



Self-Discovery Life Skills For Teenagers



2nd Edition
Sep 2020

ABOUT:

This booklet has been designed to help teenagers learn about themselves and gain life skills to channel their motivations to get what they want. It’s intended to get them thinking about what they’d like to do and start to plan how to get there. There are also lots of resources to inspire and encourage.

It’s hard being a young person sometimes and even harder for those who don’t have the right support, encouragement, understanding and love in their lives. Young people in many homes will be able to learn and feel safe to practice many of the skills discussed in this booklet in their safe environment. Equally, many don’t get those opportunities and need to rely solely or partly on themselves to master life skills.

We can’t change the past, but we can define and shape our futures if we know how. The activities in this booklet are designed to be worked on independently with consideration on how to use the skills in everyday life.

Overall, it is intended to inspire young people to reach their dreams and become the best they can be, regardless of their background or any struggles.

Best wishes,

Find us on Facebook: @selfdiscoverylifefskills

SECTIONS:

	Page
Self-awareness.....	2
Finding and using your strengths.....	3
Identifying your strengths	4
Making good decisions.....	5
Decision making example / Activity	6
Getting over mistakes	7
Emotional Maturity.....	8
Health and Wellbeing.....	11
Changing habits.....	14
Finding <u>supporters</u> and <u>asking for help</u>	15
Fulfilling your dreams	16
Putting it all together	17
Life skill development	18
Helpful resources.....	18





WHAT IS SELF-AWARENESS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Self-awareness is simply an awareness of ourselves; it is about what makes us unique. It includes our thoughts, experiences, abilities and means understanding our values, weaknesses, and habits too. Also, it is about who we are and what has shaped us.

“Having self-awareness is a vital step in taking control of our lives, creating what we want, and taking control of our future.”

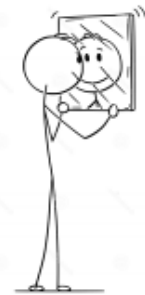
Where we choose to focus our energy, emotions, personality and reactions ultimately determines where we will end up in life. If we can understand ourselves better, it becomes easier to use our strengths, accept our faults and focus on different strategies to develop ourselves. It also allows us to take control of our actions so we can make the necessary changes to get the outcomes we desire. This may include changes to our emotions, our behaviour, or our personality. Until we achieve this, we will have a hard time making changes in the direction our life is taking us. Unless we know about ourselves, how can we plan to develop in the best ways?

Learning how to become more self-aware is an important skill to help us lead ourselves in the direction we want to go. It provides the necessary base for having strong character. Self-awareness explains our successes and our failures while giving us a clear understanding of who we are and what we need most from other people to become successful.

Research has proven that a high level of self-awareness is the strongest predictor of success for people. It has also demonstrated improvements in confidence, decision making, and stress management when we better understand ourselves. Worth thinking about then?

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS

1. Try to look at yourself objectively: You could do this by writing down your perceptions of things as they happen, particularly when there has been an emotional reaction i.e. you've felt angered or upset. Keeping a journal is a good idea where you make time to write a daily reflection - the good and the bad. When you read it later, do you have a different perspective on anything? Writing not only helps us process our thoughts but also makes us feel connected and at peace with ourselves. Writing can also create more headspace as you let your thoughts flow from your mind onto paper and stop them racing around in your mind.



2. Get feedback from others: We all have blind spots (things we don't see about ourselves), so it is helpful to gain a different perspective to see a fuller picture. This could be informally from family, friends, teachers or other people whom you trust. Tell people when you are looking for open, honest, critical, and objective perspectives. Allow them to feel safe while they are giving you an informal yet honest view and make sure they know that they are doing this to help you, not to hurt you. Allow time to reflect on it by writing down your main takeaways and any surprising strengths and weaknesses that you didn't realise you had.



3. Practice Mindfulness: This is the practice of improving your mindful awareness and helps you find greater clarity and self-awareness. Through mindfulness practice, you will be more present with yourself so that you can “be there” to observe what's going on inside and around you. It is not about sitting cross-legged or suppressing your thoughts. It is about paying attention to your emotions as they arise. You can practice mindfulness at any time you want, through mindful listening, mindful eating or walking. The ‘Headspace’ app is a great one to try.



4. Understand your triggers: Being aware of triggers is important to learn how to cope with controlling your emotions. This Triggers worksheet will help you to explore your own triggers for your thoughts, feelings and behaviours which will help you to work out what coping skills you need to learn to manage your emotions.



<https://www.psychpoint.com/mental-health/worksheets/triggers/>



FIND AND USING YOUR STRENGTHS

What do you enjoy doing that others don't like? When have you achieved something while others have struggled? What skills did you use that allowed you to succeed?

"Every single one of us is good at something. Some of us just give up on what that is before we even discover it."

If you enjoy doing something, the chances are that you'll be good at it. Some of you may know what you're good at already and others may not yet have worked it out. Even if you think you know what your strengths are, are there other things you are good at too and can you expand on your list?

Understanding your strengths is important to boost your self-confidence and when you feel good about yourself it will make you feel happier.

Everyone has different strengths, and some will be more obvious than others. The table on the following page captures a few ideas (which is by no means exhaustive) and there are questions to answer about the observations you make on the activity opposite.



www.viacharacter.org A free survey that takes 10 minutes. There are 24 character qualities and every individual possesses all the character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique profile.



www.barclayslifeskills.com Discover which jobs could suit you by picking your current skills, interests and personality traits. Uncover roles that you might not have thought of before, including resources to develop your skills further

Activity

Look at the table of strengths on the following page (adapted from <https://www.understood.org/>) and highlight at least two things that you are good at or enjoy in each column (there is no limit to the number in each). Add any additional ones in the final column and highlight these too. Then make the following observations:

Observations:

What do you notice about your strengths?

.....
.....
.....

Do you have a cluster in one category or a few in each?

.....
.....

How can you further develop and use the things you are good at?

.....
.....
.....

Are there any new strengths you would like to develop?

.....
.....
.....



