

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Handling the Situation : Helping them Start Over

If a young person has experienced a crisis or a series of crises, it may seem like things will never settle again but eventually there should come a time when things do settle and the young person seems ready to start afresh. Yet even when the crisis has passed, it can be a difficult time for young people and families as they face the long road to recovery. Things do not just go back to 'normal'.

What are they feeling?

When a young person has travelled a different path from most, or had intense and traumatic experiences, it is hard to find a place in the 'normal' world again. They may feel they do not fit in anywhere. They may lack confidence and purpose in life.

As they try to start a new life, the young person may have very mixed emotions. They may feel some pride and relief. They may feel angry sometimes. They may feel energetic and optimistic, or alternatively lack energy and need a long time to recuperate.

Change is also loss. Your child may feel sadness about parts of the life they are leaving behind. They may be lonely if they have lost friends and social networks. They may feel guilt about leaving old friends behind even if they have come to believe that these people were a poor influence.

Change involves losing routines and predictability. Lack of certainties in their life and their future may make the young person feel insecure. They may be nervous of losing a coping strategy they have relied on such as drug-taking or alcohol use. They may fear that they are not strong enough to maintain change or will not cope in everyday situations.

They may think they will be bored in a 'normal' life or will not find a new social group.

What can you do?

Foster independence

Support your child to be independent. Give them room and encouragement to make their own decisions and learn from their own experiences.

Care about them, but not for them. There is a place for parents to do some of the 'leg-work', and make suggestions, but not to fix things for the young person or have all the answers.

Be careful about offering advice. Try to wait to be asked, and let them choose whether to accept it. Ask their opinion or advice at times. This shows that you respect them.

Tune into what their own hopes and dreams are for their lives.

Foster hope and self-esteem

Encourage their strengths and the things that are good about them. Notice and comment on when they make efforts or have small successes.

Try to hold onto good possibilities there may be for your child. You may need to 'hold the hope' for them until they can do it themselves.

Keep the most positive image of your child that you can. See what is unique and great about them, and hold this inside yourself as you relate to them – it will help to bring out the best in them. This may be hard to do. It may help to remember what they were like at an easier time.

Avoid being critical. Do not remind them of the ways they have disappointed or failed.

Encourage them to focus on positive things about themselves so they feel more able to change and have an optimistic picture of their future and the opportunities it might hold.

Show affection towards them.

Encourage health

You can show your child how to look after his or her own wellbeing by looking after your own.

Show that you consider physical health important. Have healthy food available; show that you seek medical attention when you need it; exercise regularly.

Look after your own mental health. Try to be aware of your own emotional state. Get support when you need it. Take medication when it is prescribed for you. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs is not a solution.

Encourage emotional health. Let yourself feel appropriate emotions – sadness, anger, anxiety, happiness – and express them in good ways. Be fairly honest and open about your feelings. Be responsible for your own feelings as much as possible, rather than blaming the young person.

Model and encourage goodwill towards others, as well as apologies and forgiveness, so they will feel they can make mistakes and keep trying.

Encourage relationships

Family

Work on rebuilding your relationship with your child, to make it more mature and accepting. You may need to learn how to communicate better, how to stay calm, or how to let your child become independent.

Where trust has been broken, it takes time to get over the hurt and disappointment. Try to find ways to deal with your past hurts in the relationship as best you can. Try to get to the place where you can start each day afresh, without carrying old grudges and resentments. This can be difficult and you might need counselling from a supportive professional to help you get to the stage where you are able to move on in your relationship with your child, leaving past hurts and resentments behind.

Show that you value your own relationships with friends and family and participation in community groups.

Friends

Young people need friends and other young people in their lives. Parents can be very anxious about their child's peers. Try to get to know their friends and make them feel welcome in your home so that you can encourage the positive friendships.

Young people who have had serious difficulties, like mental health issues or drug addiction, often find it hard to mix in mainstream groups. They fear they will be looked down on, or will not know what to talk about; that they have nothing in common with "normal" people. It takes time to build up confidence and start mixing easily with people again.

