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Join us on Facebook!

We've been all over the internet this month to find out why kids are so hooked on the networking and messaging and sharing that's going on there. I'll admit I didn't have much of a clue about websites like Facebook and MySpace. I had asked my daughter Linda, 14, for an intorudcion to her virtual hangout places in the past, but watching her whizz through profiles and updates and bulletins just makes my head spin.

After reading our close-up on social networks, 'Wait, I need to facebook that' (page 18), I felt a lot more informed, but also a little anxious about my kids making themselves so easily accessible to an online world of strangers. Luckily Linda was is up-to-date about online privacy than I and had already put up the protection settings I rushed to demand. I realised once again that my kids are quickly outgrowing me with their awareness of modern-day technology and communication!

It sometimes makes me feel left out of their lives – cue the old "Mum, you don't get it" speech along with the eye-rolling. But it also gives me confidence that my kids will be fine when they start venturing out into the world one day, which I know will come much too soon. Letting our children claim more and more independence can be one of the toughest phases we go through with them, and it can determine the relationship we'll have with them as adults – you can read why in our feature 'Letting go again' on page 28. As always, have a great month and don't let the challenges keep you from enjoying your kids' teenage years with them!

Chrissa

Editor, UNITE
editor@unitemag.co.uk

PS: Become our friend on Facebook to stay in touch and get all the latest UNITE updates! You can find us at www.facebook.com/unitemag



I'm finally up to speed with social networking, but not quite enough to impress my daughter Linda, 14.

Your thoughts wanted!

We're looking for readers to join UNITE's parents panel to take part in online surveys and share their views about parenting, teenagers and family life. For every questionnaire you complete, you'll be entered into a prize draw to win great prizes. For more details visit www.unitemag.co.uk/panel

For our **Teens & Computers** special we were helped by...



Dr Natalie Sander answered our questions about the influence of pornography websites on teenagers' emotions and relationships for our feature on page 24. She just finished her PhD in psychology and continues her research on the development of relationships in an online environment for an upcoming book. Melanie lives in northGermany with her husband Ingo and their 2-year-old son Marco.



Martin Jenson told us all about teenagers' obsession with Facebook, MySpace & co. for our social networks feature on page 18. He studied Computer Science and worked as a teacher for three years before starting his own business developing security software for small businesses. Martin lives in Leicester with his partner Catherine and their twins Sarah and Alina, 7.

UNITE

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Your letters

Send us your views on teenagers, parenting and what you've read in UNITE, and we'll print the best

LETTER OF THE MONTH

"Finally someone remembers that we teenagers are nice people too! The media always make it sound like being a teenager is a crime. Adults seem to think every teen is either in a gang, or out drinking and sleeping around all the time, or has no respect for their parents. When my Mum bought your first issue I thought: 'Great, now they've made a whole magazine about how rotten we teens are.' I looked through it with the firm intention to write a big rant on my blog afterwards, but couldn't find anything to complain about! I always read UNITE with my Mum now. I like how you look at a topic from both the parents' and the teenagers' perspective. It's not only helpful for parents to see how other kids feel about issues they may have in their own families, but I also find it very interesting to read how parents see things. I can talk with my Mum and Dad about everything, but sometimes it's easier to accept their views when somebody else, who has nothing to do with my situation, makes the same point they've been trying to get across. So I think that makes UNITE a great read for teenagers, too. After all, we want the same thing as our parents – to have a great, strong relationship with them!"

Becki Matheson (17), by email



“We teenagers are nice people too!”

GREAT CAREER TIP

"My son loved your career profile on journalism in the July issue. He has always loved writing – he wrote his first short story when he was eight and from there it never stopped. When his Year Six teacher asked him once which job he would like to get, my son declared that he would become a bestselling author. I believe in his work and support him, but it seems like such a risky career. I'm glad he found out more about journalism in your feature. It showed him that there are other opportunities for him to make something out of his talent with words. He's doing his A Levels next year but has already started searching for journalism degree courses on the internet. He's also looking for a work placement to do in his next holidays. Thanks for the inspiration!"

Christine Myers, Guildford

A SAD STORY – BUT SO INSPIRING

"I can't tell you how touched I was by Christopher's story in 'Facing the future without Mum' (August). It's amazing to see so much hope and peace in the words of man who lost his wife so young and is raising their three children alone. It made me sit back and think about all my little family problems that sometimes make it seem impossible to get through a day. In the light of Christopher's tragedy they all faded away and I realised how blessed I am to have my family, and that

it doesn't matter that my two teen girls drive me up the walls most days with their moods and impossible behaviour. All my best wishes to Christopher and his brave children."

Michael Wheable, by email



Keep in touch! We'd love to hear your thoughts on this issue. Email us at letters@unitemag.co.uk or send your letters to UNITE Magazine, 18-20 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 3NJ.

FROM THE WEBSITE

Here's what you've been talking about on our forums at www.unitemag.co.uk

On holidays...

"My daughter (17) spent the first two weeks being bored and moody. Then I dragged her along to a new Salsa class – and she loved it! We've been to every class in town during the holidays and she's becoming quite the dancing star."

AnnieK

"When our holiday in Spain fell through we went hiking in the Peak District National Park instead. Not quite the Costa del Sol, but the countryside is stunning and the kids absolutely loved the rock climbing."

Marc_421

On entertainment...

"We saw *Coco Avant Chanel* at the cinema. It's a wonderful film, and not just for fashion fans. My daughter (16) loved it, and even got the chance to practise a little French over the holidays!"

Fairy*dust

"My son (15) sulked when we wouldn't let him see the *Watchmen* film because it seemed too violent. I bought him the graphic novel instead. He finished it in one day and looked for more graphic novels right away. I got him into reading – yay!"

SAHDad

On family life...

"My stepson (13) moved in with us in March and he's been very cold with me. Yesterday he came to me to talk about something personal for the first time – I was so moved I nearly started to cry!"

Marianna

"My daughter (14) brought home her first boyfriend and her oh-so-disinterested brother (16) suddenly became all alert and protective. It's the sweetest thing I've seen from him in years!"

Cloud29

Young, famous & OUT OF CONTROL

Teenagers may look up to pole-dancing teen stars and rapping ex-gangsters, says Susanne Hauner, but it doesn't mean they're going to join the wild side

When 16-year-old singer Miley Cyrus gave a performance last month dressed in black leather, on a stage accessorised with a stripper pole, the media cried out. Overnight, the *Hannah Montana* actor was labelled a "bad role model" to the millions of teenage fans who watched her show at the US Teen Choice Awards. While the kids voted her the winner in six categories, parents were outraged at the lack of innocence in Cyrus' dance routine. Coverage of the event took an undertone of "Look what's become of our children's role models" – once again.

Celebrities are regularly under fire for their behaviour in public and the bad influence it is said to have on their young fans. Concern may be justified – after all, these singers, film stars, athletes and glamour models often serve as role models for the young generation. Teens idolise them and aspire to be like them because they miss strong positive examples in their real lives, a report on youth culture by the Prince's Trust charity suggests.

Models for teen identities

"Teenagers are trying out different identities and looking for images to model themselves on," says Kate Whatley, a pop culture researcher. "The celebrities they see on television or in magazines can serve as a basis and have a huge influence during that time." Girls long to be like the glamorous young women they admire – model Katie Price, singers like Cheryl Cole or Rhianna, or the characters from TV show like *Gossip Girl*. Boys tend to idolise action film actors, athletes, and music stars like Metallica's Kirk Hammett or rapper 50 Cent.

While these celebrities are usually talented, hard working people who have achieved incredible success at a young age, they often flaunt lifestyles parents don't want to see their chil-



Does super-slim like Cheryl Cole encourage teen girls to starve for a "perfect" figure?

dren slip into. When footballers turn violent after a night out, pop princesses are admitted to drug rehab or rappers confess their past criminal careers, there's often not much role model quality left.

There's also much discussion about the body image promoted by many young pop culture heroines. "Women's images are being sexualised in culture," says Kate, "and parents of course worry how this female 'ideal' will affect their daughters' self-image." Super-skinny singers and actors are criticised for giving teenage girls an unhealthy idea of what they should look like.

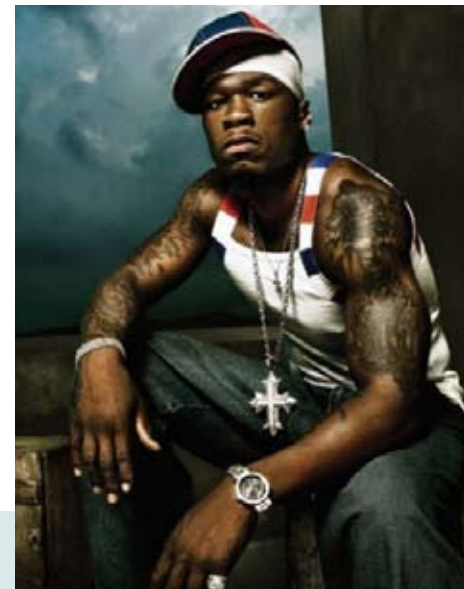
But the influence of those images on young women shouldn't be over-estimated, says Karen. "Teens admire celebrities for more than

their looks. Take Cheryl Cole, for example. She has had several hit singles with Girls Aloud, got some multi-million ad deals and is the most popular *X Factor* judge. She's beautiful, glamorous and, yes, she has lost weight. But teens see more in her than the image she represents. They may idolise women like her but that doesn't mean they'll automatically go on a crash diet."

Teens know what's "not cool"

Mum Emma Matthews has faith in teenagers' ability to make healthy judgments. She keeps an eye on her 15-year-old twins' favourite celebrities, but she's not too worried about bad influences. "I think it's one of the challenges of growing up to find out who we are and what we want in life," she says. "These idols are just some examples kids pick up on the way. My daughters admire certain people, but they'll also hear about the negative publicity they get and say 'That's not cool'. I think that proves

From drug dealer to rap star: There's a positive example behind 50 Cent's bad boy image



influence because of their image. I've been listening to 50 Cent and Jay-Z and all those guys since I was 12. I know 50 Cent was into drug dealing and got shot and all – but that doesn't mean I think that's a good thing or that I'm going to do any of that. I just like the music and style. But I guess there's always a chance someone gets it all wrong and goes off doing the stupid things his favourite celebrity does. Maybe it helps to remind kids that they're just people, too!

up to. He built up his own business when he was just a little older than I am now and many of our relatives found work there. He never took a day off until had made sure the whole family was taken care of. Yeah, you could definitely call him a role model!

Do you think celebrities can have a bad influence on young people?

It depends who you ask. My Mum always complains that the rappers I like are a bad

"Give them a break – they're just people"

Tom Mills, 17, thinks 'bad influences' are over-rated

Are celebrities role models?

Yeah, they can be, but not because they're celebrities. I mean, there are people I admire for what they do – like Michael Schumacher. And in a way I'd like to be like him. But it's about what he has achieved, not because he's famous.

Do you have any real life role models?

I've never really thought of him as a 'role model', but my grandpa is someone I look



Role model qualities? Miley Cyrus (16) danced on a pole at the Teen Choice Awards last month

they're able to question what they see."

With a little guidance from parents, teens will learn to use examples presented by their role models to distinguish between values they want to adopt and those that don't fit with their own lifestyles. And it certainly helps to remember that teenagers get quite enthusiastic about a lot of things all the time. More often than not,

this fascination with celebrities is shallower than it may look.

In response to the media coverage of Miley Cyrus' award show performance teenagers declared their continued loyalty – or their indifference – on the internet. And then they moved on to discuss other shows, celebrities, and entertainment news. "To be honest, Miley

"They're horrible!"

Cathy Barnett, 47, and Gary Merson, 52, are wary of their kids' role models

Celebrities: Good or bad influences?

Cathy: They're absolutely horrible. Kids look up to drug addicted rock stars or trashy pop stars like Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan. Their clothing is out of control, and kids imitate them! If I didn't intervene, my girls would have their breasts hanging out of their shirts all the time. And celebrities' sexual attitudes are over the top. Nothing is taboo anymore.

What's the difference to the role models you had as a teenager?

Cathy: When I grew up we had celebrities with class – intelligent, polite people who had ethics. There was an innocence that is gone now. Today kids look at innocence as a weakness. **Gary:** When I was young I looked up to the men in my family and my teachers and coaches. My son's role models are mostly famous sports athletes rather than people from their own lives.

Is that a general trend?

Gary: I think so. The way teenagers see the world today is very different. Technology allows them to be closer to everyone and everything. TV was just a few channels when I was growing up, so the influence was limited. My kids have a much greater choice of entertainment. And their heroes, whether they're athletes, or actors or musicians, seem more glamorous than the real people around them. But it's not always a bad thing. Kids also get more access people who do great things in the world today.

How do you guide your kids towards good influences?

Cathy: I keep track of the people my girls idolise and show them examples of sensible young celebrities. If their favourite shows seem too crude, the TV stays off or I look for more age-appropriate material. **Gary:** In our family we stress character. Whether it's a famous person or a teacher who is helping you to become smarter, the characters of these individuals are important. And I teach my kids that athletes and entertainers entertain you, but family or teachers are the ones who help you make something out of your life. If kids see that difference that hopefully shows them some good values to look up to in their own lives.

was just acting like every other teenage girl out there," says Emma. "Wearing a short skirt and experimenting with your image is not a crime. That's what teenagers do – that's what my girls do! She behaved like a normal teenager, and our kids know that better than we do." >>

ROLE MODEL CHECK

Meet the entertainment and sport stars teens love



Lady Gaga • The new pop princess

The singer with a preference for outfits without bottoms believes she is sending a positive message to girls. “I’m a role model for the ability for a young woman who’s not the most popular girl, or the most beautiful, to bust her arse and never give up and make something of herself,” says the 23-year-old, who taught herself to play the piano at the age of four. Before she climbed the charts with her debut album *The Fame* in 2008, Gaga tried a

career in burlesque dancing and drug experiments in New York’s underground scene. A near-death experience caused by an overdose helped her turn her back on the self-destructive lifestyle and go back to working on her eccentric pop music style. Her outfits may be overly revealing and her lyrics suggestive, but she advertises hard work above fooling around: “I don’t have boyfriends. I do nothing but eat, sleep, breathe and live my work.”