IDENTIFYING YOUR STRENGTHS

Highlight a minimum of 2 things you are good at or enjoy in each column

Character Strengths	Social Strengths	Language Strengths	Literacy Strengths	Maths and logic strengths	Study Skill Strengths	Other strengths and talents	Others to add
Honest and trustworthy	Puts effort into making friends and keeping them	Uses words to express needs, wants and ideas	Enjoys reading	Sees and understands patterns in nature and in numbers	Can plan ahead	Is creative	
Caring and kind	Likes to help and is sensitive to the needs of others	Participates in discussions at home, at school and with friends	Seeks out fun things to read like magazines or blogs on the internet	Can do mental maths such as add, subtract, multiply, or divide quickly and correctly	Can ignore distractions and stay focussed on tasks	Likes drawing and doodling	
Loyal	Accepts differences in others	Tells stories that have a clear beginning, middle and end	Understands and uses written information (like following written directions)	Uses maths concepts in the real world (like cutting a recipe in half or planning budgets)	Follows rules and routines well	Can dance, act, sing or play a musical instrument	
Hardworking	Asks for help when needed	Uses lots of words and likes learning new words	Can remember details and recount stories after reading them	Solves puzzles or word problems	Can keep track of time and obligations	Can swim or play sports	
Independent	Knows when it's okay to follow the crowd and when to resist peer pressure	Understands jokes, puns and sarcasm	Can make predictions based on what's happened so far In a story	Likes playing games that involve strategy, like Chess, Risk or Stratego	Can pause to think through decisions or choices	Is gentle with animals and / or younger children	
Cooperative and helpful	Accepts personal responsibility for actions (good and bad)	Likes talking to people	Reads with expression (like the way actors talk on TV shows)	Likes taking things apart and understanding how they work	Can learn from mistakes and solve problems	Enjoys entertaining people by telling jokes or stories	
Curious	Tells the truth and can apologise when needed	Can change tone of voice when telling a story or asking a question	Can figure out what new words mean by looking at the context or asking questions	Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different solutions to problems.	Works well / gets along well one-on-one	Likes doing community service projects	
Resilient	Has a good sense of humour	Likes listening to stories	Can sound out unfamiliar words	Understands in maths terms used in word problems	Works well / gets along well in groups	Likes problem solving in video games	



MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

We all make decisions every day and some of these decisions will have a big impact on our future. There are methods and processes we can follow to help make better decisions which we will look at below. Getting good at this when you're young will give you a huge advantage as you get to adulthood (and believe it or not, many adults lack these basic skills!).

Teenagers sometimes find it difficult to make decisions and behave impulsively, irrationally or in a reckless way which can have big consequences in their lives. So first, let's take a look at the science to try to understand why this might be the case. Adolescents differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions and there is a biological explanation for this difference. Studies have shown that brains continue to mature and develop throughout childhood, adolescence and well into early adulthood.

Scientists have identified a specific region of the brain called the amygdala that is responsible for immediate reactions including fear and aggressive behaviour. This region develops early. However, the frontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This part of the brain is still changing and maturing well into our early twenties. Other changes in the brain during adolescence include a rapid increase in the connections between the brain cells and the effectiveness of the brain pathways which impact our communication abilities, thoughts, actions and behaviour.

Pictures of the brain in action show that adolescents' brains work differently from adults when they make decisions or solve problems. Their actions are guided more by the emotional and reactive amygdala and less by the thoughtful, logical frontal cortex. Based on the stage of their brain development, adolescents are more likely to:

- **Act on impulse, rather than thinking before they act**
- **Misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions**
- **Get into accidents of all kinds**
- **Get involved in fights**
- **Engage in dangerous or risky behaviour**

These brain differences don't mean that young people can't make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. It also doesn't mean that you shouldn't be held responsible for your actions. However, an awareness of these differences can help you to be aware of the consequences poor decisions may have for you and take steps to make better decisions, which we'll look at now.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS:

Adopting a structured approach to decision-making can often be a helpful way of navigating some of its potential challenges and pitfalls. The decision-making process consists of four key steps:



NOTE: Following a process such as this makes communication easier and if it turns out to be the wrong decision further down the road, you can look back at the other options to understand why you didn't choose a different path at the time. This will hopefully help you to make better decisions in the future. Remember, nobody gets it right all the time and you'll probably have learnt along the way.



DECISION MAKING EXAMPLE

Let's take a look at how we can evaluate a number of options and make a decision based on the information.

EXAMPLE: Alex is 16, it's June and he's just finished his GCSE's. He is hoping he'll get the grades to start on a college course in September but in the meantime is wondering what to do over the long summer holiday. He's thought about some of the things he'd like to do and generated some options. There are pros and cons to his different ideas and he's a little afraid of making the wrong decision and ending up doing something over the summer he doesn't really like. So for now, he's decided to avoid thinking about it and is hoping things just work out one way or another.

Alex could wait and see what unfolds and make the best of the situation as it happens. Or, he could take control of the decision by collecting his thoughts in a logical way and evaluating the information to come up with the option that best fits what he would really like to do. He decides to give this a go and creates the following table with the options and criteria circulating in his mind. He marks 'yes' if the option would meet his criteria.

DECISION – WHAT SHOULD ALEX DO DURING THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS?

Options (all the ideas)	Criteria (things that are important)					
	Income	Travelling opportunities	Work experience	See my friends	Increase my independence	Meet new people
Get a job near home	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Get a job in a holiday camp	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Hang out at home / see friends				Yes		
Visit family and distant relations		Yes			Yes	Yes
Become a youth club volunteer			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Study and prepare for my new course				Yes		

CONCLUSION: We can see the options that best fit Alex's criteria are getting a job near home and working in a holiday camp. Becoming a youth club volunteer is a close third. Alex may decide to explore all three of these options to maximise his chance of making one of them happen. It's far easier to focus on three things rather than all of them when he would most likely feel overwhelmed and do nothing. The purpose of this exercise was to help Alex make sense of the ideas in his mind and see the facts more clearly.

Activity

Are you finding it difficult to make a decision about something? Do you have ideas in your mind but can't decide what to do next?

The process that Alex used can be translated to many different decision dilemmas including which course to study, which car to buy, where to live, how to spend free time, which new hobby to try or even options for how to handle relationships.

