

This fact sheet will outline three common risk areas for young people, what the current situation is for each area, contributing factors and how to talk to young people about them.



Introduction to Adolescent Issues

Building trust with your young person is the first vital step in becoming an effective mentor. Once you build trust with your young person, you can expect to hear information about things they are doing in their lives that you may not know how to handle.

How you talk to your young person can influence how they view their behaviour and whether they develop the skills to change their behaviour. Research

suggests that there are 'transition points' in a person's life that can be supported or undermined by a range of risk or protective factors. Risk factors can include poverty, unemployment, availability of resources, family conflict and poor academic performance. Protective factors can include connectedness to the community, good relationships with parents, development of special talents or hobbies and feeling loved and respected.

Great sites for young people

Where is your head at? National Drugs Campaign -

www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/youth-home

Somazone Program - www.somazone.com.au

Reachout Program - www.reachout.com.au

youthmentoring.org.au

Factsheet compiled by Louise Manka on behalf of the Youth Mentoring Network 2008.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this document the Australian Youth Mentoring Network accepts no liability of any loss or damage associated with its use. Mentors should always refer back to their program's policies and procedures for further clarification.

What is the current situation?

Sexual Health

- Many adolescents are experimental, strongly influenced by peers, have many short-term relationships, have unrealistic expectations about pregnancy and believe in their own immortality.
- The public health implication of teenage pregnancy is significant. Children born to teenagers are more likely to grow up in poverty, be the victims of drug and alcohol misuse, become teenage parents themselves, and to become involved in crime. Teenage mothers are more likely to suffer from depression, be dependent on welfare and live in poverty. Births to teenagers are at greater risk of medical complications.
- Young sexually active teenagers are at high risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI), which has long-term health risks.
- Currently, preventive strategies and clinical services for adolescents are lacking in Australia. Innovative and effective strategies for preventing high-risk sexual behaviours in teenagers in other countries can provide models for Australia.

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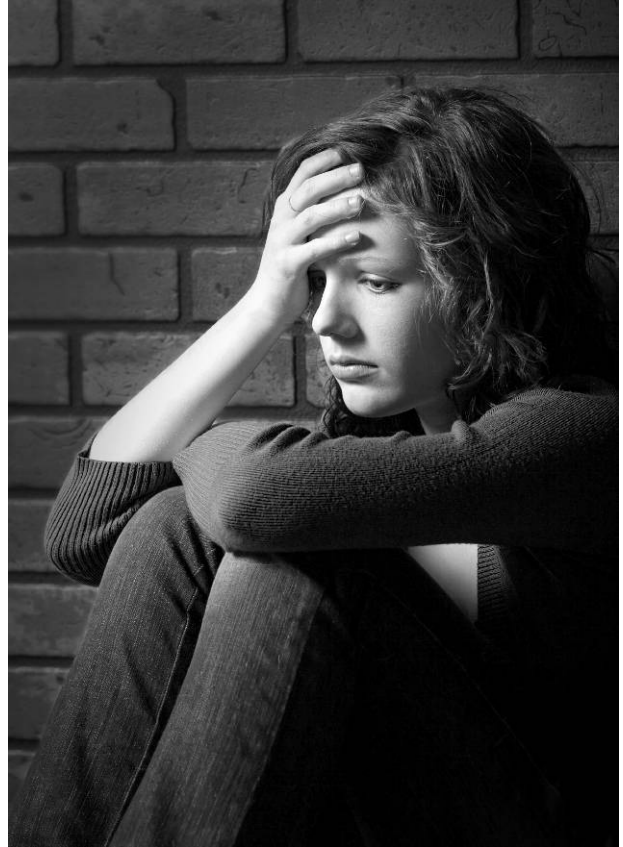
- A major reason for the high number of unplanned pregnancies and STI is inadequate promotion of sexual health and the myth that sex education will encourage it.
- Effective sex education programs address issues of self-esteem, acknowledge social norms within the cultural, peer and family context for adolescents. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), key life skills such as decision-making in relationships and sexual intercourse, resisting pressure and defending decisions should be included in sex education programs.