Popularity: Watch out, Cheryl Cole and Rihanna!
Role model factor: ●●●●●

James Stewart Jr. The racing star

Named one of “20 Teens Who Will Change the World” by Teen People magazine in 2003, the professional motocross racer went on to become the first African-American to succeed at the very top level of major international motor-sports associations. The 24-year-old champion entered his first motocross race when he was just four years old and scooped amateur titles throughout his teens. Despite being forced out of major championships by severe crash injuries in three seasons since 2003, he keeps bouncing back to take the lead and won the 2009 World Supercross Championship. And it seems like he’s too busy riding alongside his fans on his current tour and planning his future career in NASCAR to get caught up in any bad publicity.

Popularity: Could become the Michael Schumacher of the two-wheeled races
Role model factor: ●●●●●



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Visit our forum to share your thoughts on role models and find out who’s popular with kids right now www.unitemag.co.uk



Dizzee Rascal The non-gangster rapper

Having grown up surrounded by gangs and violence in an East London neighbourhood, the 24-year-old rapper says music kept him from ending up on the streets or getting into trouble. “I was violent and disruptive as a kid and got kicked out of several schools. But I found a way to channel my energies into being creative instead of destructive.” Starting out as a DJ, he released his first single at the age of 16 and got into the charts with his award-winning debut album *Boy in da Corner* in 2003.

Despite flaunting a macho image typical of his genre, Rascal says he draws inspiration from his deeply religious mother and the spirituality of martial artist Bruce Lee. When it comes to drugs, he preaches moderation: “I smoke a bit of weed for stress. But you won’t see me go on three-day drug binges or fall out of clubs drunk.”

Popularity: Could become the UK’s Eminem or 50 Cent
Role model factor: ●●●●●

Vanessa Hudgens The Disney sweetheart

The 20-year-old American sang and acted herself into teenagers’ hearts with her role in the *High School Musical* film series. After releasing two albums in two years while working on films and TV shows, she’s back on the screen this year in the upcoming musical comedy *Bandslam*. Hudgens almost fell from grace with the Disney producers of *High School Musical* and her younger fans’ parents when

Popularity: The ‘Hannah Montana’ for older teens
Role model factor: ●●●●●

private pictures of her posing nude were leaked online in 2007. But her teen fans demonstrated their support and blamed the media for making her out as an out-of-control teenager. Hudgens believes she’s a good role model compared to the usual image of Hollywood’s youngsters as a drug-loving, hard-partying crowd. Teenagers idolise her screen characters and she’s a regular on the style and gossip pages of teen magazines. Apart from the photo controversy, Hudgens has kept up her Disney kid image. □

WORDS: SUSANNE HALLNER

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Heavy Metal's got a reputation for causing depression and self-destructive behaviour, but Susanne Hauner found fans of the genre to be a surprisingly friendly and cheerful bunch

When depressed teenagers turn violent against themselves or others, two "causes" always get the blame: Computer games and Heavy Metal. In the US, some parents even send their kids to therapy programmes to get them off the heavy sounds for fear that the musical preference will be the first step into a career as a mass murderer.

Most modern music genres come with a whole set of cultural stereotypes attributed to their fans. Rap music is usually associated with anti-social behaviour, gang culture and misogyny, while Techno and Dance are linked to drug use. Pop fans are said to be role-conscious and struggling with their sexuality and peer acceptance, and Metal lovers are supposedly

depressed and prone to self-harm and suicide.

But experts believe these associations are little more than moral panics that arise from perceptions of behaviours and values observed in representatives of a certain cultural groups. These perceptions, often based on stereotypes, become highly exaggerated and are associated with an entire culture.

"Metal as a genre may have a dark image, but that doesn't mean listening to the music will make you depressed or violent – just like watching a horror movie doesn't make you kill your neighbour," says Sarah Chaker, a Music Studies PhD candidate researching the cultures of Black and Death Metal. The 30-year-old has always been a Metal fan and was converted to the darker sub-genres by listening to a

Marilyn Manson song. And yet she couldn't be a more positive and cheerful woman – no black clothes, no dark make-up, and not a trace of self-destructive tendencies. She thinks a person's mindset influences the choice of music, not the other way round. "Young people who commit suicide or harm themselves have serious issues and they're not caused by a preference for a music genre," she says. "But anyone who's depressed or preoccupied with death is likely to be drawn to Heavy Metal because they can relate to the dark themes and lyrics."

Heavy Metal developed out of the Hard Rock sound created in the 1970s by bands like Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. Punk influences were responsible for the emergence of more aggressive branches like Thrash

Metal, while Death and Black Metal evolved as sub-cultures in the mid-eighties in the US and Scandinavia and centred on themes of mysticism and death.

Metal fans are polite and peaceful

Although many fans like to imitate the bands' dark outfits and make-up, and moshing – the aggressive slamming or pushing of others – is part of the concert etiquette, Sarah says Metal fans are usually happy and polite people. "I interviewed hundreds of them at concerts and festivals for my research," she says, "and every time I was surprised how peaceful and friendly the atmosphere was. Most fans are educated, open-minded young people who said they were content with their lives." Sarah also found that

"The image gets hyped up by the media"

Christian Lange, 49, has been a Metal fan all his life. His son Michael, 17, shares his love for the heavy sounds.

How did you get into Heavy Metal music?

Christian: I started listening to music at a time when the classic Hard Rock and Metal bands were on the rise – Iron Maiden, Deep Purple, Richie Blackmore's Rainbow. Everybody listened to it. When I started my first band at 15, it didn't even occur to us to play anything else.

Dennis: As a child I hated that noise Dad was listening to. Then at 12 or so I started discovering songs I liked.

Now I'm always looking out for new Metal music to top up our huge collection.

Does the typical Metal mentality appeal to you?

Christian: To me it was always just about great rock music and creative new lyrics. I never bought into that whole death and monsters and Satan stuff – even though I wrote some pretty grim songs myself.

Dennis: When I started listening, I was too young to really understand the themes. I just love the sound, and many songs tell great entertaining stories. But I'm not too bothered about any deeper message.

How do you feel about the prejudice that Heavy Metal encourages suicide?

Christian: I think some aspects of the Metal image have developed a lot – like the Goth and Emo lifestyles. But that image gets hyped up by the media and the music industry. I can't see how the music would do any harm. My son has listened to it since he was a baby, and he's an emotionally healthy kid.

Dennis: I've never felt like cutting myself or being Emo or whatever it is I'm supposed to do according to the stereotype. I don't understand how the music should make me feel depressed. That's just ridiculous.

Left: The dark image of Death Metal bands like Equilibrium is often seen as a bad influence on the emotional well-being of young music fans

they listen to the music to lift their mood – it serves as an outlet for stress and aggression, not to fuel negative feelings.

Laura Weiss, 16, is a fan of all kinds of Metal and Hard Rock music, but she doesn't get any self-destructive vibes from it. "Music is my life and it actually calms me down when I'm angry," she says. "When I listen to music I'm more creative. It helps me forget other stuff and I can stay totally focused on what I do, for example work for school."

Far from seeing Metal music as a bad influence on young people's behaviour or emotional well-being, Sarah believes the real harm lies in the stigma given to the genre and its fans. "I don't think it helps to suggest that certain kinds of music trigger or cause mental problems," she says. "The last thing vulnerable young people need is more scorn from their parent culture aimed at their music, which is generally a very positive means of dealing with emotional difficulties. It's certainly better for teenagers to vent those feelings through their music than to act out very normal adolescent frustrations in any anti-social ways."

And then it should also be remembered that Metal is by no means synonymous for destruction and evil. Some sub-genres

explore mediaeval themes and sounds, creating whole sagas and rock operas around the adventures of historical or mythical figures. And there's even a culture of Christian Metal focusing on religious themes, with lyrics typically containing open or coded Christian messages. Despite its image, Heavy Metal music isn't all about death and darkness – especially not in the minds of its fans. □

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To find out more about the current Heavy Metal culture check out our online multimedia special with profiles and videos of the most popular bands from all sub-genres and a music expert's analysis of the most popular themes

www.unitemag.co.uk



Christian Metal bands like the American group Flyleaf combine traditional heavy sounds with religious themes and lyrics

FILMS • HOME CINEMA • GAMES

Teen entertainment

Your kids know all about these new releases. Here's our guide to the good,

NEW AT THE MOVIES



Being in love: not as easy as it looks.

For the whole family

500 days of summer

4 September • Certificate: 12A

Tom falls in love – too bad the girl he wants to spend the rest of his life with doesn't believe in relationships! This offbeat romantic comedy follows them through a summer of ups and downs as they stubbornly try to make their relationship work. Tom's teen sister becomes his voice of reason, but is he willing to listen? A welcome break from shallow rom-coms of the "He's just not that into you" kind, this film tells a story of unrequited love with powerful simplicity.



Not for little siblings

9

4 September • Certificate: 12

In a post-apocalyptic world without humans, a group of living toys stand up against fear-some machines roaming the earth to destroy all life. If they don't make it, all hope may be lost for the future of civilisation. Untypical for its genre, this animation film tells a dark, dystopian tale that may scare younger children.



For older teens

Adventureland

11 September • Certificate: 15

In the summer of '87 college graduate James is forced to take the worst job ever in an amusement park. But it might just turn out to be the best time of his life! *Twilight* star Kristen Anderson is sure to attract teen viewers, but with considerable amounts of swearing and some drug use involved it's not really one for younger teens.



Not recommended

Gamer

4 September • Certificate: 18

Game-playing teens will be counting down the days to see this sci-fi thriller: In the future, mind-control reigns and humans control humans in a mass-scale online game, while hero Kable battles for independence. But with its frenetic sequences of brutal violence throughout, this one will be better enjoyed on DVD when they're older.



trends

the bad - and the ugly

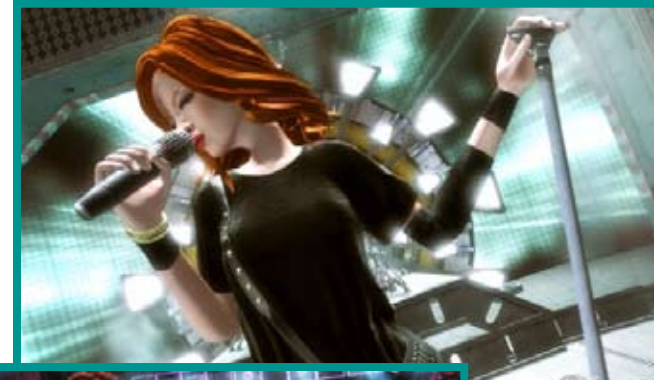
GET YOUR GAME ON

For the whole family

Guitar Hero 5

18 September • Xbox 360/PS/Wii

The party game where everyone can be a rock star returns with 85 new songs and game modes allowing you play with any combination of instruments (no more fighting over the lead guitar) and swap mid song to save your band mates if things go wrong. The range of artists, from the Kings of Leon, Coldplay and Deep Purple to Santana and Stevie Wonder, will leave no one in the family without their favourite music hero to impersonate.



START YOUR FAMILY BAND

...with the Guitar Hero 5 Bundle. We've got five game + guitar sets to give away this month! For your chance to win email us at win@unitemag.co.uk or write to UNITE Magazine, 18-20 Regent Street, Sheffield S1 3NJ. Don't forget to choose your console (available for Xbox360, PS2, PS3 and Wii).



Who's teaching who how to rock here?

For older teens

Dissidia Final Fantasy

4 September • PSP

An ancient conflict of good and evil leaves the balance disturbed and the world about to go down in chaos. The players must choose their allegiance and enter the ring with warrior characters from the *Final Fantasy* franchise. There's one-on-one fighting of the fantasy kind, but no realistic blood-shedding.



ON THE HOME SCREEN

For the whole family

Hannah Montana

7 September • Certificate: G

Teen pop star Hannah returns to her hometown in Tennessee to get a dose of reality and find out what really matters in life. Does she have to choose between fame and family? Feel-good music flick with a message about staying true to oneself.



Not recommended

Crank 2: High Voltage

14 September • Certificate: 18

The *Crank*-sequel sees assassin Chev facing the mobsters who replaced his heart with a machine that needs regular jolts of electricity. Teens may be hooked by the franchise's cult status but disturbed by the constant violence and crude sex scenes.



Not recommended

Halo3: ODST

22 September • Xbox 360

As futuristic paratroopers, players roam the ruins of a city destroyed by catastrophe. A violent first person shooter game that deserves its adult-only rating.



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Check our website for more reviews of past releases. You can submit your own film and game reviews and rate how appropriate the titles are for teens. www.unitemag.co.uk

ANSWERS

Our experts offer advice on problems with teenagers and family life

Meet the UNITE Advice Team



LUCY MARSHALL answers your questions about teen behaviour, family life and relationships. She works as a counsellor and has two sons, 18 and 13, and a 21-year-old daughter.

MATT ATKINSON offers advice on teenagers and school issues. He has been a secondary school languages teacher for 12 years and has a four-year-old son and a newborn daughter.



CLARE BALE answers questions about teenagers' sexual health and relationships. She has worked as a NHS Public Health Principal and is doing a PhD on sexualised culture and young people's health.