What's on your mind now? Why not give this process a go at helping you to work through the different options and discover what the best course of action is likely to be?

Describe something that you are undecided about. What is the decision you are facing and why do you need to make it?

.....

.....

Draw out your own grid with the options and criteria to suit

Decision	Criteria (things that are important to me)					
Options (all of my ideas)						

Next steps:

- Is there an option (or a couple of options) that stand out above the others.....
- Does this feel like the right option to take (your instinct is important too and when your instinct aligns to the facts, it feels right!)
.....
- What do you need to do next in order to increase the likelihood of it happening?
.....



Mistakes, failures, setbacks – they are all part of life and we learn to do things better by making mistakes. No adventure worth undertaking is easy and everyone who achieves success will have faced obstacles along the way.

That isn't to say we don't feel disappointed, upset or even despair when something hasn't turned out the way we wanted it to, or we've done something we regret. These are normal feelings and we should take some time to process these feelings and not feel rushed into getting over them before we are ready. Accepting what has happened is often the first stage of moving on. This means acknowledging the role we played, not blaming ourselves or others and not ruminating about it. You'll find more information about techniques to do these things online if you'd like to know more (try searching 'getting over failure').

Mistakes happen for all sorts of reasons which could stem from insecurity, the need for love or excitement, a longing to express individuality, the need to push boundaries against authority or simply judgement errors. Children and young adults in particular can be driven by all sorts of extreme feelings which may lead them into trouble. To be able to recover from mistakes is such an important building block to cope, build confidence, and essentially handle life.

'Each failure is a chance to grow stronger and wiser'

When we are ready to bounce back, we should recognise where we went wrong, so we understand the cause of the failure and don't repeat the same mistakes. By realising what we have learnt from mistakes, how they have strengthened our character or even seeing a funny side to them will help us to forgive ourselves. This is important because feeling guilty does nothing for us.

Feeling bad about things we've done in the past can negatively influence how we feel in the present. If we've accepted what's happened, taken responsibility and considered where we went wrong, we can forgive ourselves. And while we learn how to forgive ourselves, we can start acting in accordance with the things we have learnt and remind ourselves we are doing the best we can.

Showing compassion towards others will also help us to forgive ourselves. This means showing kindness to others who make mistakes by trying to understand what they are going through and how they might be feeling. Slowly our painful thorns come out from the kind words of forgiveness we offer to ourselves and others.

Here is list of people who have experienced failures or setbacks at some point in their life. As you read through them, consider how they might have been kind to themselves, to allow them to dust off and start over.

SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE WHO OVERCAME CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY:

Michael Jordan was dropped from his school basketball team because he lacked skill and was too short.

JK Rowling battled depression as a single mother living on benefits and thought of herself as the biggest failure she knew.

Stephen King had his first novel Carrie rejected by 30 different agencies before he threw it away. His wife rescued it from the bin and encouraged him to try one more time.

Sir James Dyson created 5126 prototypes which failed to become the perfect bagless cleaning machine.

Elvis Presley was a misfit as a boy, failed his music class and after his first gig flopped, his manager told him 'you ain't goin' nowhere son, go back to drivin' a truck'.

Walt Disney was fired from his newspaper job in Missouri because he lacked creativity.

Lady Gaga was dropped from her first record label after three months and was told 'you are too racy, too dance-oriented, too underground. You're just not marketable'.

Oprah Winfrey was fired for being too 'emotionally invested' in the stories that she reported on in her job as a TV news journalist.

Albert Einstein had speech difficulties as a child, was labelled handicapped and failed to get a place at Zurich Polytechnic the first time he applied.

CONSIDER: DO ANY OF THESE PEOPLE INSPIRE YOU?



EMOTIONAL MATURITY

Teenagers are preparing for adulthood and a life without constant guidance from their parents. Becoming emotionally mature is a long process, evolving over the course of our lives but it starts in earnest during our teenage years.

On the next pages, emotional maturity has been broken down into the following ten key areas with practical ideas to understand and apply maturity at the teenage stage of life. There are also examples of role model and immature behaviours to appreciate both ends of the spectrum.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| - Responsibility | - Honesty |
| - Self-Awareness | - Self-Acceptance |
| - Self-Control | - Dealing with Conflict |
| - Consideration for Others | - Relating to Others |
| - Resilience | - Open-Mindedness |

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS

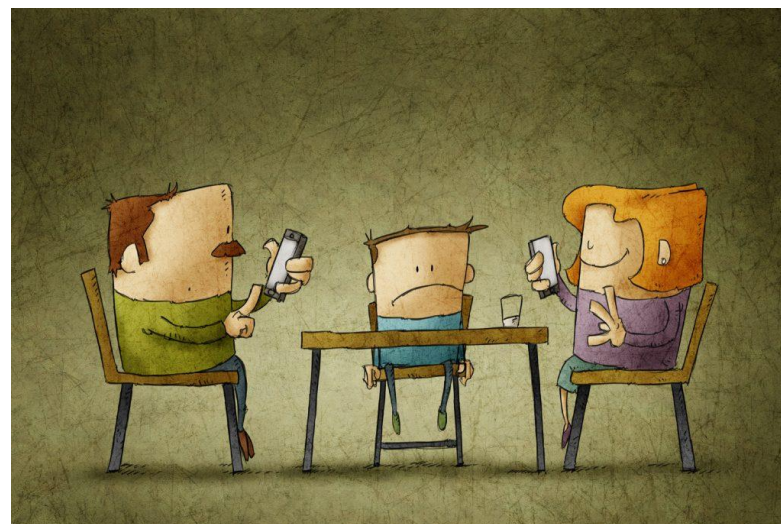
Teenagers will learn most from those around them; people they connect with who are role modelling emotionally mature behaviour will be particularly beneficial to teenagers at this impressionable time.

