**1. Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels. But old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young.**

Dumbledore was wise, wasn’t he?

**2. Brain development**

Kids these days are smart, aren’t they? They seem to know so much. So It’s important to remember that

The brain systems responsible for logical reasoning and basic information processing mature **earlier** than systems responsible for self-regulation and the coordination of emotion and thinking.

Although they ARE really smart, teenagers and young people struggle with impulse control, they are sensation-seeking, they have poor resistance to peer influence, they are short-sighted and they have distorted risk perception.

Young perople HATE being patronised because they understand a lot. But when confronted with different situations they don’t always make good decisions. We have to try to understand where they are coming from.

**4. Let Children Cry.**

- I just wanted to take a moment to direct you all to this article. The crux of it is in the title. Children have strong emotions. Often these are perfectly normal emotions and the child or young person has the facilities to work through a difficult period in their lives.

What they need it the space and time to do so in order to successfully grow up.

The author advises us :

* when interacting with young people to protect them from real dangers (like Domestic Violence) but to avoid overprotecting them.
* We should inform them how they might make good choices without berating or confronting them when we think they have made bad choices.
* We should especially avoid confronting kids in a humiliating way.

- ultimately adolescence can be distressing but working though distress is an important skill and fundamental to growing up.

Before we go on I think it is important to emphasise this.

**5. Suicide**

**But this is what we’re scared of, isn’t it.**

Although the stats here show an impressive reduction in suicide rates for youth in the last 20 years, other causes of death have also reduced so that suicide is in fact the leading cause of death in young people - more than any other cause, including road accidents, cancer, and assault.

And when it happens it is so shocking, so awful, such a waste, such a tragedy.

**6. Self Harm**

The truly miserable cousin of suicide. It includes cutting, medication overdoses not intended to kill, cigarette and other burns and other self-destructive behaviours.

- More common in girls than boys.

- An estimated 6-8% of teenagers self harm in any 12 month period.

* often dismissed as attention seeking but this is an underestimation.
* Self harm reflects an enormous amount of distress and really dysfunctional attempts to cope with this.
* Only half of people engaging in self harm seek help, the rest hide it. If you find out about someone self harming they really do need professional help.

**7. Definitions**

Depression and anxiety. You’re going to hear more about these tonight and they work the same way for young people.

**8. Low mood + Testosterone = Anger. This is my equation.**

If you have a consistently angry young man in your house think about the mood underpinning the behaviour. I have had so many conversations with young men so ashamed of their behaviour but struggling to manage their emotions. I’m not in any way condoning violence but where you’re seeing repetitive violence or even a consistent low boil, ask “what’s up?” and consider seeking help. This can, of course, be the presentation of Depression in girls too, but I’ve seen it repeatedly in young men.

**9. LGBTIQ**

It is very hard to be different in any way as a teenager. At a stage of life where social conformity and inclusion is so central to belonging. To feel different from most people must make kids struggling with their sexual orientation or identity feel incredibly alone.

It should come as no surprise then, that these kids and young people have higher rates of self harm and suicide.

To speak out about their uncertainties takes an enormous amount of courage so please, when confronted with this situation put aside any prejudices or preconceptions you might have.

How YOU feel about THEIR sexuality is actually irrelevant. Please support these young people to grow into whoever they feel they are. All they need from family and friends is unconditional love, just like everyone else.

**9. Drugs –**

This is not a new problem but some of the players are different. There’s a lot of concern and media coverage about ICE but there is a stepping stone approach to this stuff. Hard drugs like ICE are about escapism. Where is the hurt underlying this behaviour?

Cannabis – more socially acceptable but it is really hallucinogenic and different individuals respond differently to it. Its use is absolutely associated with psychosis.

**10. Alcohol -**

Remember that alcohol does more harm in Australia than any other drug??

* Contributes to the 3 leading causes of death in young people in Australia – accidents, suicide and homicide
* It increases risky behavior of all sorts
* Alcohol is a Depressant
* Alcohol has detrimental effects on the developing brain
* I encourage you to talk to your kids about staying safe when they go out drinking, including holding on to drinks, choosing lite drinks, tips to slow down like taking small sips and alternating with water.
* I would emphasise the importance of looking out for your mates while out and drinking.
* Set a good example and drink responsibly at home

**11. screen time**

I don’t know if all of you have seen this campaign. Ironically it came up on my facebook feed mid last year and it really struck a chord. I think that our endless screen time is eroding society in ways we don’t know about yet. Certainly I think that it erodes family life and relationships.

