they do so in a way that shows they care.



Does this person make you feel encouraged and motivated?



When they are talking or asking about a mistake you made, do you still feel that they are trying to help you?



Do they make you feel comfortable (including never physically or emotionally hurting you)?

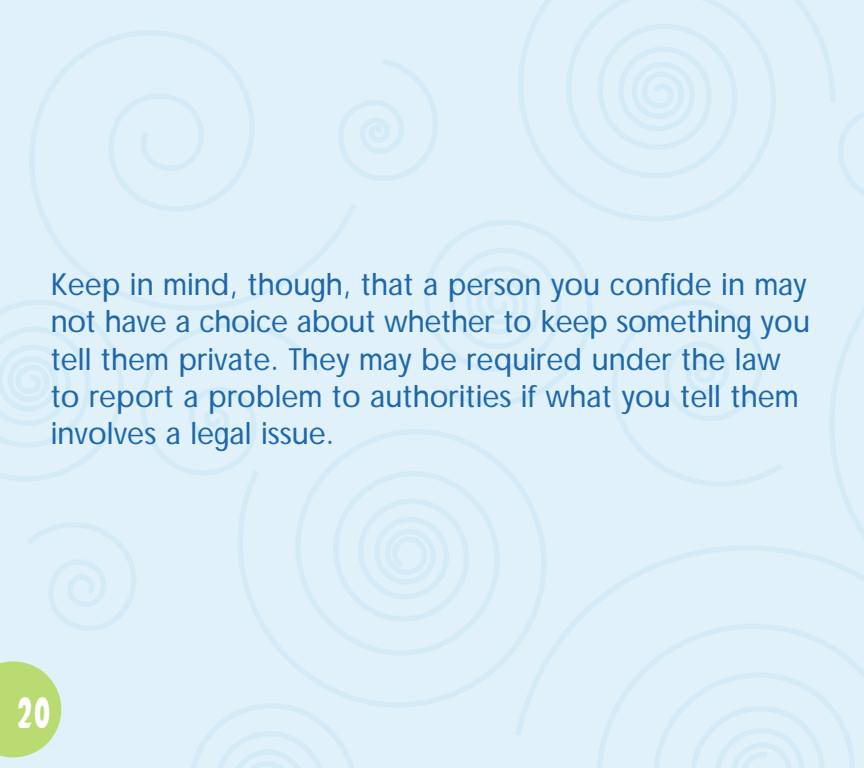
They let you think things through on your own when you want to and respect your privacy.



Do they accept that sometimes you might prefer to think through a problem or situation on your own? (Most people do sometimes.)



Do they keep things you say private when you ask them to?



Keep in mind, though, that a person you confide in may not have a choice about whether to keep something you tell them private. They may be required under the law to report a problem to authorities if what you tell them involves a legal issue.

So if you go to someone for assistance, you might want to ask them about whether they can keep a problem to themselves. They may say that they will report legal issues to someone else. If so, ask them how they have handled situations like this in the past. Ask what happened to the teenagers involved. And talk with them about your choices before you tell them your story.

So, ask questions and...

Trust your feelings.

Sometimes you may still feel unsure about whether you trust someone. If so, follow your instinct. And talk to someone else. Explain why you feel uncertain. That is one of the best things about having a circle of people to turn to: they can help you think through the doubts all of us have sometimes.

Of course, nobody's perfect. Most people don't always do all the right things. Just remember that people who say they care about you prove that by their actions over a period of time.

People who you trust can help you...

Make the best of all that life has to offer.

There isn't any magical answer that will always make life easy. For all of us, there are both hard times and good times. But having a network of friends, supportive adults, and people to talk to at a youth service organization can help. They'll be there for both the unexpected difficulties *and* life's good surprises.





And on the next page are some ideas to think about no matter how things are going for you.

Believe in yourself.

You can't compare yourself to others.

Don't let a negative response stop your positive effort.

Remember the 4 E's:

-  Expect a lot of yourself.
-  Everyone has strengths and limitations.
-  Everybody needs help sometimes.
-  Express yourself: your ideas and feelings matter

So...

Enjoy the good times,
learn from the difficult ones, and
get help when you need it.

If you do, you may find that
life has great things to offer.



YOU ARE
UNIQUE!!



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