SAM REYES is our health expert and answers your questions about teen' diet issues and healthy living. She has worked as a fitness trainer and is now a qualified nutritionist.



HEATHER SHAW is our teen representative and offers her perspective on issues and problems relating to adolescence. She's 19 and starting a degree course in biology this autumn.



She may be **cutting herself**

Q I have found suspicious cuts on my daughter's (14) arms. I'm not sure what to make of it and am worried that she may be self-harming. When I asked her about it she refused to speak to me – I couldn't get a word out of her! She doesn't seem depressed, but I know that she is having a little trouble at school with friends, and she's the kind of person that takes everything to heart. What can I do to help her?

A I know it's heartbreaking seeing our children hurt themselves. Self-harm can be a signal that teenagers are going through some emotional torment and confiding in people who love them and want to help can sometimes seem almost impossible. Feeling helpless when faced with a situation like this is something that many parents experience.

The problems you mentioned with her friends could be the reason your daughter is struggling and unhappy. Have you tried to ask her about the trouble she has with them rather than questioning her about the cuts? Maybe she'll find it easier to open up if the conversation isn't directly related to the self-harming. If these problems with her friends at school persist,

I would encourage you to speak to her form teacher about it. You could ask if the school would be willing to offer some support to your daughter at this difficult time. Some schools have in-house counsellors for their students to access, and if this is the case, she might have the option of speaking to a professional without feeling like she's being dragged to a counsellor.

I would encourage you to contact an organisation called Harmless (www.harmless.org.uk). Their website has advice for families who are concerned and there is also a section for young people, so you may feel it could be helpful for your daughter to look at too. If you feel you can't solve the problem with her, I'd urge you to seek a counsellor's advice. **LUCY**

Come, have a **drink with us**

Q My daughters, 13 and 15, know many more mature teens through friends' older siblings. Drinking is the norm among the 16-year-olds in the group and accepted by most parents. I'm worried about the peer pressure on my girls to start drinking too. My wife and I are trying to maintain a safe environment for our children to develop emotionally at their own pace. How can we prepare them to socialise without feeling pressured into doing things they're not ready for?

A Socialising with friends becomes a priority around that age. I see why you worry about your daughters' friends being a bit more mature. Peer pressure can be a huge force in the early teen years, particularly with regard to drinking and drugs. The opinion of friends often seems to become more important than what parents say. Avoid lecturing your daughters or condemning their friends' choices. Instead, try to encourage a discussion where they can share their views – you may find them to be more critical of their friends' drinking than you'd expect. Make sure your girls know about the risks of being around drunken people, for example never to get in a car where the driver has been drinking. To prepare them for situations where they may get under pressure to drink, you could talk through specific situations or do little role plays where they can learn to say "no" and get out of awkward situations. **LUCY**



“Peer pressure can be a huge force in the early teenage years, particularly with regard to drinking and drugs.”

Getting **addicted?**

Q I'm worried about my 17-year-old son's gambling habit. I recently found out that he's playing poker for money. Now he wants to celebrate his 18th birthday in a casino. What can I do to protect him from becoming addicted?

A Poker is trendy among teens. My son thinks it's cool because it's an adult thing and the 'tough' guys do it in the movies. And playing for money just gives it that little extra thrill. You could set a limit on the amount he can play for and cut back on his allowances if he risks more. I wouldn't worry too much about the casino – it's probably curiosity for the most part, and once he's been there it may lose much of its fascination. **LUCY**

Not a very **“friendly”** tone

Q My 15-year-old son and his friends have been close for years, but lately they seem to have adopted a very harsh and cruel tone with each other. My son says it's a “mate thing”, but I wonder how he will learn to respect others in such a rough, almost hostile atmosphere!



A I think it's quite a normal phase for boys to go through. The blokes I knew around that age were all playing it tough – like they were some big, manly James Bond type. You'll probably find that your son and their friends respect and stand by each other despite the rough tone. It can even be a special form of communication for them, a kind of code that makes them bond more strongly. It will probably pass once they feel more secure in their masculinity. But if your son starts treating you or other people like that, it's of course totally justified to challenge his behaviour. **HEATHER**



She's **so jealous!**

Q My daughter (13) is insanely jealous of my partner. Her father has remarried and she likes his wife, but I'm not “allowed” to have a relationship. She says she doesn't know my partner well enough to like him, but when he comes round she won't speak to him but is rude and aggressive, throws things or damages my belongings. Surely I shouldn't have to choose between my daughter and having a relationship?

A I understand that you feel very torn. As a loving parent, you must be disappointed that your daughter seems unwilling to share your happiness and to be part of the new life you're building up. Her negative reaction to your partner doesn't have to mean she doesn't like him. She's probably finding it hard to deal with the changing situation in her family generally. Maybe she feels that, with her father already remarried, she will be left out now that you have found someone new, too. You could pick a calm moment to reassure her that the changes in your life won't affect your love for her and the relationship you share. She may be willing to give your new partner a better chance on neutral territory. Rather than spending time in your house, you could arrange activities she enjoys and invite your partner to come along. Do you think it might help if her father talks to her about the situation? He may be able to help her understand that his new relationship didn't change his love for her and that she has nothing to fear from yours either. **CLARE >>**

I don't understand why he's **so angry**

Q My son (15) is getting more and more aggressive. He is shouting and swearing at us all the time, but when we confront him will never acknowledge he's doing it! I don't understand why he's so angry with us – when he's around other people he can be the nicest person in the world. I have suggested counselling but he refused to even think about it and it made him even angrier. His brother (13) is starting to pick up his moods and I don't want him to become the same.



A Teenagers often seem to reserve their worst behaviour for those closest to them – not because they hate them, but because they feel unsettled or confused. Negative behaviour can be a sign that kids are struggling with something in their life or trying to cope with emotional issues. Teenagers today are facing so much stress and pressure. Your son's anger could be a signal that he's battling with a situation he can't handle on his own or feels overwhelmed by the stress and demands of his daily life.

I can imagine that you feel frustrated or angry about his shouting. But rather than confronting him, it could help to find out if there's anything that gets him down. If communication has become too difficult, you could write him a letter. Reassure him that it's his behaviour you dislike, not him. He may be able to accept your point of view if you explain that you're more concerned about him being well than angry about the shouting.

You could gently make your son aware how important it is to deal with issues that may get him down and cause his aggression. Unresolved issues can escalate in physical violence or lead young people to seek escape in drugs. This can devastate relationships, ruin chances for the future and leave teens lives devastated. Counselling may be helpful. If you mention it, remind him that your aim is to help him feel better, not to change or correct his behaviour. **LUCY**

“ Anger can be a sign that teens are trying to cope with emotional issues ”



Can't work – **or won't?**

Q My 15-year-old son refuses to do any academic work. He says he can't do it, but the teachers tested him for learning problems and the results say he's very capable and intelligent. When I mention school he turns from cheerful to almost desperate. I can hardly persuade him to go to school anymore, he says there's no point. How can I save him from failing her GCSEs?

A The pressure on kids is massive around that age. They're constantly told how much the exams they're about to sit will affect their chances of a getting a university place, or a good job – their whole life really. Of course we only mean well, but in all concern for our child's future we may forget how they are coping right now. Your son's refusal to go to school could be due to exam stress. If he feels he can't keep up with the work load well enough to pass, it may help to work out a routine with study time and time for relaxing. With a structured plan, he may find it easier to tackle little amounts of work at a time and the work won't become too overwhelming. And also keep in mind that he'll have a chance to retake exams if he fails. **MATT**

@ Email our expert team at answers@unitemag.co.uk Visit our online archive for more answers or to share your experience and advice with other readers. www.unitemag.co.uk



She wants to be a **teen mum!**

Q My 16-year-old daughter has been with her boyfriend for three years. Lately their relationship has taken an awfully serious tone – they're talking a lot about moving in together, getting married and having a baby. Surely it's much too early for my daughter to think about having children? I'm worried that she's about to make the wrong life decisions. Is that only a phase she's going through, or should I do something?

A There are chances that it could be a phase. Maybe it helps to take a look at what's going on in your daughter's life generally? She may be unhappy about something, and having a baby might seem like a way out. Have you talked to her about the reality of supporting a family and raising children? She seems to have an idealised view of it and may not be looking ahead at the long-term consequences. It could also be that she's looking for an opportunity to prove she's becoming a responsible young adult. At that age teenagers are often tired of being seen as a child and long to be taken more

seriously. And all this talk about getting married and having a baby seems a lot like she wants to 'play thouse' with her boyfriend. If she's really determined to have a baby, you may not be able to forbid it. But you can guide her as much as she's willing to listen. It may help to suggest other ways for her to take on responsibility and feel more like an adult. She could

get a part-time job – babysitting may be a good idea, as it could help her understand what it's really like to have children. **LUCY**

Too young for a **tattoo?**

Q My 17-year-old daughter wants a tattoo. I trust her as she's a sensible young woman, but I think too early for a decision about a tattoo which will last a lifetime. Should I allow it or insist she waits until she's 18?

A If you 'force' her to wait, chances are she'll rush to have it done as soon as she's 18. You could allow the tattoo and insist on careful consideration. You seem to have a good relationship with her, so she may let you be part of the preparation process. You could offer your help in finding reliable tattoo studios and looking for images she likes. That way you can ensure she's not taking a health risk and may be able to steer her towards a moderate motive she won't regret having on her body later in life. **HEATHER**

From sports fanatic to **couch potato**

Q My son (15) used to be a sports fanatic, but he has given up all his sports, putting it down to stress at school. But he's not working that much and now all I see him do now is sit around with the computer and TV on. He's already putting on weight and I'm worried how this lack of exercise will affect his health. When I mention it seems to see it as an attack and gets very defensive.



A Tackling diet and lifestyle issues with teenagers can be frustrating. At that young age teens often aren't too bothered about their health, although your son's defensive attitude may indicate that he is more concerned than he lets on. You could suggest doing some physical activity as a family, like going for long walks. Maybe you can borrow someone's dog to make this more attractive. You can also reasonably expect him do a bit of sport every week. A simple rule could be that he picks one activity per term and sticks with it. If you continue to worry about his health, you should speak to your GP. **SAM**

Healthy diet for a **vegetarian teen**

Q Our son (13) recently became a vegetarian. We try to support him but he doesn't show much interest in keeping his diet healthy and varied. He basically just dropped the meat. Some days he also refuses to eat eggs or dairy products. How can I make sure he's eating properly and his diet isn't lacking anything?

A You're right in realising that your son's new vegetarian diet needs to be appropriately 'planned' to maintain good health, high energy levels and strong muscles and bones. Teenagers' nutritional needs are high because their bodies go through phases of rapid growth and change. The nutrients vegetarians need to look out for in particular are protein, calcium, iron, and vitamin B12. Good protein sources include dairy products, beans, cereal, nuts, tofu and soy milk. Calcium is important during adolescence as it's used to build bones. Teens should include three good sources of calcium in their diet every day, for example dairy products and green leafy vegetables. Iron requirements of teenagers are also quite high. Foods high in iron include broccoli, spinach, raisins, watermelon and chickpeas. Your son may become a vegan as he tends to avoid dairy products and eggs. In that case, make sure he gets many plant-based sources of protein, calcium and iron.

The key to a healthy vegetarian diet is variety. To find meals your son will enjoy, you could look at the food lists, tips and recipes on the health section of our website together. **SAM** www.unitemag.co.uk/health



“ Vegetarians need good sources of protein, iron, calcium and vitamin B12. ”



Criminal tendencies

Q Several amounts of money have gone missing in our house over the last few months. We only have one daughter, 16, so it must be her, but she denies taking the money. I don't understand why she would steal as she gets allowances and everything she needs. I'm worried that she'll start stealing from other people and don't want her to get in trouble with the police – what can I do?

A I understand you're disappointed about your daughter stealing from you and lying about it despite your efforts to provide her with everything she needs. Could it be that her demand for money has suddenly gone up because of a change in lifestyle? If she's with a new group of friends, for example, she might feel under pressure to spend more on clothes or entertainment. Try to encourage her to talk to you about how things are going in her life in a quiet moment. If you make it clear that you're more hurt by her dishonesty than angry about the stealing she may be less afraid to tell the truth. Reassure her that it's her behaviour you don't like, not her, and that you'll support her with any problem that may be causing her stealing. Maybe she thinks stealing from family isn't as serious as stealing from strangers? You could ask someone at your local police station to talk to her about the consequences – you don't need to give them specific details about her actions, but it could serve as a reality check for your daughter. **LUCY** ☐

Wait, I need to FACEBOOK that

Teenagers grow up in virtual social spaces often beyond our control. Susanne Hauner we can guide them without getting in the way as they learn the life skills of the digital

Facebook, Bebo and co. are becoming the favourite places to hang out for technology-savvy kids. They are virtual spaces where one is rarely alone and can make new friends 24 hours a day. For teenagers, growing up with computers and the internet, it's a familiar environment. But parents will wonder what's going on in these networks, how safe kids are there, and how their cyber connections will affect their real lives.

The average teenager now spends one hour a day on social networks, websites where they can create personal profiles and connect with other users. Most teens use them to stay in touch with their current friends, as studies in the US and the UK have found. Social networks are all about communication – you can chat and send messages, comment on others' activities, post public notes and share photos and videos.

For teens, online networking is just another form of interacting with their friends. But to parents – especially those unfamiliar with social networks – the concept can seem a little questionable. "My daughter spends hours on Facebook and MySpace every week," says Anette Berg, mother of a 15-year-old. "If I didn't intervene, she'd probably be on there all night, too. She says she's talking to her friends, which seems fine. But I don't under-

stand why they can't just meet up in real life."