If you are lacking role models in your life, here are some ideas to help you to manage the challenges and thrive in your own emotional development:

- Recognise where the behaviours of people around you lie on the spectrum - considering which areas are better or worse than others. It will then be possible to focus on the positive areas where they display more mature behaviours as well as learn by the mistakes from their immaturity.
- Set clear boundaries with parents or care givers – you are not responsible for them; their mistakes are not your fault and how they feel is not down to you because they are responsible for their own negative emotions.
- Talk to a friend or supporter (see page 15) about how you are feeling and the impact that a lack of role models is having in your life. Sharing worries can be helpful and is a proven way to release anxiety.
- Don't be afraid to seek help from a professional such as a school counsellor or an organisation such as those that provide emotional support and practical advice found on page 13.

Activity



- Who do you know that demonstrates many of the emotionally mature behaviours outlined on the following pages? Do you see them as a role model?
- Select a couple of practical ideas in the middle column to support your own emotional maturity. After a month or so, you can reflect on the progress you have made and think about others you may like to try.
- Do any mature behaviours seem more difficult to understand? Acknowledging these will be the first step towards making progress. Next you could try discussing your thoughts with a trusted person (perhaps your role model) as this often helps us to make sense of the numerous thoughts in our minds.





Are these parents good roles models?

Maturity Model: Helping teenagers understand emotional maturity



1. Responsibility

Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers become more responsible:	Immature Behaviours
 <p>Makes plans and sets goals, taking responsibility for their actions, thinks through consequences of a decision before making it, trusts their own judgement, realises the source of emotional problems lies within themselves, forgives others easily and moves on, stands up for fairness and justice.</p>	Accept the straightforward facts of the situation rather than making excuses for shortcomings	 <p>Feels sorry for themselves, blames others and rarely apologises for mistakes, feels life isn't in control - they are hard done by and people are out to get them, lacks preparation to ensure things don't go wrong in the first place and needs others to take their side to make them feel better.</p>
	Take positive action to make plans and decisions rather than react to them once they have already occurred	
	Build trust with others by always doing what they say they will do	
	Take steps to influence and control more things in life, knowing that others are not responsible for them	
	Do regular chores and volunteer to take on new responsibilities, demonstrating dependability by doing them without being asked	



2. Self-Awareness

Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers become more self-aware:	Immature behaviours
 <p>Understands themselves, their core values, strengths and weaknesses and how past experiences have shaped them, is open to change, knows things aren't always black and white and others see things differently, understands their emotions and how to manage them.</p>	Take an interest in getting to know themselves better by listening to feedback and reflecting on previous experiences to become more self-reliant, productive and flexible	 <p>Believes they are always right, compares themselves to others, has a lot of conflict in life, frequent emotional outbursts, gets defensive when challenged, not able to see their faults therefore sees no need to change, often changes their mind, jumps to conclusions quickly and does things such as overeating, drinking, smoking and drugs in order to not feel emotions.</p>
	Understand that two people who see the same thing will each interpret it their own way, creating different perceptions	
	Understand their triggers in order to control emotions	
	Look at themselves objectively when receiving feedback from others, without getting defensive	
	Take responsibility and learn from mistakes or problems they may have caused, recognising positives as well as negatives in a situation	
	Recognise the feelings of different emotions and able to identify what they are	



3. Self-Control

Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers develop self-control:	Immature behaviours
 <p>Can resist temptation and show restraint towards things that might be detrimental to their longer term well-being, has healthy habits which mean less room for unhealthy ones, avoids situations where they'll confront temptation in the first place and can control negative emotions when they aren't getting their way.</p>	Make positive lifestyle choices that effect the longer term	 <p>Has a low stress tolerance, is impatient, makes poor judgements, gives into pressure from others and frequently regrets decisions, puts thing off, is easily distracted and finds it difficult to complete a task, has frequent heated arguments due to difficulty with controlling emotions.</p>
	Be patient in order to get what they want, persevering with tasks they know are important but rather not do	
	How and when to say no	
	Avoid doing things they'll later regret	
	Appropriately reward themselves when they have exercised good self control	
	Avoids situations which could get out of control and try to calm others before an argument erupts	

4. Consideration for Others

Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers develop their consideration for others:	Immature behaviours
 <p>Feels empathy and concern for others, celebrating their success and helping where they can, gives wholeheartedly not seeking anything in return, is genuinely curious wanting to understand others' ideas and promotes unity and oneness.</p>	Show compassion to themselves in the first instance as the compassion they develop will naturally spread so they are more understanding of those around them	 <p>Is quick to criticise, voices strong opinions giving little thought to how they make others feel, has difficulty feeling happy for others, likes to talk a lot about themselves making out they are better than other people, interrupts to turn the conversation towards themselves rather than listening to others and excludes people promoting division within a family or group.</p>
	Treat others the way they wish to be treated	
	Do the right thing when no one is watching - appreciating recognition if it comes their way but do things without a need to be recognised	
	Consider why another person is feeling the way they do and why they might be hurting	
	Really listen to another person in order to understand, asking them questions	
	Not be afraid to speak what they feel when the timing is right	

5. Resilience

Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers become more resilient:	Immature behaviours
 <p>Comes up with resourceful ideas, stays positive and is flexible to help them cope with whatever comes their way, uses strengths gained from past challenges and shows patience - understanding pain eases with time and sticks at things rather than giving up. Has trusted people they can talk to about problems and returns the kindness as a supportive friend.</p>	Utilise their skills and strengths to cope and recover from problems and challenges	 <p>Finds it difficult to cope in life, worries about the future, doesn't like uncertainty or change and refuses to adapt expecting others to adapt to them. Can feel overwhelmed by things they cannot control, dwells on sorrow and seeks pity from others, gives up on things easily rarely finishing what they start.</p>
	Make realistic plans that can be adapted when needed, focusing on ways to tackle the problem and make changes that will help	
	View themselves as a fighter rather than a victim	
	Understand that setbacks happens and sometimes life is hard and painful	
	Understand what they can influence and control and what they cannot	
	Gain satisfaction from solving their own problems	

