



# St Catherine's BRAMLEY

Patron: Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Cornwall

Headmistress: Mrs AM Phillips MA Cantab

**Supporting your teenager through COVID** by Dr Anna Shipton and Dr Jo Taylor, Resident Clinical Psychologists at St Catherine's School, Bramley.

**The global pandemic has affected not only our physical health but also our mental health, and the restrictions on our lives have presented particular and unique challenges, for teenagers. St Catherine's Clinical Psychologists, Dr Anna Shipton and Dr Jo Taylor, helped St Catherine's parents understand some of the dynamics at play and kindly offered to share their insights with you too.**

Many teenagers and young people are finding coping with the Covid crisis a real challenge and there are justifiable reasons for this.

We are all biologically programmed to seek reward and pleasure, which may involve taking risks or making poor choices. This is necessary for survival; we would never achieve anything if we didn't have the drive to seek out new experiences and take some chances. Some people are naturally more prone to risk taking regardless of their age, particularly if they have low self-esteem, a thrill-seeking temperament, or a natural susceptibility to boredom and disinhibition. But something unique is happening in the teenage brain and in their social emotional development. Teenagers are more likely to make impulsive decisions, driven by how they feel in the moment, rather than by thinking or planning ahead.

Teenagers may also make more risky choices – this might be the result of poor judgement or a lack of awareness of the dangers, or being driven by overwhelming desire to feel pleasure, regardless of the consequences. The pressures of social acceptance and belonging are particularly acute as a teenager and peer dynamics can play a big role in decision making. You might hear your teenager justifying their behaviour to you and to themselves – “I'm not vulnerable, it was worth it to finally have a good time, everyone else is going out.” It is also a normal and natural stage of cognitive development for teenagers to be egocentric in their thinking and struggle to see things from the perspective of others. Knowing all this means we can have greater sympathy for our teenagers but what does it mean practically? How can we help teenagers learn to take responsibility for their behaviour and recognise the potential consequences for others, in order to protect the more vulnerable in the community?

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As parents, we can help by listening to our teenagers, and acknowledging and validating their feelings of frustration and desire to get back to 'normal'. We can try and help them think about the impact of their choices on what matters to them and their peers both in the very short-term 'if you come into contact with someone who has Covid you'll have to self-isolate and remote-School' and in the slightly long-term 'we want to get this under control so we can have a family Christmas'. It is useful to and connect any restrictions on their social life to protecting their immediate family/friends/grandparents, as well as talking about broader consequences in wider society.

As parents it is our job is to create and uphold boundaries for our teenagers around what social gatherings/activities are acceptable. We can help them understand changing local and national advice and we can reinforce this with practical, clear guidance around how to interact and behave as safely as possible to minimise risk to them and to others.

Whilst in many teenagers the challenge may be to create awareness of risk, there will be some teenagers who have a tendency to over inflated, acute sense of responsibility. Parents should be mindful of this and take care to avoid increasing anxiety or overly cautious behaviour. It's a balancing act and it's not easy, but we hope the above might help your understanding of some of your teenager's reactions to the unprecedented restrictions being placed on them and support you in helping them navigate their path through. For further resources on this, we'd recommend looking at the Barnardo's and Young Minds websites.

**Notes (must be included with article)**

**St Catherine's is a day and boarding School for girls age 4 to 18. [www.stcatherines.info](http://www.stcatherines.info)**

St Catherine's School have a Psychologist on staff who works with a wider team to support the mental health of St Catherine's girls. This team includes the Headmistresses, Housemistresses, our Chaplain, Boarding Housemistresses, the girls Tutors as well as medical practitioners on our Governing Body and designated Safeguarding staff.

**Dr Anna Shipton** is a Clinical Psychologist, who works at St Catherine's School, Bramley. She has previously worked in Paediatrics at the Evelina Children's Hospital, and also in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services across London.

**Dr Jo Taylor** is a Clinical Psychologist, currently on maternity leave from St Catherine's School, Bramley. Jo has also worked in NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and has provided teaching on child mental health to primary and secondary schools, and on Psychology training courses.

Both Jo and Anna draw on a number of evidence-based therapeutic models in their work with young people and families, including cognitive behavioural therapy, narrative therapy, solution focused therapy, mindfulness and acceptance and commitment therapy.