So what's the big appeal of internet networking? "Instant interaction," says computer security consultant Martin Jenson. "It's a permanent stream of communication. Something happens, and you can share it immediately with all your friends." Just got back from your date? Argued with Mum and Dad? No need to pick up the phone and call your friends one by one

But when teenagers start using the internet to avoid personal interaction, it can harm their ability to develop relationships and cause them to withdraw from real life. Online interaction is often more casual and anonymous, which can make communication easier for insecure teenagers. And they may find that social networks allow them to create their internet personas as improved versions of themselves.

“If teens use the internet to replace personal interaction, it can harm their ability to develop relationships.”

any more. Today's teens just update their status on Facebook and within minutes, often even seconds, replies from their friends are piling up on their pages.

That, in itself, is nothing to worry about – as long as the need to share their lives online doesn't dictate our children's behaviour. "It can become a problem if kids feel the need to update their profiles permanently about everything," says Martin. "If something ordinary happens and your child's first reaction is to post it on all the networks, it may be time to talk to them about the balance between real and virtual life."

Does the internet kill social skills?

Many parents wonder how this trend of taking communication into a virtual environment will affect their children's social skills. To some extent, online networks are simply an extension of personal interaction. And they can even help shy or socially awkward kids to keep in touch with people if they're struggling in real life.

"It can become a hideaway," says Martin. "If you're 15 and self-conscious, and struggling to make friends in the real world, you can just become someone else online." Social networking tools allow you to make up an identity, create a list of 'cool' friends, and reinvent yourself in your online profile.

The danger is that people with active online identities may place less value on their real lives, says Dr Himanshu Tyagi, a mental health expert: "It's a world where you can delete your profile if you don't like it, and swap an unacceptable identity in the blink of an eye for one that is more acceptable." He believes this might leave young people vulnerable in real life and at a higher risk of impulsive behaviour or suicide.

But the potential dangers shouldn't be overplayed, says Graham Jones, a psychologist researching the impact of the internet: "Over-use of social networking sites can lead to problems, but in my experience the people who tend to be most active on sites such as Facebook or Bebo are those who are most socially active anyway – it is just an extension of what they are already doing."

A generation of information junkies

Even for teenagers with a healthy grip on reality, the appeal of permanent information sharing seems irresistible. Profiles often read like diaries, updated at ten-minute intervals with messages of little content or news value like "Just chillin'" or "I'm boooored". "That's the part I don't get," says James Quine, father of two sons, 14 and 16. "It's alright if they log in to

investigates how generation

check for new messages. But what's the point of hanging around on Facebook all day? I found my older son clicking aimlessly through pages, and when I asked what he was doing he said: 'Nothing, just waiting to see if somebody posts something.' Two hours later, the answer was still the same. It's almost like an addiction."

While addiction might be too strong a word for the average teenagers' internet habits, many do exhibit a seemingly unending need to share every detail with the world. But how can you tell if your child has crossed a line where social networking becomes compulsive? Here are some pointers to look out for:

- They spend considerably more time on the computer than face-to-face with friends and family, or give up hobbies and activities in favour of going online.
- They seem to lose track of time while on the computer, staying up past bedtime or getting behind with homework and other duties.
- They are getting restless or anxious if there is no computer within reach or they haven't had a chance to check their profiles for a few hours.
- They and talk about social networking all the time, for example how they will write an update about something that just happened in real life.

If you discover some of these signs, it may help to limit the time your child

spends on social networks or to set up rules for internet use generally. It's normal for teenagers to become obsessed with something new temporarily. But if this behaviour continues over weeks or months, it may be necessary to

intervene before it can have damaging effects on your child's social life.

Finding a healthy balance

If you feel your need to cut back on your teen's online time, banning the computer or social networks won't solve the problem. And you wouldn't do your child a favour cutting them off completely from tools that they may need later in life. "A reasonable amount of social networking can help young people develop useful skills," says Martin. "Online communication is becoming increasingly important in many jobs. People build up networks of professional contacts for work or to progress in their careers. Teenagers who grow

up using social networks will find it easier to network professionally and to interact in new media environments as part of their job." What teenagers need to learn is a healthy balance between real life and online presence. You

The average teenager spends
1 hour a day on social networks.
50% of teens say they
meet new friends online.



Hanging out with friends via the computer: Most teens use online networks as an extension of their social lives.

New Ribena Strawberry

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“Don’t talk to strangers” in the age of the internet

Make sure your teen’s need to share every detail with the online community doesn’t get them all networked up in trouble

Do you know how much your child reveals on the internet? Do you know who can access their information, their pictures, and their contact details? Social networks can be a great way to stay connected and make new friends, as long as you’re aware of the pitfalls of information sharing. This is especially true for teenagers, who often make a great effort to express their personality online.

pictures. What many don’t realise is how much they give away about themselves to a community of millions of users and, in some cases, even to anyone with access to the internet.

“Pages with silly comments or compromising photos from the last party may make teens look cool in their friends’ eyes,” says Martin Jensen. “But what many don’t consider is that anything they post could be seen by their

“Many teens don’t realise how much they give away about themselves to millions of social network users.”

Social networking can turn into a kind of popularity contest for young people. Many seem to measure their social success by the number of contacts on their lists and the amount of attention they get in the network. “At school it’s always like, who’s got most friends on Facebook, how many photos of you are on there, and so on,” says Michelle Walter, 14. “One girl in my year was already tagged in more than a thousand photos by others. It’s almost like she’s famous. And she gets a lot of people adding her as a friend. It’s really hard to keep up with that.”

Popularity ranking by the number of strangers who take an interest – it’s a risky game. In order not to look like a loser, with few friends and poor social skills, teens try to attract new contacts with profiles full of information and

teachers, the college they may apply to next year, or a future employer. Recruiting departments often run a quick internet check on the candidates.” Try searching for your child on Google – you might not believe the amount of information you may come up with.

There’s also a danger of catching the attention of strangers with dubious motives. Although only half of all social networking teenagers use the sites to make new friends, 43% say they have been contacted by strangers. Social networks, much like chat rooms, provide a relatively anonymous environment for paedophiles, hiding behind a fake profile, to meet unsuspecting teenagers.

“Most online communities require little more than a valid email address for people to register,” says Martin. “Anything else can be fake – name, age, location, interests, photos.” A 14-year-old may not even question if the 16-year-old they just met online who shares their interest in music might in fact be an adult preying on them.

Although these things can happen, it doesn’t mean teenagers will run into the net of a predator as soon as they register on a social network. If used reasonably and with a healthy amount of caution, most communities are

Learn & monitor:
Let your child help you explore social networks

Tips for safe networking

1 Create an account on the sites your children use and find out how they work. Some networks allow only registered users to access your content, while others are accessible to everyone.

2 Every social network has privacy settings which let you control the amount of information other users and outsiders can see. Help your child to choose settings which only allow users on their contact list to access their information and pictures.

3 Make your child aware of the dangers of stalking and identity theft and don’t let them post their full name, address, phone number or other information that could be used to identify or locate them.

4 Check the social network’s terms of use and privacy policies. Some networks store and use data added by users even after it has been deleted.

5 Advise your children only to accept contact requests from people they know in real life and not to share information with strangers or virtual-only friends.

6 Some applications are run by third parties and share private data if allowed to access a profile. Advise your child not to activate or install additional applications.

7 Warn your child to be careful when using parts of the network which are publicly accessible. Even if their own profile is protected, information or pictures they post on other people’s pages or in discussion groups can still be visible to everyone.

8 Remind your child that all photos they post can be downloaded, saved, manipulated and passed on by everyone who has access to them.

9 Users can tag each other in photos. If friends tag pictures of your child, they can be viewed by other users or even publicly. Networks usually have a setting which allows you to disable the tagging function and you can remove tags already placed.

relatively safe. With an eye on their activities and a few simple rules you can make sure your teen can enjoy social networking without any threat to their safety – and without exposing themselves in ways they might regret later. □

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Visit our website for reviews of the most popular social networks with detailed ratings of their features and privacy settings, or join the discussion in our reader forum. www.unitemag.co.uk

Computer kids unplugged

Live Action Roleplaying gamers act out their characters' stories in a real-life setting



"Doing computer stuff" is a favourite teen pastime – and it can teach great skills. Our technology-savvy kids will be the video game developers, web designers and online marketing experts of tomorrow. But if the computer habit gets out of hand and your teen can't be motivated to do anything else, Susanne Hauner has some exciting activities that build on computer-related interests and will get kids away from the screen.

The games are on

For fans of computer games, these gaming-related activities could be an exciting alternative: Live Action Roleplaying (LARP) games can take computer games outdoors. Participants meet and play their fantasy characters live in a fictional universe, set in a mediaeval-style camp in the woods or a futuristically designed warehouse. Players are mostly aged between 12 and 30. "Many get into it through computer games," says Alice Beck, 23, who started "larping" at 17. "The universe and characters are sometimes based on a computer game." Fights can be part of the story, but weapons are safely padded. "The fighting is probably less dangerous than, say, judo," says Alice. "You can learn it in workshops, and it's great exercise."

Teens who are into combat games could try martial arts. It will keep them fit and can be a good outlet for stress and aggression. Real combat training can give children a healthier perspective on fighting and help to balance the often glorified image of violence promoted in computer games or the media generally. And at the same time they'll learn some self-defence skills which may come in handy when they get older and start going out on their own.

For fans of racing games like *Need for Speed*, who crave the adrenaline kick of life beyond the speed limit, Go Karting may be an exciting hobby. True, the machines won't be as powerful as their tuned-up virtual counterparts, but being on a real racing track will make up for that. And who knows, today's racing teens could be the Lewis Hamiltons of tomorrow!

Far left: How about martial arts for a break from the combat games? Left: Go Karting - a real-life adrenaline kick for racing game fans



Fans of iTunes and song downloads may enjoy making their own music

Time for myTunes

A lot of things teens do online are related to music – downloading songs from iTunes, sharing them, or watching music videos on YouTube. So why not encourage your kids to start their own music project? And I'm not talking Playstation's *SingStar* or *Guitar Hero* here! Teens could try singing classes or learn an instrument at school or with a local youth group. It can be a great alternative to private tuition and you can usually borrow equipment if you don't want to invest in an instrument right away or you

child is trying out different options. Teens who aren't bothered about playing instruments but spend their time glued to music videos may be interested in dance classes. Most dance schools offer pop, hip hop or street dance lessons – the styles and moves made popular by MTV and music film hits like *Step Up*. You may even find courses teaching dance routines from artists like Britney Spears, Beyoncé or Usher. Teens will love to learn the moves of their favourite singers, and stay fit at the same time!

Do-it-yourself YouTube

Who says teens who spend their time looking for new films to download and watching TV shows online might not have the potential to go into filmmaking or acting? Ask them how they would feel about shooting their own short film. They could even share it on YouTube. Equipment doesn't have to be expensive – small digital camcorders with good picture quality are available at reasonable prices. Or look out for a film-making workshop in your town or region where teens can learn some basics and borrow equipment before they decide to go ahead with a project. It's also a great opportunity to get the whole family involved – everybody can try out their acting skills and put their creativity into scriptwriting, costume design or production.

The film-editing can be done on the computer, which probably ties in with your teen's interests and allows them to learn or improve skills that may come in handy one day. For kids who prefer to be in the spotlight, an acting workshop may be an exciting break from watching their favourite actors on the screen. Once they get into it, they could join a drama group or help organise theatre projects at school. Even if it may not lead to a career in Hollywood, acting can be a great outlet for creative energy and a great way to gain self-confidence. And showing initiative in extra-curricular activities always looks good on a CV!

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Check our listings of exciting activities for teens in your city or region, updated every month!

www.unitemag.co.uk



YouTube-inspired teens could be the filmmakers of tomorrow

So that's how celebrities get their styling!



Style trend insiders

Many teen girls spend a lot of time on magazine or celebrity gossip websites. They love to be up to date about the latest trends in fashion and beauty and the products, labels and tricks their favourite actors, singers or models use. And they can learn a great deal about styling that way. If they take these interests out into real life, they can build on that knowledge and gather skills that may become a basis for a career as a stylist or designer. Girls who are fascinated by ce-

lebrity looks could do work experience at a local beauty saloon over the holidays or for a few hours every week. Or, if they're into fashion, they might enjoy volunteering at a charity shop where they can help customers pick and match their outfits. A part-time job at a vintage clothes shop can also be a great way to learn about fashion. Clothes often need to be fixed or done up, so teens can get a chance to work on their sewing skills and help to design new outfits. □

Welcome to the internet

Before you proceed, please

BLINDFOLD MINORS

Pornography is available for free all over the web and teens probably have a better idea of what's on offer than we do. Here's an uncomfortable truth

You're sure your teen wouldn't use the internet to look at pornography? You might want to check their website visit history. The average teenager watches 87 hours of porn per year on the internet – that's one hour and 40 minutes a week – as a study of teenagers in the UK found. For many, especially boys, you can call it a daily habit.

Curiosity about sex, of course, comes natu-

When I looked it up, I ended up on a website with hard core porn videos."

It's hardly a surprise that pornography is widely circulated over the internet. What's shocking about it, though, is how easily it can be accessed by anyone. Children, familiar with all things online, probably know that better than we do. But most of them are by no means prepared to assess the material they see and are

children's sexual development."

In America, a study of pupils aged 13 to 17 found that 91% of the boys and 82% of the girls had already been exposed to hard core pornography. About half of them reported they were curious to try some of the things they had seen, and 31% of the boys and 18% of the girls had already done so. Sarah observes a trend towards premature sex too. "I asked this 15-year-old boy in my class why he's going out with a 13-year-old and he said: 'She's young, but she gives great blow jobs'. True or not – you have to wonder where they get these ideas from."