6. Honesty



Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers appreciate honesty:	Immature behaviours
Is authentic and comfortable with who they are, open and honest with those around them, realises that honesty is the best policy and doesn't exaggerate or embellish things to impress others, respects others' feelings by exercising tact and recognises the importance of honesty to create connection and harmony.	Be truthful to themselves about what they are thinking and feeling	Deceives others by lying, conveniently forgetting, changing the subject or staying silent, behaves differently in front of different people, says one thing to one person and something different to someone else, gets pleasure out of telling the truth to hurt someone, gets tangled in a web of lies needing to tell more to cover up earlier ones.
	Don't strive to be somebody else	
	Appreciate the benefits of honesty such as closer relationships, feeling good about themselves and avoiding trouble	
	Think about why they tell a lie and how they could avoid it in future	
	Consider how they want to be treated by others - would they rather know the truth or untruths that may appear kinder?	
	Think before they speak for the sake of themselves and others	



7. Self-Acceptance



Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers develop their self-acceptance:	Immature behaviours
Accepts themselves for who they are, doesn't overly care what others think, accepts they are prepared by their past not defined by it, suppresses negative emotions about themselves focusing on the positive aspects of their character, reframes negative situations in order to see opportunities in them, doesn't take things for granted and is thankful when their basic daily needs are met.	Understand their strengths and how to apply them as well as areas in which to develop and grow, resisting comparisons to friends and siblings	Compares their life unfavourably to others, allows envy to consume them, never satisfied with what they have, unable to make peace with difficulties in the past, consumed by negative emotions and regrets, dwells on mistakes and ruminates, often complains they are hard done by.
	Can pick themselves up after setbacks and start over with a renewed belief in themselves	
	Manage negative emotions and find the words to explain to others how they are feeling	
	Find positive things even in challenging situations and consider things they can learn when events don't go their way	
	Set realistic goals, understanding no one is perfect and take the pressure off themselves if it leads to not starting things or feeling inadequate	
	Value strong friendships and endeavours to be a good friend	
	Look for the good in all people and things	



8. Dealing with Conflict



Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers deal with conflict:	Immature behaviours
Gets over disagreements easily and refrains from going over past issues, is available to others and able to discuss emotive subjects calmly and rationally, remains calm on the inside to keep control on the outside, can openly articulate thoughts and feelings with no hidden meanings and de-escalate an argument by using their calming influence and communication skills.	Move on from disagreements and make peace	Often starts and has long, drawn out arguments, finds it difficult to let past grievances lie, takes things very personally, likes to remind others of their mistakes, changes the subject if there's something they don't want to discuss, says mean things in the heat of the moment and verbally abuses others by criticising them or calling them names, has a need to win every argument.
	Can find the right times to speak, not interrupting others but being assertive when they want to be heard	
	Not retaliating if they are verbally abused, setting clear boundaries telling others this behaviour is unacceptable to them	
	Consider what is worth disagreeing over or debating with someone and avoid correcting people on minor points	
	Understand their own triggers and minimise / control their reactions	
	Bring calm to a tense situation by listening, acknowledging both sides and encouraging people to take time out to cool off	
	Find the words to explain to others how they are feeling, without holding grudges or sulking	



9. Relating to Others



Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers to relate to others:	Immature behaviours
Believe they are responsible for their own happiness, trusting and loyal to family and friends accepting them unconditionally, holds balanced conversations - talking and listening equally, has fun and is silly at appropriate times and shares their good fortune when they have it.	Rely more on themselves and less on others for their happiness	Thinks they are better than others, offers advice when people haven't asked for it and puts on an act in front of others. Enjoys talking far more than listening, regularly feels disappointed or let down by others and tries to change people, keeps secrets, spreads gossip, finds any opportunity for a competition, sulking if they don't win, has a low generosity of spirit.
	Make good judgements about the people they can trust and reply on	
	Become aware of what they are giving as well as receiving in relationships	
	Be respectful of others, accepting they feel as they tell them they do	
	Not ashamed to seek advice and wisdom from others. Can say what they mean in a tactful way without hurting people	
	Enjoy healthy competition, celebrating their own success as well as losing graciously and celebrating others success when they win too	



10. Open-Mindedness



Role Model Behaviours of Maturity	Practical ideas to help teenagers develop their open-mindedness:	Immature behaviours
Is open to many ideas and opinions and doesn't judge people who think differently, accepts they are wrong at times seeing disagreement as a thoughtful way to expand their knowledge, is curious and finds excitement in the miracles of nature and asks deep questions about their own existence and the complexity of life.	Learning about different cultures and their origins and interested to know why people see things differently and adjust their opinions accordingly	Focuses more on being understood rather than understanding others. Blocks others from speaking, preferring to hear their own voice, considers how to refute another person's thoughts rather than understand them and gets frustrated when others challenge their ideas, has little interest in how things work or come into being, feels unfulfilled about their own beliefs to the meaning of life without attempting to explore possible answers.
	Become more interested in listening to understand and they don't see everything as simply black and white	
	Be less judgemental of others because they know they aren't perfect themselves and realise that being right can mean changing their minds when someone else knows something they don't	
	Ask more genuine questions and make less statements in order to learn, assessing the merits in each part of a two way disagreement	
	Understand different areas of science and the natural world, taking an interest in the things around them	
	Take time to reflect on day to day observations, forming their own thoughts and ideas	





It's important that we do things to look after ourselves - physically, mentally, and socially. It can be challenging to do this sometimes but by doing so, we can help minimise the negative impacts of other issues in life.

Here are some ideas to look after yourself and help to keep you feeling positive.

GETTING ACTIVE:

Regular physical activity is an important part of getting and staying healthy. Exercise produces endorphins (chemicals that cause you to feel content and happy); therefore, working up a sweat may result in the added benefits of being in a better mood and having more energy. Fitness can also boost concentration making schoolwork easier and other benefits of exercise include:

- Building strong bones and muscles
- Improving balance and flexibility skills
- Developing new skills and feeling a sense of achievement
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- Improving cardiovascular fitness
- Reducing stress and feeling more relaxed
- Improving posture
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem
- Having fun with friends and making new ones

Anyone who doesn't get enough physical activity is at a greater risk of becoming overweight or obese. This makes it harder for them to be active and keep up in sport or play. Being overweight can make people more prone to conditions such as asthma, flat feet and joint sprains. It can also contribute to more serious health conditions in the future.