Sometimes young people come to realise they need to make a break from some friendships. This can be a hard step to take. Recognise that they may grieve the loss of that relationship, even if you are relieved.

Support your child to make new friends by working together to find activities to be involved in with other young people, whether in education, work, community groups or recreation. Focus on finding an activity they can commit to; the relationships will grow out of the shared activity.

Encourage activity

Learning

It is important to believe you can learn. Education and training is important for young people to help them get work, but learning is also valuable in itself. It does not always have to lead somewhere.

If your child left school at a young age, it may be difficult for them to feel confident about starting a training or education course again. Start with slow steps, like short courses, for example, literacy and numeracy courses at TAFE, or adult learning courses of particular interest to them. The first thing may be for them to get used to having structured time.

Lead by example. Learn something new yourself. Read. Write a diary.

If your child is willing, spend time learning activities together. Go to the library together – surf the net, borrow a film, read books or current affairs magazines. Watch the news together, and discuss the state of the world.

Work

Voluntary or paid work connects young people to their community. Working for pay makes people feel skilled, useful and self-sufficient.

Volunteer work can also make people feel good. They are contributing to the community. They are being generous, and using abilities they have that are useful to others. It is also a good way to gain skills and experience for employment.

Recreation

Everyone needs rest and recreation. Hobbies, sport or other recreation activities can provide moments of enthusiasm and relaxation, as well as connection with others.

This may involve a young person learning to 'have a go' at something new and also learning how to persist at activities until they can do them and enjoy them.

You may feel they have no passions. Finding joy can be a challenge. Try to tune in to the tiny moments of pleasure that your child has, like laughing at a comedian, or watching a beautiful sunset.

Be patient

Sometimes it will seem they are happy to do nothing. You may be frustrated and feel this will happen forever.

They may need some time to recuperate and recharge before they can confront their challenges. This could be a time to focus your energies on yourself and other family members, while letting the young person know your support will be there when they are ready.

Be aware that relapse is a normal part of change and recovery. This may include a return to drug use, or deterioration in mental health or behaviour. Remember it takes time to change patterns of behaviour and ways of living your life that have become comfortable. Make sure you have safeguards and boundaries in place, so you and the rest of the family are protected if there is a relapse.

Accept that change and recovery from difficult times or trauma takes time. Be content with little steps in the right direction.

You may gently and patiently encourage them, but in the end it is up to the young person to choose what path they will take.



Useful Resources

Learning

- Neighbourhood Houses
www.anhlc.asn.au
Ph: 9654 1104
- Council of Adult Education (CAE)
www.cae.edu.au
Ph: 9652 0611
- Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE)
www.tafe.vic.gov.au
Ph: 131 823
- Go Volunteer
www.govolunteer.com.au
Ph: 9820 4100

Employment

- Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET)
jpet.facs.gov.au
- Centrelink Social Workers
www.centrelink.gov.au
Ph: 131 021
- Youth Central – Youth Services Portal
www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au



Tips from this Help Sheet

- When a young person has travelled a different path from most it is hard to find a place in the 'normal' world again.
- It will help to support your child to be independent. Care about them, but not for them.
- Encourage their strengths and the things that are good about them, whilst keeping the most positive image of your child that you can.
- Show that you consider physical health important, and model looking after your own mental health and your relationships with friends and community.
- Sometimes young people come to realise they need to make a break from some friendships. This can be a hard step to take.
- Encourage learning, work and recreation, at the pace or level that your child needs and wants.
- Be patient. Accept that change and recovery from difficult times or trauma takes time.



Related Help Sheets

- Building Your Relationship
- Dealing with Conflict
- Improving Communication
- Keeping Calm
- Setting Boundaries
- Feeling Guilty
- Adolescent Development



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

Jesuit Social Services work cooperatively with others to engage disadvantaged individuals, families and communities and the wider society to promote health and wellbeing and to address social exclusion.

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