Disturbing messages

There is also concern about the consequences for teenagers' emotional well-being. "During adolescence our children are only starting to develop their sexual identity," says Dr Sander. "They are not mentally prepared to understand and evaluate the messages they get from pornographic material."

Research shows that pornography gives teenagers unrealistic expectations about relationships. "Porn reduces everything to the sexual act," says Melanie. "There is no responsibility, no room for emotions. It confronts teenagers with a lot of ideas about sex, but tells them nothing about emotionally healthy sexual relationships. And if they don't learn to deal with the emotional side of it, sex can become a constant trial and a destructive force in their future relationships."

The issue is further complicated by the messages pornography communicates about



women – and men. Girls can get distorted views about their bodies and their sexual identity if they compare themselves to what they learn as "normal" from pornographic images. Natalie believes it also gives boys a very misleading idea of how women should or want to be treated. "This can put a lot of pressure on boys," she says. "They think they constantly have to 'perform' as they see it in films and images. Frustration with sex and a constant fear of failure can result from that."

During adolescence, children are vulnerable and extremely susceptible to influences affecting their development. In today's media environment teenagers can hardly be kept from all inappropriate influences. But it can reduce the harm if we make sure they don't develop a one-sided, unchallenged understanding of what they see.

Education protects best

An alarming find of the UK study was that teenagers spent an average of two hours a day surfing the internet unsupervised. This of course doesn't mean that they spend all their online time looking at questionable material.

According to the study teens also search for information on sexual health, contraceptives and pregnancy.

Asking Google for advice seems easier for many teenagers than asking their parents. The internet can be a good resource and hosts many websites providing genuine and appropriate advice. But as teens look for answers about sex they will also come across pornography by chance, even if they're not actively searching for it. That's why parents need to be aware of what their kids do online to guide and monitor the input they get.

Banning them from the internet probably won't do to protect them from all harmful material they may come across. Forbidden things only fuel curiosity and encourage secrecy. "And even if children can't access the internet at home, there will always be friends with access," says Sarah. "It's so easy nowadays for kids to share images and videos on their mobile phones." She believes the best way to counter the trend is to improve sex education at school and in families.

We can't protect teenagers from everything, but we can prepare them to deal with it.

Unusual suspects

If your child doesn't browse the internet for porn, there are still many chances to come across sexually explicit images. Be aware of the possible hidden messages in seemingly innocent websites.

YouTube is a video platform hosting everything from music to films and amateur videos. Everyone can upload. The danger: Videos are cross-referenced according to names and content tags. For the music video of Justin Timberlake's hit "Love Sex Magic" the list of related videos will offer more music – and more sex. YouTube has no content filters. To block it, you need to install software on your computer.

Search engines like Google look through all online contents and results don't discriminate between safe and unsafe material. A search for "party" or "club" can bring up pornographic images – unless a search filter is in place to block suspicious material. On most search engines filters can be activated in "advanced search" or "preferences".

Social networks like MySpace are widely used for promotion. Profiles with photos of models or model wannabes abound – just click through to a few profiles and see just how accidentally you come across bare skin and revealing poses. As with YouTube, filtering out inappropriate material is difficult. It may help to keep an eye on your child's use of the websites and their contact lists or to use software to block it.

Pop-ups are advertising windows that pop up when you enter a website. They can advertise anything, including pornography websites. Computer gaming and download websites seem particularly haunted. Most internet browsers have an integrated blocking function which can easily be activated. Check your browser's help menu.

"They will need your guidance to understand and evaluate what they see and to get a healthy perspective on it," says Natalie. "It's important to address subjects like pornography open and with confidence. Don't treat it as a taboo – that will only make teens more insecure. A helpful approach may be to explain pornography as one specific notion of sexuality which is not the norm and not something they need to act out in their own lives. Make them aware of all aspects of a sexual relationship to help them develop their own sexual identity independently from negative influences. □

@ Dr Natalie Sander will join our expert chat room on 17 September at 8pm to answer your questions and give advice. www.unitemag.co.uk

“Teenagers are not mentally prepared to evaluate the messages they get from pornographic material.”

rally with adolescence. From classroom gossip to suggestive advertising, everything around our children will feed that curiosity. The media-savvy generation knows that the answers are all waiting online. And even if they don't know about the seemingly endless supply of free pornography on the internet, they will find out about it as soon as they start searching the web for information about sex.

"When I asked my Year 8 pupils about their favourite websites, many of the boys answered 'porn' or gave me examples of pornography websites they visit regularly," says Sarah Atkins, a secondary school teacher. "I know they all watch videos on YouTube all the time. And then there was a lot of talk about Redtube in class.

oblivious to the effects their seemingly cool pastime can have on their health and emotional development.

Encouragement of premature sex

Research has linked early exposure to pornography to a rise in STD levels and teenage pregnancy rates. Regular consumption is said to encourage teens to become sexually active earlier than they normally would. "Children are curious, they want to try things they see," says Dr Natalie Sander, a psychology researcher. "Or they talk to their friends about videos they have seen – and there will always be a few kids boasting about their experience and egging the others on. As a result, this seems to accelerate

Stay in control of your computer

If you are concerned about unsafe material on the internet, there's a range of parental control software available that helps you filter and restrict what your child can access. Here are our top three.

Safe Eyes allows you to block inappropriate web sites, monitor social networking and filter or block YouTube. You can trace your child's online activity and control access to the internet and the time spent online. £30 for an annual licence.

Cyber Sentinel can filter out harmful websites, protect instant messaging, chat rooms, emails and file-sharing platforms. You can disable chat and messaging programmes. £25 per year.

CyberPatrol Parental Controls lets you block entire websites or only certain contents and words. It is customisable for multiple users and can also block or restrict access to programmes installed on your computer's hard drive. £25 per year.

Join us on UNITE mag.co.uk

...the online community that's all about you and your family



From safe internet browsing to easy ways for busy teens to get their daily exercise, our website is packed with great tips for making the teenage years more fun for the whole family.

In other news, Sheena Rhodes joined our Blogs team and will be writing every week about her experience going from single mum to brand-new step mum of three teenagers – we're expecting a rollercoaster ride! Thanks for helping to make UNITE such a big and supportive community for parents. Let us know what you think of this month's online specials in our forum!

Sarah Dawson

Online Editor
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THE SOCIAL NETWORK GUIDE

Who's on there • Security check for teens' favourite networks • Step-by-step instructions for making your internet browser teen-safe

FAMILY FITNESS

10 great ways to get the whole family off the sofa • 15-minute exercise tips for busy teens and parents • Healthy alternatives for junk food fans

PROBLEM SOLVED

Share your parenting experience with other readers in our community or submit your own questions



Bad influence: Would you BAN your child's FRIENDS?

You just know those new mates will be trouble, but your teen won't listen to your warnings? Maybe it's time to cut the friends off. But will it do any good?

Criss Morris, mum of two daughters (24 and 18) says:

NO! Trust your teen to cooperate

I think teens try out friends in the same way they try out fashion, lifestyles or identities. Sometimes "rebel friends" just come along with the rebel hair or clothes. At 16 my older daughter Amanda went through a crazy hair phase – purple, green, blue, you name it – after meeting a new friend. Later she started going to raves with him and to be honest, I didn't like the idea at all. But I believed she was old and responsible enough to decide who her friends would be, and I trusted her to take my warnings seriously.

I made it clear that I didn't dislike her friend personally and was not attacking her judgment or taste. But I stressed that I was worried about the lifestyle she learned from her friend. We talked about my concerns about raves – the drug-taking generally, the dangers of date rape drugs, and the risk of becoming careless about sex under the influence of substances. Amanda understood my point and the fact that I trusted her and didn't try to forbid the friend and the raves made her more willing to cooperate. She promised she wasn't taking drugs and I know she meant it. Later I learned Amanda had even helped some of her rave friends to stay off drugs. She'd joke with them and say: "No pill heads here, come have a beer with the rest of us instead". Needless to say, in time she made new friends and grew out of the raves – and the rainbow hair.

Generally I always encourage my kids to bring their friends home so I can get to know them and see what they're up to. I think it also shows my daughters that I'm open towards their friends and not judging anyone without knowing them. They've come to understand that if I don't approve of a friend, it's for good reasons. The outcome is usually that they come to the same conclusion over time, or they surprise me by proving I was wrong about someone.



Separating kids from bad influences can be tricky – teenagers may see it as an attack on their lifestyle and take sides with the friends.

Keith Anderson, dad of a son and daughter (21 and 15) says:

YES! Sometimes it's your only choice

My stepson Jason had a tendency to pick the "wrong" friends when he was younger. I always tried not to over-react and told him why I thought he shouldn't be friends with certain people, and strongly suggested that he separate from them. My wife and I never banned friends, but once the outcome could have been a disaster.

When Jason was 17 he became friends with an 18-year-old who was selling marijuana. I warned Jason to be careful not to get dragged into the drug story but he wouldn't listen and only became mad at me. Then this friend manipulated him into letting him use his car to deliver the drugs. They were caught by police in a traffic control, and Jason's brand new car was impounded. He could have gotten into so much trouble! Luckily he got the car back after a few weeks when the truth came out that his friend was doing the dealing and Jason had had no part in it. But until the friend admitted

the whole thing, Jason was absolutely terrified of the consequences.

He learned his lesson the hard way – and so did we. If I had known into how much trouble this friend would get Jason, I certainly would have separated them. Now that my daughter Lucy is getting to that difficult

“ We never used to ban our kids' friends, but once the outcome could have been a disaster. ”

”

age, I would still talk to her first and explain the reasons why I don't approve of certain friends. And after all that has happened, my kids usually believe me that I'm only trying to protect them. But if we get into a situation where I clearly feel Lucy is under bad influence from a friend and

she doesn't believe me, my answer to the ban question would be a resounding yes. I know it would cause a riot, and maybe she'd benefit more from learning from her own mistakes. But I don't want to watch one of my children risk their future again just so they can learn for themselves. We're there to protect them after all, and sometimes that just means we have to draw a line. □

In the next issue: Would you allow your 13-year-old to go to a mixed sleepover party? To join our Parent Debate, send your opinion to debate@unitemag.co.uk

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Vote in our online poll or tell us how you would decide on our forum. www.unitemag.co.uk

Letting go again



When children start breaking free, our first impulse can be to strengthen our hold on them. Susanne Hauner finds out we need to let go now to make sure they'll always come back.

It's Friday afternoon. Amy, 16, comes home from school and rushes into her room, door slamming shut before mum Carol, 47, can even say "Hello". Minutes later, Amy emerges with her rucksack, ready to head off again. "Staying with Linda for the night," she calls over her shoulder. Carol stops her. "What about homework? Family dinner tonight? And what have you got planned with your mates anyway?"

A few minutes later Amy storms off, slamming another door, and instead of learning about Amy's evening plans, Carol has been informed that she is controlling her daughter, making a big deal out of everything and that Amy's plans are none of her business. Carol remembers when Amy used to come home from school and tell her all about her day. How the girl looked up to her, talked to her, listened to her. "I'm losing my daughter," she thinks, but she just can't figure out what she has done wrong.

"Nothing," says child psychologist Dr Pat Spungin. "It's a fear many parents of teenagers are struggling with. They worry because kids become withdrawn and don't seem willing to include

"I kept thinking, if she doesn't let me take part in her life any more, how can I ever be sure she'll open up to me again when she needs advice or has problems?" The difficulty is not only staying in a position to protect them during adolescence, says Dr Spungin. "The basics you lay at this point are likely to influence your relationship with them later in life. If you build up a relationship of independence, trust and understanding now, they will always feel comfortable being open with you."

It may seem like quite a lot of pressure to get things right now. If this scares you, try to remember what your teen is going through and what you both want to achieve in the growing up process. During that time if often seems that teenagers start making unreasonable demands. They expect that every request for going out and sleepovers is granted, they'll be happy to let you drive them and pay for their entertainment – but if you ask what they are up to you will be told to stay out of it.

It doesn't mean they're being ungrateful or don't appreciate our support. But they are keen to choose for themselves, to

“When she was little I had to let go and let her take her first steps, even though I knew she would fall. Now I feel like I have to let go of that hand again.”

them in their lives any more." It can make us feel like we're losing control and can no longer protect our children. But what happens is simply that they are starting to step out of our protective shade. It doesn't mean they hate or reject us. But to develop their own identities, at some point teenagers need to gain enough distance from to be able to develop their own identities.

Forays into a world outside the nest

When our children begin to demand greater independence, we may find ourselves faced with some tough decisions about how much freedom we should give them. "Some parents focus on regaining control of their teenager," says Dr Spungin, "while others are wondering how to build a good relationship despite the barriers their child is building up. That's what the focus should be." Our protective impulse may tell us to monitor our children more closely or set up stricter rules. But that's most likely encouraging teens to become more secretive, lie or rebel.

The best thing we can do is give our children more freedom gradually, while we're still around to guide and protect them. As teens learn to make their own choices, they will naturally make mistakes, get themselves into a bit of trouble, or get their feelings hurt. We can't protect them from those experiences, but we can offer them a safe environment to grow and experiment. "Understand that the distance your child demands is temporary," says Dr Spungin. "Teenagers need room to handle their own situations as part of the identity-building process. Once they have accomplished that, they will feel confident and independent enough to recreate a closer bond with you."

Renegotiating positions

As our children change, the relationships we have with them are also transformed. Don't let your worries get in the way. "I was shocked when Amy accused me of controlling her," says Carol.

form bonds outside the family and be in charge of their lives as much as they can. It's important for teenagers to do this on their own, so they can become confident and responsible individuals. Of course they will still need our help with things they can't do, like driving or covering their expenses, but they will push away as far as they can and demand respect for their privacy. It's the time for us to understand at what point it's best to step aside a little and let them go – or sometimes leap – forward on their own.