There are so many different ways you can exercise, we could fill the whole page with a list of suggestions. Why not try a google search for ideas, see what's on at your local leisure centre or talk to friends for inspiration? Remember, if you enjoy it, you are far more likely to do it again and for it to become part of your way of life!

EATING WELL:

We all know that eating a healthy balanced diet is really important for our health. Teenagers experience many physical and lifestyle changes at this stage in their life. When you start secondary school, you often have more independence and therefore freedom to choose what you want to eat.

This is also a time in your life when you might become more aware of your own body and feel pressure from your friends, peers and the media to look a certain way – for example, social pressure to be thin or muscular. The pressure can lead some teens to exercise excessively, skip meals and follow unnecessary weight loss diets, which in extreme cases can lead to eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

With the media promoting the 'thin' body ideal, it may be difficult to know what a healthy weight is and how it can be achieved. The Internet is full of ideas for miracle diets, but people come in all different shapes and sizes, and by eating a healthy, varied diet and taking part in physical activity then your weight will be healthy for you.

THE BLUE ZONES:

We can learn a lot from people who live the longest in the world. 'Blue Zones' are regions of the world where people live much longer than average (search up Blue Zones if you'd like to know more). Essentially, they don't follow any fancy diet regime and their principles for eating well are rather straightforward. Take a look at the list below and judge for yourself.

- **Drink mostly water (they don't waste calories and sugar allowance on other drinks – they aren't worth it and it saves money too!)**
- **Eat a lot of fruit and vegetables, including them with every meal**
- **Eat a lot of beans, seeds, whole grains and nuts for protein, fibre and healthy fats**
- **Eat slowly and don't eat until they're full (stopping eating when they feel about 80% full)**
- **Avoid all takeaway food, learning to cook so they understand exactly what they are eating**
- **Limit meat consumption and have meat free days**
- **Limiting refined sugar, but still appreciating odd treats**





GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

Getting adequate sleep each night is a necessity for physical and emotional health and sleep experts recommend that teenagers get at least 8-10 hours a night. Teenagers need more sleep because they are growing, and it is during sleep that growth-promoting hormones are produced. Sleep also has a profound effect on body fat regulation as during sleep important appetite-regulating hormones such as leptin are produced, and these hormones can become deficient when sleep is inadequate. Consequently, this causes people who do not get enough sleep at night to overeat and thus gain fat. Getting enough sleep also ensures effective cognitive functioning which can affect academic performance, improve concentration and memory and make good decisions. Finally, good sleep helps us to feel good and reduces mood swings and irritability.

Activity How much sleep are you getting this week?

	Time to bed	Fell asleep at	Woke up at	Number of hours sleep
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Are you getting enough sleep? By keeping a log, it's easier to see what's happening. You may be going to bed too late to get enough sleep, or perhaps you are going to bed early enough but not getting to sleep straight away due to distractions such as screens or noise?

GETTING A JOB

In addition to the obvious advantages of earning some money and having a little financial independence, there are other benefits too. Part-time jobs and summer employment help teenagers learn life skills such as time management, responsibility, dependability and confidence. They also provide valuable experience to include on a CV or further education application. Evidence that someone has shown commitment to working in a job, no matter what the role, really sets them apart from someone without this experience. It's surprising how many examples involving teamwork, communications, customer service or perseverance that can come from work experience and could be used to answer interview questions.

FEELING CONNECTED

Social connections are important for our wellbeing as they help us feel like we belong and give us a support network for when life feels hard. Prioritising spending time with friends and family and meeting new people are all great things to do and teenagers often need to feel a sense of belonging to feel good about who they are. Those who do not have at least a few close friends sometimes suffer from isolation, insecurity and a poor self-image. Teens gain much of their identity from the people they spend time with, because these people often reflect similar interests and beliefs. Having good friends will help build healthy emotional and psychological development through a strong sense of belonging.

People who have a sense of belonging to a particular group learn valuable lessons from social interactions within the group. Members of peer groups essentially act as mirrors, providing important feedback about behaviour and personalities to individual group members. Teens who are a part of a group with positive goals and influences can gain confidence in social settings by learning the value of cooperation for the good of the group. Teens who belong to a positive group and share a sense of belonging with group members are often better able to resist negative peer pressure from outside sources than are those who are marginalized. They often possess a strong sense of self, empowered by others of like mind and interests.



MANAGING DIFFICULT FEELINGS

In addition to the physical and emotional changes during teenage years, there may be many things life throws in the path that can result in trauma, anxiety, depression, or general distress. While trying to navigate social situations, bullies, various other responsibilities, and home life, as well as beginning the process of self-discovery, teenagers have a full plate indeed.

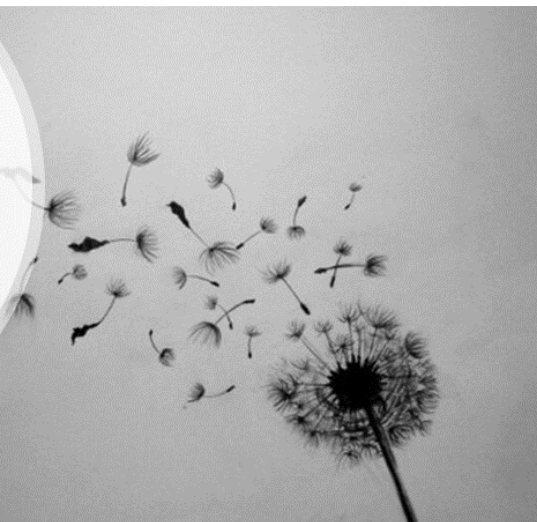
Managing emotions is one of the most important life skills a person can develop and one strategy to develop in managing emotions is the ability to identify feelings. Sometimes teens find it difficult to let themselves know what they are feeling, or perhaps they simply don't know how to identify their feelings.

Learning to accept feelings as they are and finding people to talk to that can be trusted may benefit you. Remember that emotions are not necessarily reality because it's easy to lose perspective when feeling emotional.

Feelings must be released somehow, and these are some ideas that may help.

