



Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Child Family Community Australia

# Parenting teens and tweens

## Resources for policy and practice



# Parenting teens and tweens

Middle childhood and adolescence (the “tween and teen years”) reflect the prime importance of parenting and positive family functioning to support young travellers on the journey to adulthood. Australia’s suite of longitudinal studies, including the Australian Temperament Project (now in its 33rd year) and the flagship, Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), provide new insights into the positive pathways most children take on life’s journey, and into the factors that can place young people at risk of a range of problems and vulnerabilities. There is a growing range of programs to support, strengthen and sustain families, including those that focus on promoting effective parenting practices. This fact sheet outlines some key statistics, then summarises some key research findings and finally, provides a brief overview of resources for policy makers and practitioners.

## General statistics on teens and tweens in Australia

- One in five Australians are aged 12–24 years and 28% of all households contain a young person.<sup>2</sup>
- Two in three 12–19 year olds live at home with two parents (66%), and a further 20% live with one parent.<sup>2</sup>
- One in five Australian young people were born overseas—mostly in Asia (6.6%) or Europe (2.6%).<sup>2</sup>



- In 2006, around 63% of young people aged 12–24 years were engaged in some form of education (43% in secondary school, 20% in tertiary education, and 6% in vocational education and training).<sup>2</sup>
- On average, young people spend 40 hours a week with their family and most report having close relationships.<sup>2</sup>
- The proportion of children who access the Internet increases with age, with 96% of 9–11 year olds and 98% of 12–14 year olds having accessed the Internet in the 12 months to April 2012. Most children (90%) who access the Internet at home use it for educational purposes.<sup>1</sup>
- 73% of 12–14 year olds have a mobile phone. Children born overseas and children from one-parent families are more likely to have a mobile phone.<sup>1</sup>
- One in four young Australians aged 16–24 years had a mental disorder in 2007, with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and substance misuse the most common mental disorders.<sup>2</sup>

## Longitudinal research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies

### The Australian Temperament Project (ATP)

The Australian Temperament Project (ATP) is an ongoing, longitudinal study following young people’s psychosocial development from infancy to adulthood, investigating the contribution of personal, family, peer and broader environmental factors to adjustment and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

### Findings from the Australian Temperament Project (ATP)

Highlights from *The Australian Temperament Project: The First 30 years* include:<sup>4</sup>

#### Parenting young adults

- Most parents agreed that it was their role to pass on values, provide advice, and/or care for an adult child if he/she was sick.
- The majority did not believe they should provide food/clothing or help their young adult children with household tasks.
- Almost two-thirds had given their young adult children financial assistance in the past year.
- Parental monitoring was shown to be a protective factor against later antisocial behaviour among adolescents who engaged in bullying behaviours.

#### Relationships between young adults and their parents

- Over 75% rated their relationship as at least an “8/10”.
- Parents tended to underestimate how much their adult children valued their relationships with parents.

## Positive development

Experiences shown to promote positive development of teenage children include:

- close relationships with others, including parents and peers;
- school engagement;
- better control over emotions;
- an easygoing temperament; and
- being community-minded.

## Antisocial behaviour

Factors that appeared to protect “at-risk” children from becoming antisocial adolescents include:

- better relationships with parents;
- closer parental supervision;
- higher school engagement;
- no/few antisocial friends;
- better emotional control;
- lower attraction to risk-taking behaviours; and
- a more “reserved” personal style.

## Anxiety and depression

Early intervention is important. Anxious and depressed children were more likely to improve if they had:

- good social skills;
- positive relationships with parents and peers; and
- positive school experiences.

## Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)

*Growing Up in Australia:* The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is a national research resource that is following the development of 10,000 children and families from all parts of Australia. As the children move through the tween and teen years it will provide invaluable information on the factors that influence their developmental patterns, especially as these relate to parenting, other aspects of family functioning, and wider life events, experiences and opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

## Information sources on parenting teens and tweens

- **Child and Youth Health:** Health and parenting information based on the latest research and best practice <[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)>
- **Raising Children Network (RCN):** Providing parents, practitioners and those who care for children with reliable information <[raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au)>
- **Headspace:** Access to mental health information and services to inform and support young people, professionals and families <[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)>