Cue the conflicts and arguments?

"As part of the identity-shaping, teenagers start to form their own views – views that may clash with what you think or feel your child needs," says Dr Spungin. "Parents will want to protect children from the dangers of the adult world they're so eager to explore." What we need to find is a balance, a way to guide and protect them even from the distance they put between us. For even though our kids may not admit it, they still need us as backup if things go wrong or they get insecure. "It reminds me of the time when Amy was a toddler learning to walk," says Carol. "At some point I just had to let go and let her take her first steps, even though I knew she would fall. Now I feel like I have to let go of that hand again."

Letting go means adapting our parenting style to new demands. What our children need from us changes drastically during adolescence. When they were little, they needed us to make decisions for them – now they need us to trust them to make their own. "Try not to get too anxious about it," says Dr Spungin. "Keep in mind that teenagers aren't usually asking to make major life decisions at this point. All they want is some power to decide how they spend their free time and pick their friends and the things they like. Even when it comes to issues like sex or drugs, many adults' fears tend to be out of proportion to reality." >>



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Our psychologists and parents have some tips to help you find the right balance between limits and freedom with your teen.

Give yourself some credit. Keep in mind that your children will make their choices based on the principles and values you've taught them so far. You will probably find that you've given them a great basis and may be surprised how well they do in making the right decisions. The outcome will benefit both of you: Your teen will respect and thank you for your confidence, and you will find it easier to give them more independence as they grow older.

Things will go wrong. But this is not a time for scolding and punishing. Although it may seem difficult to control your reactions at times, yelling will only make the situation worse. If you approach matters calmly and with empathy, your child will trust you and be more likely to

Remember when they were little and learned to take their first steps? Now it's time to let go again.

ask for your advice the next time — this is the best chance for you to help them deal with mistakes and learn to make informed decisions.

Keep your interest casual. Teens can be extremely sensitive about their privacy. If they perceive your interest as controlling or spying, chances are they will try to shut you out further. Let them know you're interested and you'll be there any time they want to talk, but don't push the matter. As long as your child feels comfortable with your interest and feedback, they will welcome your involvement and be much more open to your advice.

Pick your fights wisely. If you nag about everything, it will weaken kids' willingness to listen and see your perspective. They may do things you disagree with, but as long as they don't harm themselves or others, let them have their victories. What's the harm if your daughter decides she needs pink hair for a few months as long as she treats you with respect, helps at home and does well at school?

Respect your children's opinions. Sensitive teenagers will feel hurt by criticism or jokes about their clothes, looks, friends or music. Accept them for who they are instead of trying to change them into someone you want them to be.

Don't try too hard to be their friend. Teenagers need and expect rules. If you don't set any limits, they will get confused and insecure. Don't try to gain their favour by giving them freedom which they are not ready to handle. They still need you to protect them and will accept your authority if they feel understood and guided gently.

Accept your limits. Communication between you and your child is going to change. It's natural for teenagers to have little secrets. If they don't share things like they used to, don't see it as rejection. It can hurt to be locked out, but for teens to withhold certain information will simply be a way of creating their own private spaces. It doesn't reflect on how well you are doing as a parent.

You may feel anxious about letting your children take their first steps into adulthood, but here's one thing to keep in mind: They venture out equipped with everything you've taught them as they grew up. You will no longer have as much influence on their decisions, but you've already given them all the basics and values they need to grow into independent, happy individuals. □

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Laura Doerflinger will join our expert chat room on 24 September at 8pm to answer your questions and concerns about the topic.
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How mature is your teen?

Teenagers need limits and guidelines to help them find their way into the adult world. "During that time, it's important to stay focused on the end result: helping them become a responsible, successful adult," says Laura Doerflinger, editor of parenting audio books on www.familyauthority.com. "When you negotiate rules with your adolescent, try to assess how mature they already are and adjust your guidelines to the outcome you are hoping to achieve."

Laura's checklist: These are some general indicators that your teen has reached maturity

- 1 They develop respectful, caring and solid relationships with family and friends.
- 2 They are well-organised and manage their own schedule, including homework, school, work and social time.
- 3 They find a balance between needs and wants, for example school work and leisure time.
- 4 They take care of themselves — including cleaning up, cooking basic meals and doing laundry.
- 5 They take care of their body and mind by exercising regularly, choosing healthy food and taking time to relax and reflect.
- 6 They can manage their own monthly budget and spend money reasonably.
- 7 They show initiative and commitment, for example by volunteering in the community or by starting to earn their own money on the side.

Have confidence in your parenting skills: You have given your child all the basics they need to go into the world as an independent, happy young adult.



Let's

TALK about SEX

Addressing the issue can be awkward, but when it comes to sex education, embarrassed silence won't help to protect your teen's health

When teen pregnancies and STD levels are on the rise, we're quick to blame failing sex education in schools. And they might not always do the best job indeed. More than half of the 12 to 15-year-old respondents in a survey by the UK Youth Parliament said they haven't been taught about pregnancy, how to use a condom, or where to find their local sexual health clinic.

But that's only half the story. Even teens who know their facts about protection and contraception need a great deal of support to cope with the growing pressure in our culture to have sex. "Everybody's doing it" is the message teenagers get from the media, and often from their peers as well. The danger is clear: If teen-

guidance about relationships and the emotional side of their children's developing sexuality."

Don't ignore sex – your teen won't

Sex can be a dreaded topic for parents, especially when conversations move beyond the purely biological facts. It may be difficult to acknowledge that your kids are going to have sex or already doing it. But ignoring the subject clearly won't help. "Parents sometimes fear that talking about sex will encourage their children to have sex, but that's not true," says Clare. "In fact teens are more likely to experiment if they have nobody to talk to about the questions brought up by everything they hear and see about sex in the media or from friends."

“Why be embarrassed about sex? You were happy to do it at the time, but now you can't even talk about it?”

agers choose to become sexually active without sufficient information and understanding, they will end up compromising their health.

And yet many parents are all too happy to leave it to teachers to deal with these important issues. "We need much more involvement from the parents' side," says Clare Bale, a PhD researcher in sexualised culture and young people's health. "Schools will hopefully teach all the health aspects as soon as new legislation makes sex education compulsory. But that can't replace a parent's responsibility in offering

Teens need answers to sort out the facts from fiction – only about half of the 16-year-olds are sexually active – and to gain the confidence to stand up against the pressure and say no to things they don't feel ready for. Talking openly to teenagers will not only help to defeat the myths and misconceptions about sex. Teens who are used to addressing the subject without feeling embarrassed will also find it easier to be open about it with their boyfriends or girlfriends. And that means there's a much bigger chance they will talk about protection too!

Enjoying first love without pressure: Talking about sex empowers teens to make decisions in their own time

Of course the best way to teach confidence is by showing it. And why be embarrassed anyway? "Sex only becomes an embarrassing topic if you make it so," says Edward Richter, a secondary school teacher and father of a 12-year-old. "Being open about things robs them of their mysteries and helps to form a more open mind. I don't understand the idea of being embarrassed to talk to your children about sex. You were happy to do it at the time but now years later you can't even talk about it?"

"We have to talk"

Things are most likely to get awkward if you make your kids sit down and launch into a 'big talk'. Instead, try having informal conversations about sex and relationships while you do everyday things together – in the car or while washing up. Here are a few things to consider when talking to teens about sex:

- Your teenager is a sexual being, not a little child. Be realistic about what they know and don't talk down to them. If you act as if they're not supposed to know anything about sex,

teenagers who are already sexually active may see that as implicit disapproval of their choice. A great way to assess their knowledge is by asking them how they feel or think about things.

- Sexual messages are everywhere in the media. This can be a good starting point for discussion. If an image or reference comes up on TV, don't make crude jokes or change the topic. Talk about the message and encourage teens to develop their own views.

- Don't be overly judgmental in talking about sex or about certain preferences or activities. If your teen gets the impression that you're condemning sex or certain aspects of sexuality, they may get embarrassed and hesitant to ask about things they're interested in or simply curious about.

- Let your teen know that you are available for discussions and questions and that you will respect them and treat conversations seriously. Just saying "You can talk to me" won't always do the job. Demonstrate by your behaviour that you are really approachable about the subject.
- Your teen may choose to be sexually active

Long-acting reversible contraception

Contraception and condoms are free under the NHS and a local clinic or GP can help with the right choice. The trend goes towards long-acting reversible contraception. The most common methods are:

Implants

A small flexible rod is inserted under the skin on the upper arm. It releases the hormone progesterone which temporarily stops ovulation. The implant lasts for three years and is 99% effective. It doesn't affect chances of getting pregnant in the future. Periods may stop or become irregular and period pain can improve.

Contraceptive injections

The injections contain the hormone progesterone which stops ovulation. The most common types last for 12 weeks and are 99% effective. They don't affect chances of getting pregnant in the future but it can take up to a year for fertility to return to

normal after the last injection. Periods often stop.

Intrauterine devices

A small plastic and copper device is inserted into the womb by a doctor or nurse. It can work by preventing sperm from fertilising an egg, or by stopping a fertilised egg from implanting in the womb. Devices last between three and ten years, are 98% effective and don't affect future chances of getting pregnant. Periods may become heavier or more painful.

Intrauterine systems

A small plastic device is placed in the womb. Most work by preventing a fertilised egg from implanting in the womb. They last for five years and are 98-99% effective. Chances of getting pregnant in the future are not affected. Periods may be irregular at first but usually become less frequent or stop after about a year.

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Check our health pages for our medical expert's tips on teens, sex and staying safe. We've also got a location finder for sexual health clinics and other helpful addresses near you.

www.unitemag.co.uk

The kids leave a trail of chaos around the house, they attempt to talk about things ends in a fight? Then it's

never listen, and any time to build on the

Pillars of peace

Respect & responsibility

Teenagers' bedrooms often resemble an obstacle course of discarded clothes, school books, computer equipment and general mess. The kids, of course, don't mind the chaos. It may be relatively easy for parents to ignore it in their rooms, but when it comes to family spaces or chores, the arguments just never seem to stop. Here are some tips for more peace in the household:

Create the right mood. Teens need to understand that running a household is a shared responsibility. Create an atmosphere of cooperation where family members help each other and make sure you're supportive in teaching kids how to do their chores.

Set clear minimum standards. For kids' rooms the minimum could be: dirty clothes in the laundry, food cleared up, shared items returned to their place.

As long as they stick to it, don't intrude. For family spaces the standards will be higher – teens need to respect that the whole family will be affected if they don't help out. If they moan, ask who they think would clean up after you if you didn't.

Save your breath. Even with minimum standards enforced, there may still be things you don't like about your teen's room. But as long as nobody gets harmed, nagging will only annoy you both and is unlikely to produce results. Close the door and save your energy for more important arguments.

Let them learn from consequences. If your daughter misses a tennis match because she can't find her racket under the pile of things on the floor, it's her problem. Lessons like these will be much more effective than anything you could say to change their behaviour.

Readers' views on teens and chores

“We have household calendars that state the chore and details. Our kids have to do the rubbish, empty the dishwasher and give the bathroom a small tidy every day. Once it's done, they can play on the computer or watch telly.” Cathy97

“I know many parents link chores to allowance. But I think chores are a necessary part of family and community life and are non-negotiable. No one pays me to cook and Hoover, and kids shouldn't be paid to unload groceries or take out the trash.” JohnM

Join the discussion on www.unitemag.co.uk/forum

Every team goes through a crisis sometimes – don't let arguments ruin a great relationship with your kids

The power of talking

Talking is the key to peace and harmony at home. If teens don't seem to listen or are slow to do what you ask for, the reason might be a problem in communication. Teens see things from their own perspective, which can be completely different from yours. Bridge the gap by talking: Say how you see a problem and what you expect from them and let them make suggestions on how they will contribute to a solution. Make sure you listen to their views to find an agreement you can both live with. Praise is one of the most powerful elements of communicating with your teen. But it only works if it is genuine. How often

do we say “That's nice” without really paying attention? If teens sense you don't mean it, it can make them feel less confident about their achievements and they may not even bother trying to do things well the next time. Also beware of the “buts”. Making suggestions for improvement can be a natural reaction to things they do – after all we want them to learn and get better. But don't let criticism turn the praise upside down. “You did well on this but...” will be appropriate and helpful at times, but it will mean the world to your teen if they get unconditional praise for something they're really proud of.

Teens' views on good and bad communication

“I sometimes feel my parents don't respect things I do because they don't understand them. I spend a lot of time maintaining the website for my model airplane club. My dad always told me off for spending so much time at the computer, because he saw me sitting there for hours doing stuff he can't relate to. Once when we argued about it again I asked him to look at what I do. He sat down and let me explain how I made the website and how much effort there is behind it. He was surprised and even a little proud of my work and seems much more understanding about the computer issue now.” Josh, 16

“My mum's really into sewing so when I did this sewing course with my youth group I couldn't wait to show her the top I'd made. Mum said it was nice but that I hadn't done the stitches properly. She said ‘You don't want to go out like that’ and unpicked the seams and fixed it herself. The top looks better now but I don't like wearing it because it somehow makes me feel like I've failed.” Anna, 14



Talking and listening is usually the best remedy for a family crisis

Constructive arguments

Whether it's about chores, homework or behaviour – there will always be times we lose our temper with teens. Arguments can be a trial for peace at home, and many teens say arguing with their parents is one of the things that get them down most. But with some crisis management basics you can make sure arguing won't ruin your relationship. **Stay in control.** As soon as you both start shouting, there's little chance left to sort out the problem before one of you storms off. When kids get aggressive, counter their yelling with a quiet, calm reaction. That should take them by surprise and calm them down too.