**Useful Website:
Family Planning — www.fpa.net.au**

Suicide

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people, second only to motor vehicle accidents. In remote rural Australia suicide rates for young males are nearly twice those of males living in capital cities. The rise in suicide is most rapid between the ages of 15 to 19 years.
- Recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest reported suicide deaths have dropped 22% since the peak of 1997. While suicide rates in adolescents have halved, they still account for one in five deaths in this age group (source: Lifeline e-newsletter, April 2007)
- The National Suicide Prevention Strategy commenced in 1999 and aims to support national suicide prevention activities and to develop and implement a whole of government and whole of community approach to suicide prevention across all levels of government, the community and business.
- There are many reasons why a young person may wish to take their life but feeling overwhelmed and unable to see any other solution can often be the catalyst. You can help by talking about the issues and exploring possible alternative solutions and suggesting avenues for help and support.
- If you are immediately concerned about the safety of a young person you will need to stay with them until they get some help, even if they don't want you to. If there is a risk of violence, you will need to call the police.



Drugs and Alcohol

- Drugs are chemicals that affect the mind and body and include medicines, tobacco and alcohol.
- Drug misuse is influenced by economic, social and cultural factors.
- Young people drinking excessively and increased drinking by young women is of major concern.
- A National Alcohol Strategy has been developed to focus on reducing intoxication and addressing cultural acceptance of excess and misuse.
- Cannabis use is underestimated in our society and is increasingly being linked to mental health issues. The National Cannabis Strategy focuses on informing the community about cannabis and to try to prevent or minimise its use.
- Synthetic drugs such as amphetamines, ice and ecstasy have all been on the increase in recent years. Information and awareness of the consequences of these drugs is the current priority as well as discouraging it from becoming acceptable

More information for MENTORS can be found on the
AUSTRALIAN YOUTH MENTORING NETWORK Website under the Information for
Mentors page youthmentoring.org.au/info-for-mentors.html



Talking to young people



- Ensure you create opportunities to have conversations. You could go for a walk, take a trip in the car/bus, or do an activity together. Many adolescents will start talking when eye contact is not direct.
- See the conversation as an opportunity to allow them to explore consequences of behaviour in a safe and non-judgemental environment. Try not to ignore, patronise, condemn or avoid the issues. (See Building Relationships FACT SHEET)
- Use scenarios and stories from your own life – personalise it, get them to imagine someone close to them being affected by something they do.
- Be honest about how you would feel and why but don't expect them to feel the same way.
- Always keep in mind that your role is not to tell the young person what to do unless it is around safety, medical or child protection issues. Make sure you and your young person are aware of your obligations for reporting information around child protection and other safety issues. If in doubt, TALK TO YOUR PROGRAM COORDINATOR!

References & Further Information

- ADIN – Australian Drug Information Network – www.adin.com.au
- ADF – Australian Drug Foundation – www.adf.org.au
- Policy Positions of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ACDA) 2003 - www.adca.org.au/policy/index.htm
- Skinner, R.S. and Hickey, M.(2003) 'Current priorities for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Australia' *Medical Journal of Australia*; 179 (3): 158-161
www.mja.com.au/public/issues/179_0_040803/ski10035_fm.html
- Williams, H and Davidson, S. (2004) 'Improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health. A view from Australia: learning from world's best practice' *Sexual Health* 1(2) 95-105
www.publish.csiro.au/paper/SH03023.htm
- Family Planning www.fpa.net.au
- Centre for Adolescent Health - Youth Suicide in Australia www.rch.org.au/cah/research/index.cfm
- Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Services – Youth Facts and Stats www.youthfacts.com.au
- Beyondblue – www.beyondblue.org.au/ybblue
- Lifeline e-newsletter – www.lifeline.org.au/learn_more/publications
- Australian Youth Mentoring Network - www.youthmentoring.org.au