RELEASING FEELINGS:

- Write about your feelings (such as in a journal or diary)
- Express your feelings through art or music
- Physical activity can be productive in helping to release feelings
- Crying is very beneficial at times and it's okay to cry
- Talking and processing emotions with someone trusted can be helpful for both releasing feelings and gaining perspective



If you need further support, there are several organisations that provide emotional support and practical advice as follows:

- Family Lives is a charity specialising in supporting families.
- Relate offers relationship advice and counselling. You can also use Live Chat to talk to a counsellor.
- Young Minds, the mental health charity.

AVOIDING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

Some people turn to alcohol or other substances when worried, upset, or bored. However, doing so can really affect their health, disrupt sleep, and even lead to financial or relationship problems.

It's really hard to give something up, particularly when there's nothing to take its place. Therefore, it is important to think about how to replace an unhealthy habit with a healthier one. For instance, someone who likes to smoke could chew gum and / or do something to keep their hands busy such as writing, gaming, online chat or drawing. We'll look in more detail on how to change habits in the next section.

If you're concerned about the impact alcohol or drugs are having on your life, the following resources may be helpful:

Help with Drinking: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/teenage-drinking/>

Help to quit smoking: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/quitting-smoking-under-18s-guide/>

Help with drugs: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/drug-addiction-getting-help/>



CHANGING HABITS

Changing habits isn't easy for anyone and breaking an unhealthy habit will take some time. Research on the subject by psychologists and neuroscientists has shown it takes around 2 -3 months for a new habit to stick, which means it takes perseverance to make a change.

A high proportion of what we do each day becomes a habit and we run on autopilot, doing things subconsciously (without thinking very much). We are far more likely to stick with a new healthy behaviour if it forms part of our daily routine – so the more healthy things you can incorporate into your schedule, the less chance you'll slip back to making unhealthy choices.

The great news is that once we have changed one habit or behaviour, it becomes easier to change others. This is because we increase the belief in ourselves and once our self-confidence increases, we are more likely to persevere. Ever heard the term success breeds success? However, using your willpower to change takes energy so unless the changes are very small, experts in this field recommend focusing on changing only one thing at a time and mastering that, before moving onto the next.

ACTIVITY

Can you think of a habit you would like to change right now?

What is it?

Why do you want to change it?

What will you do instead?

What will the change mean to you? (saving money, better health etc.)

What is the first step you will take?

When will you take it?

How will you forgive yourself if you stumble?

When will you know when you have been successful?

How will you reward yourself when you've achieved it?

BRAINSTORMING HABITS YOU WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE

Activity: Write in the bubbles any ideas about what you would like to change. You don't need to complete all of them (or you may want additional room to write more detail). This activity is designed to help you think about what your next goals might be.



Activity.....
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Eating well.....
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Sleep.....
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Work.....
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Connection
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Feelings.....
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Drinking / drugs.....
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Other.....
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BRAINSTORM

BLOCKERS  What are the top three things that would most likely prevent you from fulfilling your desired changes?

1).....

2)

3)



FINDING SUPPORTERS AND ASKING FOR HELP

Seeking support and knowing when to ask for help is wise. Nobody knows everything and if you ask anyone about a significant achievement or a success, the chances are that support from others played a critical role. But asking for help can be difficult. Admitting to yourself that you need support when you've been taught (or taught yourself) to be self-reliant seems to go against your values. It can feel uncomfortable, like swallowing your pride.

Often, young people who are in challenging circumstances will have developed a strong sense of independence and found remarkable ways to handle challenges in their day to day lives. However, this can make it even harder for them to ask for help.

It takes courage and strength to ask for support and realise the benefits that accepting it can bring. Let's start with the benefits and look at what both you and the other person could gain:

SOME OF THE BENEFITS INCLUDE:



HOW DO WE FIND SUPPORTERS?

If you want to ask an adult for help, make sure it's a person you trust and feel safe with. They might be someone you feel close to or helped you with something before. They could be anyone, such as someone from your family, a parent of a friend, neighbour, teacher, sports coach, school counsellor or religious leader. There are some tips next to help you start to prepare for and start a conversation.

PREPARATION:

- Plan what you want to say - it's often a good idea to write it down (Remember; you have control over how much you tell someone - you don't have to say everything if you don't want to and you can ask them before you say anything to keep what you've said private)
- Think about the timing of the conversation and when the person may be free to talk without distractions
- Think about how they might be able to help you in advance and how you might answer some of the questions they may have

HOW TO START A CONVERSATION:

You could start talking about something else first to ease yourself in. This could be followed by one of these conversation starters:

- "I want to tell you something but I don't know how."
- "This is hard for me to say, but I have something important to tell you."
- "I need some advice on something I'm stressed about."

ACTIVITY ✍ Find a notebook. Think about something you'd like to do where you may need support. It could be a decision you need to make, a habit you'd like to change, in fact anything at all.

- What specifically would you like help with?
- Why do you want help (are you looking for expertise, time, encouragement, a different perspective?)
- When do you need it?
- Who could you consider asking or where could you look to find support?
- How could you explain your request for support and which of their skills you are looking for?
- How could you create an opportunity to ask them?
- If they can support you, how could you show your appreciation?
- And if they can't support you, do you think they could support in a different way or know where you could find what you are looking for?



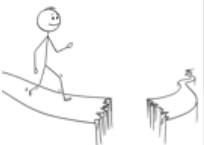
Dreams make life worth living and if you are struggling, your dreams are your reason to keep going. People say 'follow your dreams' but that's sometimes easier said than done. Life gets in the way, the daily grind, pressure from others and loss of motivation.

'The more you dream, the more you can do'



You may be clear on what your dreams are and if so, that's fantastic, you can skip ahead to the activity. If that isn't the case, here are some thought starters to help you work them out.