- **ReachOut.com professionals:** Recommendations and advice for professionals to support young people experiencing mental health difficulties and to build young people’s resilience <[au.professionals.reachout.com](http://au.professionals.reachout.com)>
- **Youthbeyondblue:** Information, resources and interactive support for young people, parents and professionals working with young people experiencing mental health problems <[www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)>

## Australian programs for tweens and teens

- **Parents and Adolescents Communicating Together (PACT):** A group program for adolescents and their parents to teach skills for resolving conflict peacefully <[www.exploringtogether.com.au](http://www.exploringtogether.com.au)>
- **Aussie Optimism:** An evidence-based mental health promotion program for children in primary and lower secondary school <[healthsciences.curtin.edu.au/teaching/psych\\_aussie\\_optimism.cfm](http://healthsciences.curtin.edu.au/teaching/psych_aussie_optimism.cfm)>
- **MindMatters:** A national mental health initiative for secondary schools that promotes and protects the mental health and wellbeing of all members of school communities <[www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)>
- **Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP):** Building resilience and promoting positive mental health in teenagers <[www.rap.qut.edu.au](http://www.rap.qut.edu.au)>
- **Triple P Positive Parenting Program:** A parenting and family support suite of training that endeavours to prevent behavioural, emotional and developmental difficulties in children and young people <[www.triplep.net](http://www.triplep.net)>

## Publications

### Australian families with children and adolescents

This Australian Family Trends publication highlights some of the ways in which Australian families with children under 18 years have changed or remained stable during the past two decades. <[www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factsheets/2013/familytrends/aft5/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factsheets/2013/familytrends/aft5/index.html)>



### Family factors in early school leaving

Young people who leave school early are at greater risk of experiencing long-term unemployment and slipping into social exclusion as a result. This paper looks at the risk factors associated with young people exiting the education system prematurely, particularly in a family context. <[www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a144992/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a144992/index.html)>

### Parental involvement in preventing and responding to cyberbullying

This paper outlines definitions and statistics related to cyberbullying, differences between cyberbullying and offline bullying, and parents' roles and involvement in preventing and responding to cyberbullying incidents. <[www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a141868/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a141868/index.html)>

### A public health approach to practice and programs promoting family wellbeing: A whole-of-agency model

This article discusses a framework that an Australian family services agency developed to improve service planning and delivery to families, young people and children. <[www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/newsletter/newsletter15.html#drummond](http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/newsletter/newsletter15.html#drummond)>

### Young people and their parents: Supporting families through changes that occur in adolescence

This article explores the changes that young people and their families experience during the adolescent period, and

ways that practitioners can help facilitate or strengthen bonds between the two. <[www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing1.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing1.html)>

### Safe and supportive families and communities for children: A synopsis and critique of Australian research

This paper reviews the research on building safe and supportive families and communities for children in Australia. Based on assessments of 22 evaluation reports, it examines the evidence base in the areas of community attitudes and awareness of child safety, parenting and family support, and child-friendly communities. <[www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a140415/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/papers/a140415/index.html)>

For further publications, visit <[www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/bibliographies/parentingteens.php](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/bibliographies/parentingteens.php)>

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, Australia, April 2012*. Canberra: ABS. Retrieved from <[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsl/Products/4901.0~Apr+2012~Main+Features~Internet+and+mobile+phones?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsl/Products/4901.0~Apr+2012~Main+Features~Internet+and+mobile+phones?OpenDocument)>
- <sup>2</sup> Muir, K., Mullan, K., Powell, A., Flaxman, S., Thompson, D., & Griffiths, M. (2009). *State of Australia's young people: A report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*. Canberra: DEEWR. Retrieved from <[https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/41\\_Report\\_YoungPeopleReport.pdf](https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/41_Report_YoungPeopleReport.pdf)>.
- <sup>3</sup> The ATP is a joint project between the Royal Children's Hospital, the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and the Institute. See more at <[www.aifs.gov.au/atp](http://www.aifs.gov.au/atp)>.
- <sup>4</sup> Vassallo, S., & Sanson, A. (Eds). (2013). *The Australian Temperament Project: The first 30 years*. Melbourne: AIFS. Retrieved from <[www.aifs.gov.au/atp/pubs/reports/first30years/index.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/atp/pubs/reports/first30years/index.html)>
- <sup>5</sup> LSAC is conducted in partnership between the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and AIFS. See more at <[www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au](http://www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au)>.



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