Don't get personal. During arguments it's easy to get carried away and launch a general attack on everything that annoys us about the other person. Instead of venting all your anger about their behaviour, attitude or mistakes, stick to the problem you're arguing about and try to find one solution at a time.

Apologise. We're all wrong sometimes or say things we didn't mean. It can be difficult to admit that to your teen, especially if they refuse to accept it if they are wrong. An apology from you will not only demonstrate your willingness to forgive, but may also make them think about their own reactions.

Be aware of the words you choose

“YOU are selfish, lazy and irresponsible” ... will make teens feel like **you're attacking their character.**

“I was hurt by what you said this” or “I worried because you came home late” ... will make teens **realise how their actions affected your feelings.**

“You **always** leave a mess” and “You're **never** on time” ... will mean to teens that you're **over-generalising their behaviour** and provoke a response like “If you think everything I do is bad anyway, why should I even bother trying?”

“You **left a mess in the kitchen today** and I had to clean it up, you were **late yesterday** and we **all had to wait** with dinner” ... will let your teen know you don't think they're a bad person but **only criticise some of their actions.** □

@

Share your tips for solving the chores crisis and keeping up peace at home on our online forum www.unitemag.co.uk

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Susan Agondeze, aged six, Jinja, Uganda.

Photo: Georgie Scott/ActionAid

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Three young fathers on juggling homework, nappy changing and the trials of adolescence

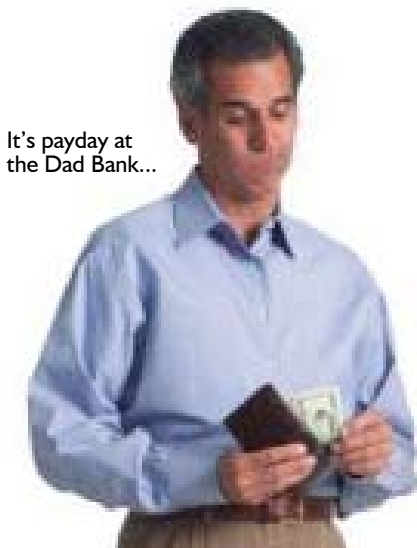
PLAYFUL PYJAMA PARTIES?

Would you let your 13-year-old go to a mixed sleepover party? Parents discuss the hot issue.

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It's payday at the Dad Bank...



WORDS: SUSANNE HAUNER

Mum, Dad... I need MONEY

Will too much generosity turn teens into bankrupt adults? budget, says Susanne Hauner, and they will see that money

Teenagers' lives are more expensive than ever. These days kids "need" the latest mobile, an iPod, a computer, constant entertainment, and new brand-name clothes every season. "Need" often means: "It's non-negotiable. Buy me this or you're depriving me of something that's essential for my lifestyle."

The average teenager receives an allowance of nearly £1000 a year, according to a survey conducted for MTV One. At 13, kids get £45 per month on average and by the time they turn 18 that sum has risen to £120. But why do many teenagers feel entitled to all kinds of luxuries? For one, this consumerism is of course a road we're heading down as a society in general. And it's not only greed, but also our own guilt that drives us to hand over greater sums to our children, says family therapist Carleton Kendrick: "We spend more time at work than ever before. We are overwhelmed trying to balance our work and family lives. Often the money we give our children is 'I'm sorry that I don't have more time for you' money."

No matter if we give out of guilt or generosity, the important point is to balance our instinct to give our kids all they need and wish for with an awareness that we're not doing them any favours spoiling them too much at this age. Soon they will be standing on their own feet, going to university or starting their career with a small income. And if they're not used to managing their own, limited budget, it won't be long before they're headed for big financial trouble.

Teaching some money basics

Three key concepts our children need to learn about money are budgeting, financial planning and comparative shopping, says Jonathan Self, author of *The Teenager's Guide to Money*. "It will help them a lot in life if they understand early on that managing their money badly means they will have to work harder and longer, plus they'll always be worrying about it."

Comparative shopping is something children will pick up naturally if you make it a habit yourself. The same is true for long-term planning. Tell them how much money you're putting aside and what you're saving it for. You could also make it a rule that a certain amount of the money they get, for example on birth-

days, has to go into a savings account.

Managing a budget can be a more difficult concept for teenagers to grasp, especially as long as they live with the security of having all their needs taken care of. Have you ever asked your teen: "Do you think money grows on trees?" There's probably some truth in it. As long as kids feel that money automatically comes every time they ask for it, it's easy for them to get the impression that there's an inexhaustible supply.

It is normal for young teens to start asking for more money to spend on their own – and important to for us to grant those requests to a reasonable degree. They will probably ask for a monthly or weekly allowance to get greater freedom in spending it without us knowing every detail. You may not like the idea that, along with that money, you'll be handing over a considerable amount of responsibility and control over their lives. But it's a unique opportunity for children to learn how to manage their own budget, and what better time to learn that lesson than while you're still around to help and guide them?

Allowances - yes or no?

Many parents believe that giving children allowances and letting them decide how to spend the sum will help them understand the value of money and the importance of budgeting. Others prefer the more controlled system of paying for their teens' expenses individually as they occur. What works best often depends on the personality and development of the teenager. We have asked some of our readers to share their experience with their kids and allowances:

Miriam Becker, 38, nurse: "Allowances are a great way to end arguments about what



Let them manage their own budget, says Susanne Hauner, and they will see that money doesn't grow on trees.

you agree to buy. I got tired of my 16-year-old daughter coming to me all the time for money. Now I give her £60 a month to cover clothes and entertainment expenses. It works very well. When she complains about needing clothes I tell her she has the money to buy them unless she has already spent it on something else. I hope it teaches her to plan ahead better."

John Mort, 52, teacher: "We started giving our older son monthly allowances when he was 15. I think it's the best opportunity for children to learn dealing with their finances in a secure, controlled environment. He did a very good job managing his allowance of £80. But it didn't work with our younger son – he kept spending whatever was in his pocket at once. So for now, we give him money daily for his expenses and supervise his shopping."

Ashley Vincent, 42, accountant: "I don't believe allowances. Giving kids too much money while they're not yet old enough or willing to work for won't teach them the value of it or how to manage it wisely. I cover my children's expenses, but if they want to buy bigger things they have to save their birthday money or work for it. My son bought his first game console at 11 from money he'd saved and earned over some time. He was incredibly proud of having done it."

Craig Hartley, 49, orthopaedic technician: "I don't give allowances because I want to keep some control over my children's activities. Thirteen to fifteen tend to be ages when kids are at a risk of getting into trouble. I think the limitations of having little money helped to keep my 17-year-old son at home at a time when being out and around too much wouldn't always have been good. But he and his little sister know that they can ask me for anything they need and that I'll do whatever I can if the

How teens are spending their money

Dennis, 17

Monthly allowance:

"I get £40 and my parents also cover school expenses and buy most of my clothes."

Other income:

"I don't get paid for chores, but my grandma pays me £10 for mowing her lawn."

Where does the money go?

"I spend maybe 80% of my allowance on going out. Clubs and parties are expensive – my budget stretches to two or three nights out a month. If I want to buy additional clothes, I have to pay for them. And I always put some money aside so I can afford new computer equipment or games every now and then."

Is it enough?

"Right now, yes. But I'm a little worried that it won't be enough when I turn 18 and can go out and drink more. If I can fit it in with my school schedule, I'll try to get a job."



Michelle, 14

Monthly allowance:

"I don't get a fixed amount. I just ask my Mum when I need money and if they agree they'll pay for what I need."

Other income:

"I get £5 a week for chores, but only if I do them all. If I forget something – no money. My Mum's really strict about that."

Where does the money go?

"I try to save my chores money for things my Mum is a bit funny about. For example she thinks I go to the cinema too much so if she doesn't give me the money I can pay for it myself. Or I buy little things like accessories at Primark that my Mum doesn't always need to know about."

Is it enough?

"Yeah. I mean, I usually get what I need. But it would be nice to just have the money so I can decide what I buy and don't have to ask my Mum about everything."



requests are reasonable."

If you don't like the idea of allowances generally, you could still let your teen experiment with budgeting in certain areas of their life. For example, give them a limited amount of money per month to cover clothes. Make clear the money is not to be used on anything else and that you will provide money for entertainment

Parent Poll

From what age should children get allowances?

20% age 5 or younger

52% age 6 to 10

23% age 10 to 15

5% no allowances

Source: www.familyeducation.com

and other things you agree on. Ask your teen to keep a diary of their spending over the month to help you monitor it. If they run out of money because they've spent it on other things, you can talk to them about what went wrong. Once they're doing well at managing small amounts, you can build on that and slowly extend the trial to cover other areas of their spending.

Lessons for teens - and for you

Here are our top tips for teaching financial responsibility to teenagers:

- Be open about your own budget. Talking about your income and spending will help them understand the scope money management beyond their own limited financial universe.
- Talk about the difference between need and want. Teens think they "need" a lot of things, but if you ask them to choose between two options or single out the three most important items on their wish list, they will get a feeling for essentials and luxuries.
- Be aware of your own values. Teenagers can be under a lot of pressure from their environment to buy certain brands. If you have a habit of buying designer labels, balance it by making your teen aware of other options – hunting for unique vintage items in charity shops can be a nice break from high street shopping.
- Let them get a job. Earning their own money babysitting, doing paper rounds or helping out at a shop can give teenagers a good taste of the effort it takes you to earn the money they spend. They will start looking at prices in relation to the hours they have to work for the money and may become much more hesitant to buy little things they don't really need. □

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Have a look at allowance guidelines for teens or make a budget plan with your kids on our interactive budget wizard. www.unitemag.co.uk

Opening doors to the future

With recession talk and grim prospects dominating the news, teens need support and inspiration instead of added pressure to start planning ahead for their careers



Ready for serious business? Work placements can help teens find out what kind of job they want



Whether it's a degree course or an apprenticeship - there are many ways into happy and successful careers for young people

@

For teens: Take our Skills & Interests test to get ideas and suggestions for jobs you might enjoy
www.unitemag.co.uk

Employment prospects are bad for everyone right now, but teenagers are likely to suffer most. Almost half of Britain's firms said they had no plans to hire any of the thousands of young people who are entering the job market this year. More than one in ten teenagers between 16 and 18 is 'neet' – not in full-time education, employment or training – with rates for boys twice as high as for girls.

And all that's despite a surge in applications for sixth form, college and university places, indicating a record low in employment for teenagers. "In the current recession, the situation is desperate for thousands of young people who leave school at 16 wanting to work or train in the workplace," says Barnardo's chief executive Martin Narey. "There's a steady decline in employment and work-based learning opportunities for young people aged 16 to 18."

University graduates aren't much luckier. Up to 40,000 of this year's graduates will still be unemployed in six months' time according to figures from the Higher Education Career Service Unit. Many teenagers pondering what to do after their GCSEs may wonder if there's a point in staying on at all just to get rejected by universities swamped with applications, or to get in and join the dole queue with a degree in hand three years later. That is, if all the talk about grim prospects hasn't already put them off thinking about the future altogether.

Helping teens to look ahead

The rollercoaster of adolescence often leaves little room for career planning. After all, at 14 or even 16, working life may still feel like the distant future. But as competition for university places and jobs grows it becomes more impor-

tant for young people to look ahead and build up skills to improve their chances.

If teenagers aren't bothered about their future or willing to discuss the issue, informal chats can help to figure out their interests without even mentioning jobs or careers. Favourite subjects at school, hobbies and activities are a good place to start. Many interests may be of the 'just for fun' kind, but don't rule those out as opportunities. Kids who spend hours on the internet could be suited for new web development jobs. Teens who abandon their homework in favour of a guitar or football might end up in the music industry or in professional sports.

Relaxed conversations about the things teenagers love should bring up some pointers that can help to gently introduce a range of possible careers. Keeping an open mind about unusual choices and not putting down typical dream

jobs as 'just dreams' will make it easier to single out areas kids are truly passionate about. Even if the dream career isn't a feasible option, there may still be exciting and more realistic jobs related to it. That kind of brainstorming will not only give teens confidence in what they want to do, but can also provide a whole range of ideas to look into with a careers advisor. Volunteer work or placements in the chosen field can be another helpful way of finding out more about the job. They're also a great motivation boost and will make a CV stand out from the rest!

If teens are indecisive about what they want, that can be an opportunity in itself. With the way job markets are developing, young people may end up changing careers several times. Those who don't have a detailed plan worked out in advance may find it less frustrating to navigate through such changes.

The best way to prepare kids for their difficult way into the working world is by helping them gain confidence. This can mean letting them feel you believe in them no matter which path they choose, as well as giving them the freedom to try – and drop – different options. Career decisions need to be made and are likely to affect their whole life, but the less pressured teens feel about it, the easier it will be for them to develop ideas and keep a positive outlook. □

Recession-proof jobs and careers

It's not all doom and gloom on the job market. While many industries have suffered from the recession, there's good number of jobs which have remained unaffected or even benefit from the economic downturn.

IT Consulting

Jobs for skilled IT workers are still on the rise. The UK Government alone spends £15 billion per year outsourcing IT staff due to a lack of internal IT skills. The sector needs at least 150,000 new entrants each year to meet the growing demand. Salaries are increasing and currently around £40k.

Construction & Engineering

The construction industry is expanding despite a slowdown in the UK housing market, and the job market in construction and civil engineering is looking fairly bright. Average salaries are between £24k and £35k.

