

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Your Feelings : **Feeling Blamed**

Parents often feel blamed by their children and by others in the community when things do not go well for their young person. Some parents find that their children, blame them for ... well ... everything.

Parents should take appropriate responsibility for their own actions, but it should not tip into over-responsibility for their child's situation and behaviour.

### **It is my fault**

Sometimes the blame is appropriate; the parent has done the wrong thing by their child. The best thing you can do is to take responsibility for your actions and make amends. If you have done the wrong thing, say sorry. Learn from the mistake and try to do things differently next time. This is really the most any of us can do.

This also demonstrates to your young person how to take responsibility for wrong behaviour.

### **Abuse**

Some children and young people are abused. Your child needs to feel safe, physically and emotionally. It is crucial for any past abuse to be acknowledged by family so that the young person feels believed and helped to know the abuse was not their fault. They should never be blamed. They need to feel supported by family. Getting appropriate professional help as early as possible is important if abuse has occurred or is suspected.

### **It's not my fault**

There can be times when your children try to place blame or responsibility at your feet when it is not appropriate. Every time something goes wrong – from losing their socks to getting arrested – they may blame you.

### **Learning responsibility**

Learning to take responsibility for yourself and your own actions is one of the challenges of maturing as a person. People naturally tend to resist accepting the blame for the things they have done wrong. Teenagers are still learning how to recognise when they have made mistakes and to accept responsibility for them.

It is part of your role as a parent to provide an environment where they can learn how to take an appropriate amount of responsibility for themselves. It can help to talk to your teenager about which things in their lives they are responsible for. They still need your support and guidance.

When you take on too much responsibility – when you accept blame for things that were really their own fault – it stops them from learning to take responsibility themselves.

### **Parents know everything**

Very young children see their parents as all-powerful; parents know everything, and can do everything, and control everything. As they mature, young people slowly learn that their parents are people with flaws and limitations, not so different from themselves.

Teenagers are moving towards seeing their parents in a more human light; but it is easy for them to still believe that their parents can control the world. When things go wrong for them, it is tempting to blame their parents for not keeping their lives perfect. The temptation is stronger when they are at fault themselves because they don't want to be blamed or accept blame.

A first flash of anger or disappointment may often be directed at you, but as they calm down, they may see the situation more accurately. It may be appropriate to ask for an apology once things have cooled down.

### **It happens**

Another life lesson that teenagers need to learn is that sometimes there is no one to blame. Life can have disappointments or traumas that just happen by accident or circumstance. This is an important lesson to learn and accept.

### Entitlement

Some people expect a lot from their families and life. They can have a sense of 'entitlement' that makes them feel that they deserve to receive a lot without giving much.

Your young person may feel that they deserve to get what they want, when they want it. They may get angry and blame you when they do not get what they want. They may feel they do not owe anyone anything, that they do not have to put much into a relationship, or a family, or a household. They may not see what they need to do to make things better for themselves.

You can try to help them learn to balance their expectations, and take more responsibility.

### Over-responsibility

It is natural for parents to feel totally responsible for their children. When we are responsible for the care of a helpless baby, they are totally dependent on us. But being a good parent to a teenager is different; now we must learn where our own responsibility ends.

Many of the things in your child's life are beyond your control. Some things that go wrong may be by accident or as a result of their own behaviour. You should not feel responsible for these.

If you feel overly-responsible, you will always feel like a failure, because you are asking yourself to control things you cannot ever control. You may feel angry, miserable or helpless. It may stop you being the best parent you can be.

Gently encourage your young person to accept when something is not your fault. You are then putting responsibility back on them, and not joining the "blame game".

### But I want to help – problem-solving skills

You may find it very difficult to step back and do nothing. You need to find a way to help while supporting your children to take more responsibility for their lives.

You could help them learn problem-solving skills. When problems arise, invite your child to sit down with you and talk through the following steps:

1. What is the real or main problem (e.g. no job, high anxiety)?
2. What are the options for dealing with it?
3. What are possible results of each option?
4. What is the best option for you to try first?
5. How can you make a start?
6. Tell them; you may need to persist for a while to give it a chance to work.
7. Check if it is working. How did it go?
8. If it's helping, encourage them to keep going, or if not, go back to step 1 or 2.

It may help to write down what the problems are and the options for dealing with them. By going through this problem-solving process you are helping your child learn how to think through a problem and do something about it.



### **Kids these days**

Keep in mind there are larger influences on your child's behaviour than just you and your parenting. Each generation of parents and grandparents tends to see "the youth of today" as more rebellious or outspoken than "when I was young". Teenagers have always challenged their parents. It is a normal part of growing towards being an independent adult.

But there are also genuine changes from one generation to another as the world changes. There are some ways in which this generation of teenagers is different from yours in their expectations and behaviour.

Research suggests that more parents today seem to feel blamed by their child and by others in the community for their child's problems, and to feel guilty, or overly-responsible for their child's behaviour. If you feel this way, it might help you to know that you are not alone. Just remember, it has been said that "people resemble their times more than they resemble their parents".<sup>1</sup>



### **Tips from this Help Sheet**

- If you are responsible for something, take responsibility and make amends
- Sometimes blame is wrongly placed at a parent's feet. Learning to take responsibility for your actions is a big challenge and takes maturity.
- Sometimes things happen and there is no-one to blame.
- Encourage your teenager to accept when something is not your fault
- If you feel that you have to help, practice problem-solving skills with your young person.
- There are larger influences on your child than you and your parenting.



### **Related Help Sheets**

- Feeling Guilty
- Setting Boundaries
- Dealing with Conflict
- Improving Communication
- Family Dynamics



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→ **Strong Bonds is a project of Jesuit Social Services.**

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