- Find some time to **relax** so you can think clearly
- Consider what's important to you: Think hard about what you love to do, what makes you **passionate**, what **invigorates** you and makes you feel **fulfilled**. Is it singing in front of an audience? Is it looking after the environment? Is it creative such as art or woodwork? Is it writing or reading? Is it working with people? Or working with computers? (Take a look back at your strengths if you need help with ideas)
- Do your **research**: Once you have an idea, it's time to start looking into how to accomplish it. What can you find out online and who has achieved something similar that could share knowledge with you?
- **Make a plan**: Create goals by breaking down the dream into smaller chunks, writing them down into a plan. You will need to be more detailed here and think about timescales, support required and new skills you'll need to learn.
- Put in the **hard work**: Unfortunately, dreams don't just fulfill themselves. You're going to have to put in work to accomplish the things that are important to you. This means practising, it means putting yourself out there, it means making mistakes and learning from them.
- Deal with the **obstacles**: There could be many different obstacles that occur along the way so being prepared and flexible can help you a lot when dealing with them. The biggest obstacle of all is usually fear, fear that you will fail. When you find yourself obsessing over these fears, bring your mind back to the next task, without thinking about the overwhelming whole.
- Stay **motivated**: Another problem that people have when trying to achieve their dreams, is staying motivated to do so. It's easy to get overwhelmed or distracted. Staying motivated means pushing through the times when things get hard.



ACTIVITY Following the passion that drives you

Write a letter to yourself. Imagine yourself, five years into the future, telling your younger self all about what you are doing and your journey to get there.

- What are you doing now, where are you, who are you with?
- What have you learnt or discovered along the way?
- Which of your strengths have you used and how have they helped you?
- Who do you hang out with / do you have someone special in your life?
- What healthy habits are a part of your life?
- Which decisions were your best and why?
- What are you enjoying most? What hobbies do you have and how are you spending your free time?
- Did you overcome any obstacles or challenges along the way and how did you cope with those?
- Who did you enlist help from?
- What advice would you give to your younger self to keep going when the going gets tough?
- You may even want to include what you are planning or thinking of doing next.

Tip: Try to include as much detail as you can. Describe what you can see, the people you are with and how you are feeling. Try to be as creative as possible but most importantly, have some fun with your story!



Activity Fill in the boxes to summarise YOU

One of my dreams is:

My greatest strengths are:

I will use my strengths to:

I am going to get better at / learn about:

I am proud of my achievement in:

I am going to carefully think through my decision on:

I am going to reduce my unhealthy habit of:

I am going to seek support from:

I will spend more time with the following person as it makes us both feel good:

I enjoy and will do more:

My failure at:

I am going to become more independent by:

I am looking forward to:

Has given me courage to do:

Because I learned:



Life skill development: Well done for getting to the end of this booklet and hope you found it interesting and thought provoking. Completing all the activities requires a lot of deep thinking and reflection and hopefully you will have learnt a lot about yourself along the way. In addition to the insights you will have gained through the activities, there are a fair number of other life skills you will have been developing through these activities too and here are a few of these additional skills:

- **Adaptability and willingness to change:** By engaging with all the activities and being open minded to change.
- **Problem solving:** Through learning about decision making and thinking an issue through in a logical way, you are understanding how to solve problems.
- **Willpower:** If you have started to change any unhealthy / unwanted habits or introduced something new in your life, that takes willpower.
- **Communications:** By being more self-aware, your confidence will grow and communications with other people will get easier. Did you talk to anyone about a decision you made, and did you find it easier to explain yourself?
- **Resilience:** Resilience is the ability to bounce back when things don't go as planned. You have learned about recovering from mistakes, forgiving yourself and moving on and considered how to overcome challenges in the future too.
- **Perseverance:** During the activities, did you reflect on anything that has needed perseverance in the past? Do any of your future dreams need perseverance too?
- **Writing skills:** You'll have written lots down during the activities and had to summarise and choose your words carefully so you can fit all the key points in. Being able to emphasise key points or facts is a life skill you'll use in many different contexts.
- **Emotion regulation:** Looking at yourself objectively, getting feedback from others, mindfully considering how you are behaving and feeling and recognising triggers all help to regulate control over emotions. Understanding that you can control your reaction to an event even if you can't control what's happening is an empowering realisation.
- **Growth mindset and open mindedness:** Someone has a growth mindset if they have a positive attitude towards learning and their ability to progress and achieve. Intelligence and learning can be developed and since you have worked through this whole booklet, you must be open minded and willing to learn.
- **And last but not least employability!** You have learnt about yourself and become clearer about your dreams for the future. You know what you are good at and how to use these skills more. You can make better decisions and you have thought about what you could learn from any mistakes. These could all be examples to talk about in interviews. And when you have 3 job offers, you'll know how to evaluate them to decide which is best for you!



[Actionforchildren.org.uk](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

Mental health resources and information including all the national helplines and useful sites such as Childline, NSPCC, The Samaritans, Bullying UK, Beat Eating Disorders, Self Harm and many others.

[Theministryofparenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Anxiety-help-book-for-Teens.pdf](https://www.theministryofparenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Anxiety-help-book-for-Teens.pdf)

Free anxiety workbook for teenagers incorporating lots of activities to help deal with anxiety and worry.

[Headspace.com/](https://www.headspace.com/)

Free trial available on this meditation app. Other free apps or meditations are available via the app store or YouTube.

[Getrevising.co.uk](https://www.getrevising.co.uk)

Free revision tools proven to boost your grades.

[Medium.com](https://www.medium.com)

30 great websites to expand your general knowledge on everything from art, science and philosophy to history, interesting facts and how stuff works.

Final Words

The ideas and activities presented in this booklet follow the fundamental coaching principle that only the individual really knows what is best for them: everyone is the expert of their own life. This booklet does not contain advice, only ideas and encouragement for people to think how to best apply them.

Activities are designed for the reader to consider how they could use the skills in everyday life. They use the principles of logic and reflective consideration as well as drawing on positive psychology techniques to encourage the reader to focus on positive experiences, events and influences.

A huge thank you to the following teenagers who reviewed this work and gave me thoughtful and constructive feedback. Your ideas improved it immensely!

Evie Asprey	Ben Fairchild	Thomas Fairchild	Saskia Davies
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Joseph Ashby	Lizzie Jarvill	Henry Jarvill	Georgia Davies

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Louise Harrison, MCIPD, BEng (Hons)

FEEDBACK:

If you have any feedback, I would love hear from you so I can develop and improve it (via a message on Facebook: @selfdiscoverylifeskills).