Public Relations

Demand for effective public relations professionals is at an all-time high as marketing budgets are shrinking and organisations turn to PR consultancies as an alternative for ad-

vertising. PR executives earn around £25k, communications directors £50k and above.

Midwifery

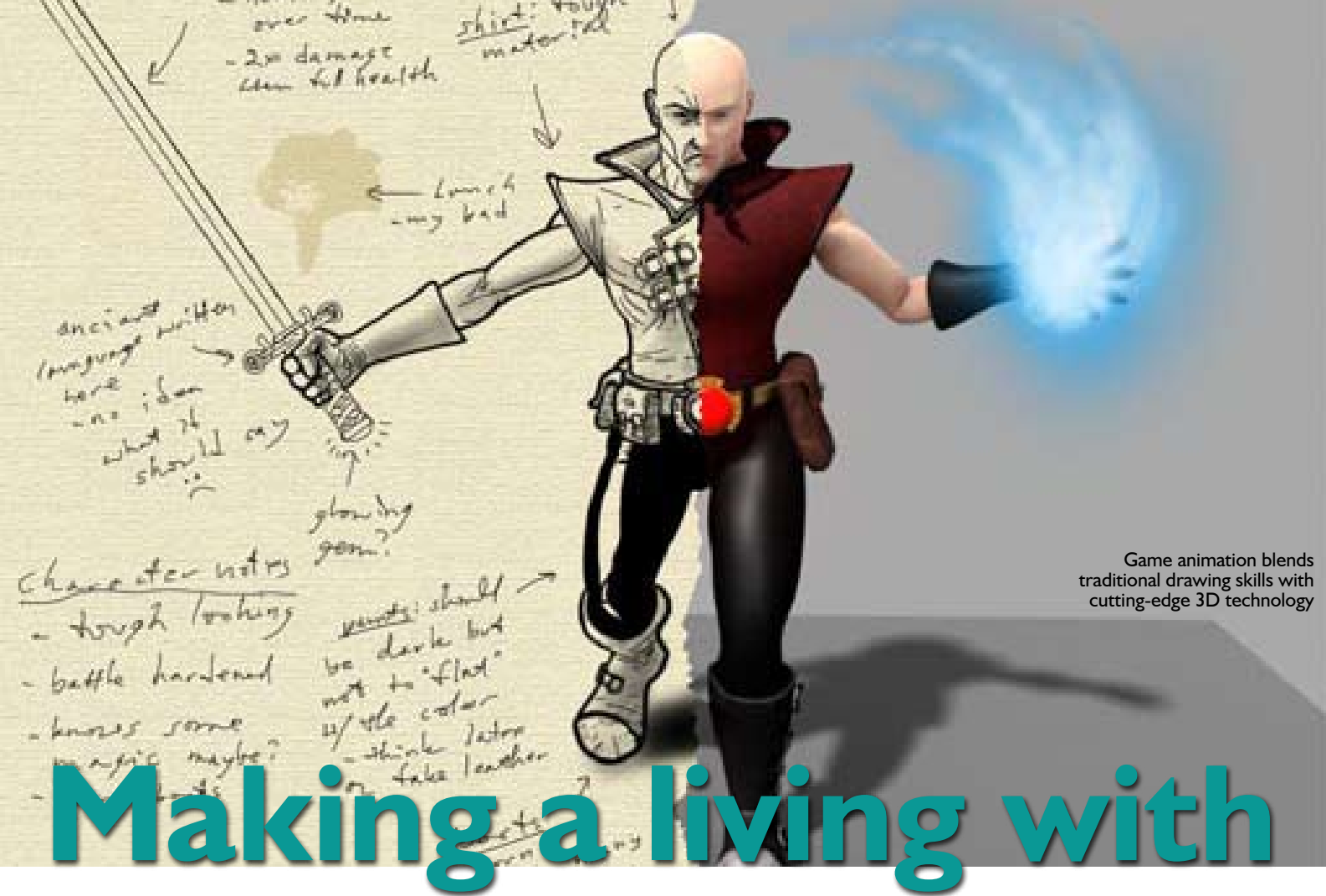
The UK's birth rate is set to increase by up to 12% each year, but since many current midwives are approaching retirement age, a shortfall of more than 10,000 qualified professionals is expected over the next years. Midwives earn around £25k.

Teaching

Teaching is certainly one of the most recession-proof jobs. The Teacher Training Agency is filling more than 32,000 teaching posts throughout the UK each year. Newly qualified teachers start on a £19k salary which rises incrementally to £33k.

Market Research

With the retail sector in the most difficult trading period in a decade, the role of market research has taken on greater importance as retailers try to adjust to their customers' needs. Researcher salaries start at £18k and can reach £32k after a few years of experience.



Game animation blends traditional drawing skills with cutting-edge 3D technology

Making a living with

FUN and GAMES

In our **Teens & Computers** Special
Susanne Hauner checks out exciting
careers for young game fans

In the early days, video games were created by a handful of programmers and often featured minimal graphics and clumsy animations. The rapid growth of digital entertainment has turned games development into a multi-million pound industry with great demand for highly skilled artists, designers, animators, programmers, writers and musicians. **UNITE** talks about career opportunities with Niels Diekmann, 28, Assistant Producer at the games developer and publisher Electronic Arts (EA).

What does an Assistant Producer do?
“On the Producer’s team, we do the project managers for the game. It’s mostly organisational work, like commissioning the game’s elements and making sure the design and programming teams meet their deadlines.”

Who else is involved in making a game?
“On the creative side, there are Game Designers. They think up all the features of a game and write very detailed instructions for the creative teams about every element that’s needed to make it work. Then you’ve got the programmers, story writers, designers, animators and so on who create all the individual elements.”

Where did you start out?
“I did a degree in Media Management, which doesn’t have anything to do with computer games directly. But that’s common – about 90% of people in the industry originally come from other careers.”

How did you get into games?
“I’ve been playing video games since I was a kid and always dreamed of working in the development. But I thought you had to be really good at maths and programming to get in. Then I did a placement with a games company after my degree and found out about all the production aspects.”

How did you get the placement?
“I had made some contacts in an online fan community for a game. At a community meeting I got the chance to talk to a producer and just asked for a placement. And that’s how I ended up doing work experience with the Chief Designer and programmers at EA!”

Did that lead to your job?
“Not directly. I got a three-month contract as a games tester, which means checking all the game’s functions before the release. It’s a terribly under-paid and stressful job, but a

great opportunity to make contacts. During that time I met my current boss. They didn’t have any jobs going at the time, so I did some more qualifications and small jobs and kept in touch, and eventually EA offered me a job on the FIFA Games Producer’s team.”

But surely making games isn’t always the dream job it seems to be?
“It’s great once you actually get a job, but a very competitive field. And many contracts are temporary, especially with smaller companies who only develop one or two games at a time. Once the game is finished, you’re out looking for jobs again. Even people in senior positions often get temporary contracts. And your job always depends on the success of the game you’re working on.”

What’s great about the industry?
“It’s still growing and career structures aren’t very rigid. I worked for a company in Dublin briefly and although I started at the bottom, I already had three people working under me after two months. With a little luck you can climb the ladder quickly. And the range of projects you can work on during your career is incredible – just think of all the different categories of video games.”

University degrees in Computer Games

Many professionals in the industry don’t have degrees specifically aimed at games development. But universities and computer and media schools are expanding their range of Computer Games degrees, with highly specialised courses for every area of game development. Here’s a quick guide to the most common categories of degrees and professions.

Computer Games Programming

Programmers make up the technical division of a development team. They create the software that runs the game, the platforms and the game’s functions. Degrees involve a good deal of graphical maths, hardware development and 3D modelling.

Computer Games Design

Design departments develop concepts for the story, characters and visuals of computer games. Degrees focus on the creation of various elements that make up a game, such as user interfaces,

3D objects and the game’s environment. Modules include design, drawing, modelling, development and studio and film studies. They can lead to a variety of industry positions including Creative Director, Games Designer, Scriptwriter or Games Tester.

Computer Games Art

Artists create all graphical elements needed in a game – from the characters to the leaves on the trees. Courses teach drawing and graphic design, 3D modelling and animation, texturing and lighting. Some offer optional modules in digital videography or music. Graduates can go into careers as Art Directors, Artists in 3D Characters and Environment or Animators.

Computer Animation

Although not exclusively aimed at the video games industry, Computer Animation degrees often lead to game development jobs. Degrees focus on drawing and design skills and digital animation, with modules on

scriptwriting, story and character development, digital filmmaking, editing and post-production. Graduates who don’t go into the games industry will find career opportunities in TV advertising or branches of the film industry like music videos or animated feature movies. □

Getting a head start

The gaming industry is an extremely competitive field. Entry requirements for university courses are high and talent alone isn’t always enough. Here are some tips for teens to stay a head of the competition.

Create a portfolio. Nothing shows off your talent like a collection of your work. Whatever you sketch, draw, design, write, film or animate, keep a copy for your presentation book and make a blog or website for your work samples. That way you’ll have them handy at all times and it will save you loads of time when you start applying.

Do work experience. The easiest way to get a foot in the door is by knowing the right people and having loads of experience on your CV. A work placement will get you both, and you may get a chance to stock up your portfolio. You can contact development studios or games publishers for placement opportunities.

Know the market. Make sure you’re aware of new games and developments outside your areas of interest. This will include other entertainment genres like film, music and art. Game developers take their inspiration from all of those, and you can show you’re one step ahead by knowing what will be the next big hit.

Get noticed. Companies sometimes hire gamers to test new products. As a tester, you can show skills and initiative by giving feedback packed with constructive suggestions for improvement. Gaming conventions can also be great chance to catch the attention of industry professionals. Companies often send recruiters to conventions to look out for young talent – your chance to shine with your portfolio!

Do your ‘homework’. Read as much as you can and check out the programmes and techniques developers use. Niels recommends *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman as a very helpful guide for beginners.

@ Visit our website for a list of all UK universities offering computer game development courses and related subjects www.unitemag.co.uk



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10 Things

I love

about my family

Leslie Cruse, 37, lives in Nottingham with her partner Marc Rhodes, 35 and their children Ben, 6, Luke, 8, and Ashley, 13.

1 Even though I'm the worst singer in the world, my kids let me be the 'special guest' at their SingStar karaoke parties.

2 Lately Ben insists on telling me bedtime stories instead of the other way round. He says: "You know what, today I'll tell the story and you relax."

3 Ashley makes the most amazing cakes if she has time on weekends. To return the favour, I pretend I don't notice if she's not doing her chores sometimes.

4 As a financial advisor Marc has to travel a lot. But no matter how busy his day is, he always calls at bedtime to say good night to the kids.

5 When I was studying for my PGCEs and got really stressed out, Marc came round every night to bring me dinner for three weeks. And we had only been out on a few dates!

6 Ashley is going through some adolescent turmoil and can be in a right mood sometimes, but she's a total angel with her little brothers.

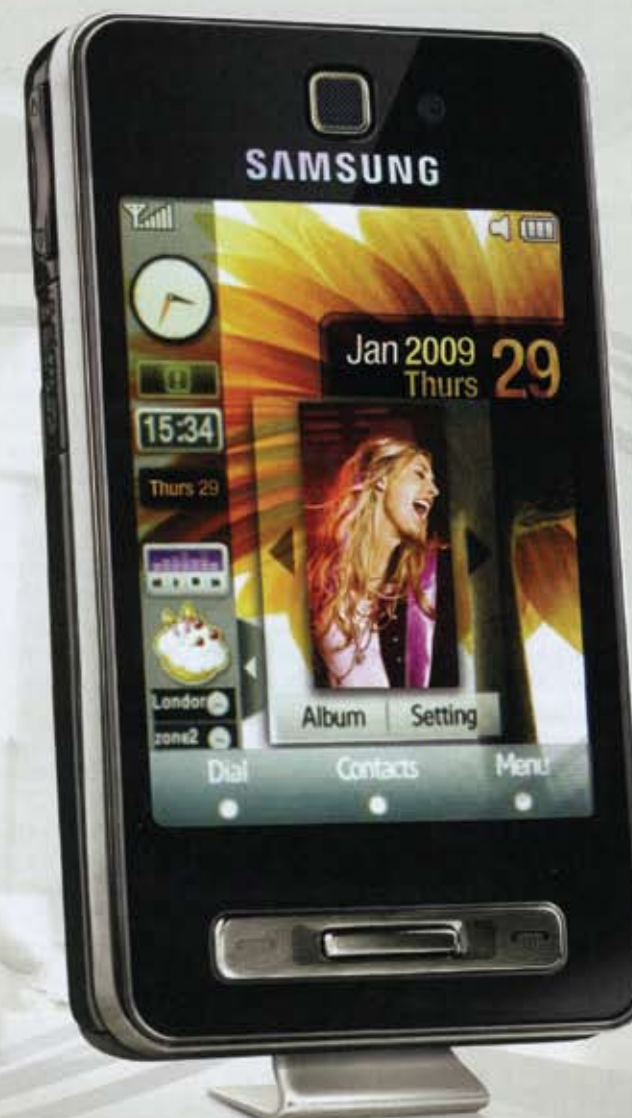
7 On my last birthday, Marc and the kids wrote a poem for me. Ben and Luke memorised it and performed it at the family party.

9 Luke and Ben can fight like cat and dog, but if one of them is in trouble, they form an unbreakable union. You won't get a word out of either!

8 Luke's a little stand-up comedian. I shouldn't let him get away with his impersonations of me nagging, but I just can't stay angry – he's hilarious!

10 When I was crying during a film, Ben wandered off and tried to make me camomile tea. That's what I do when the kids are ill, and he associated crying with being ill. □

Our latest family portrait, taken on our holiday in Gran Canaria this summer



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