* The very first milestone of infancy is the social smile at 6 weeks of age. Interpersonal interaction is crucial to the way our brains are programmed.
* No matter how many friends and social engagements you have online you cannot get the stimulation to the parts of the brain that are wired for empathy, understanding and successful interpersonal transactions from an online interaction
* AND young brains are still learning this stuff so the more time they spend online instead of interacting with real life humans has got to take away from their learning about how to cope with real people in the real world.
* And people skills are crucial to success in life. Successful relationships are crucial to a happy and rewarding personal life.
* I have seen several cases of what I would consider to be serious screen addiction in which teens and young adults completely refuse to leave the house, go to school and interact with the world. I think the current generation of parents of adolescents were caught unawares as the internet technology and social media grew up with this generation but my main message is
* BEWARE! MAKE BOUNDARIES. And
* DON’T be a hippocrite about it.

**12. cyberbullying**

- Suffice to say that people say things online that they would never say in person.

- Occasionally someone is really targeted for overt and nasty bullying online in various forms like

- words of abuse, sharing personal information publically, humiliation or shaming on a huge social platform.

- This is awful and you just have to hope you’ve kept the door open in your relationship with your child that they come to you for support if this happens.

- 90% of the time they won’t. If some guy has bragged about the great blowjob Emily gave at the party on the weekend to his 250 nearest and dearest on facebook, she may not tell her parents, but it will be socially crippling for her at school on Monday.

- More often the bullying is by exclusion. A failure to respond to a request, not getting enough “likes” on a given post or comment, can send someone into a real spin.

- Also low self image can develop based on the rosy and exciting pictures posted by others.

- I think a good place to start with this stuff is to teach a “do unto others” sort of approach.

- It is VERY important to remind kids (and ourselves at times!!) that what people put online is a very rosy view of their lives. I’ve seen discussions in which people are encouraged to open up and be more honest online. I personally think it is better advice to encourage your kids to have a superficial page if they want one rather than invite personal responses online. Just remember to keep it in perspective that everyone else is doing the same. Try to have a laugh about it: some people are spending an inordinate amount of time making those online pics look pretty!

One key fact, and I’m going to labour it, is that kids who spent more than 3 hours a day on social media (and you would be shocked how easy that is to do. There are apps to track your own time online you can try for yourself) these kids are 110% more likely to experience cyberbullying.

**13. Body image** – obesity and anorexia

- kids are so self conscious and we are quite right to be cautious when discussing their bodies but we can be doing them a disservice. Obviously if a child is undereating and becoming underweight you should be seeking help but we can and should be helping the overweight kids too. NOBODY wants to be the fat kid at high school.

- when talking about bodies, focus on health, not appearance.

- set a good example. Be a role model. Statements like “ we all need to get fitter” or “Let’s go on a health kick” are supportive.

- if you have a chid who expresses body image anxieties take them to see a dietitian or go to learn yourself about better eating and promote a healthy weight goal.

**14. Exercise**

- keep them active! Busy kids are happy kids. Endorphins from exercise improve mood, natural sunlight helps regulate a good sleep-wake cycle and team sports promote social interaction and peer cooperation.

**15. acne**

- can cause varying levels of distress but it is actually linked to suicide!

- we can fix it!!!

- there have been fluctuating concerns in the media about the acne drug “Roaccutane” and suicide risk but the causation is largely now attributed to the acne itself and in any case there are many other treatments for acne which we can try first.

- please get help from your doctor for this

**16. Girls and contraception**

I’ll love to put equal responsibility for contraception on the boys but it’s the girls who get left holding the baby. Of course we don’t want to encourage early promiscuity and the safe sex messages about condom use should be reinforced BUT impulsive, disorganised, experimenting young people are wonderfully fertile. Please encourage your girls to get to the doctor when they feel ready for sex.

**18. Where to get help**

If kids have their own Medicare Card they can see the doctor with more confidence and privacy

You can start with your GP, school counsellor or access a service like

Headspace

There are online counselling services for the tech-savvy like eheadspace and Moodgym

**19. LISTEN**

**My last message is LISTEN.**

**Turn off your phone and TV and laptop**

**Go for a walk together**

**Have regular family dinners – research shows that this helps!**

**Spend TIME together**

**A final quote from that lovely article “Let children cry”**

We need to give them the gift of *being good at feelings,* of being able to make sense of uncomfortable but healthy sadness, anger, fear and shame, rather than the gift of *feeling good,* which is shallow and evaporates in the face of adversity

**Ref**

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