

CIRCUS ACT

A workbook for parents of adolescents

These were developed after years of working with parents of young people

These can be done in any order you like, in your own time, in your own home
or with friends or with a professional

Wishing you all the best on your life stage and journey

Balancing Act

The behaviour of an adolescent can seem like that of a trapeze artist, balancing on a high tight rope. You may feel you have little control on the situation and can only look on and hope for the best.

It is normal for adolescents to experiment and push boundaries. Some may get involved in risky behaviour (feeling like they are too high out of your reach on that wobbly tight rope) but many have strengths to help them across the other side (internal strengths and sometimes extra controls - like the pole used by a training trapeze artist).

Your role changes as they grow up. It may help to view your role with an adolescent child as a safety net. There is a balancing act for you too - of it not being too tight (otherwise they will bounce back completely) and not too loose (otherwise they will crash right through). You and the young person will have strengths and skills to help you both stay strong and keep balanced.

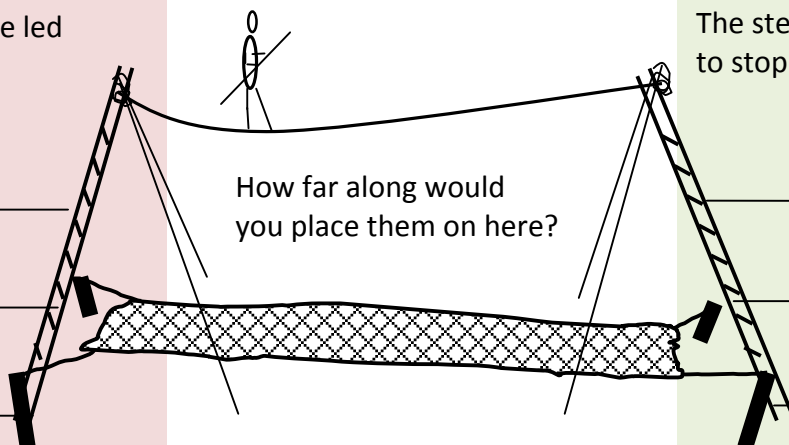
Lets look at the behaviours of the young person ('trapeze artist'). Describe what worries you most:

Which of these could be considered "normal" for their age?

What skills do they have to help themselves stay safe (balanced)?

Do you trust that they will stop this behaviour (get to the other side safely) in their own time? Why?

The steps that may have led to the behaviour:



How far along would you place them on here?

The steps that may help to stop the behaviour:

The safety net (you)

What are the strengths of the net (of your parenting)?:

What are some possible gaps (areas you want to improve on)?:

What boundaries or rules do you have in place? In what way could they be too tight or too loose?:

What words do you use to support the young person and their strengths?:

Which parts of your life may make it difficult for you to keep an even and strong 'safety net'?:

Who else is helping you hold up the 'safety net'?:

Do you think that your culture, ethnicity or religion impacts on your parenting style?
If so, in what way?:

Hall of Mirrors



Perceptions about past experiences can change and even be distorted. Some experiences will be a distant memory while others can still feel recent and be at the front of your mind.

What are your experiences of being parented?

What are some of the most positive memories?

What aspects do you try to act out in your own parenting?

What aspects of the parenting are you trying to avoid?

"Back stage"

Children and young people experience various events and transitions when growing up (for example moving to a new school or home, making or losing friends). These can sometimes occur when parents / carers experience changes as well (having more children / changing jobs / loss or separation). Take some time to consider events that you and / or your child have experienced over the last few years:

Your experiences:

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Young person's experiences:

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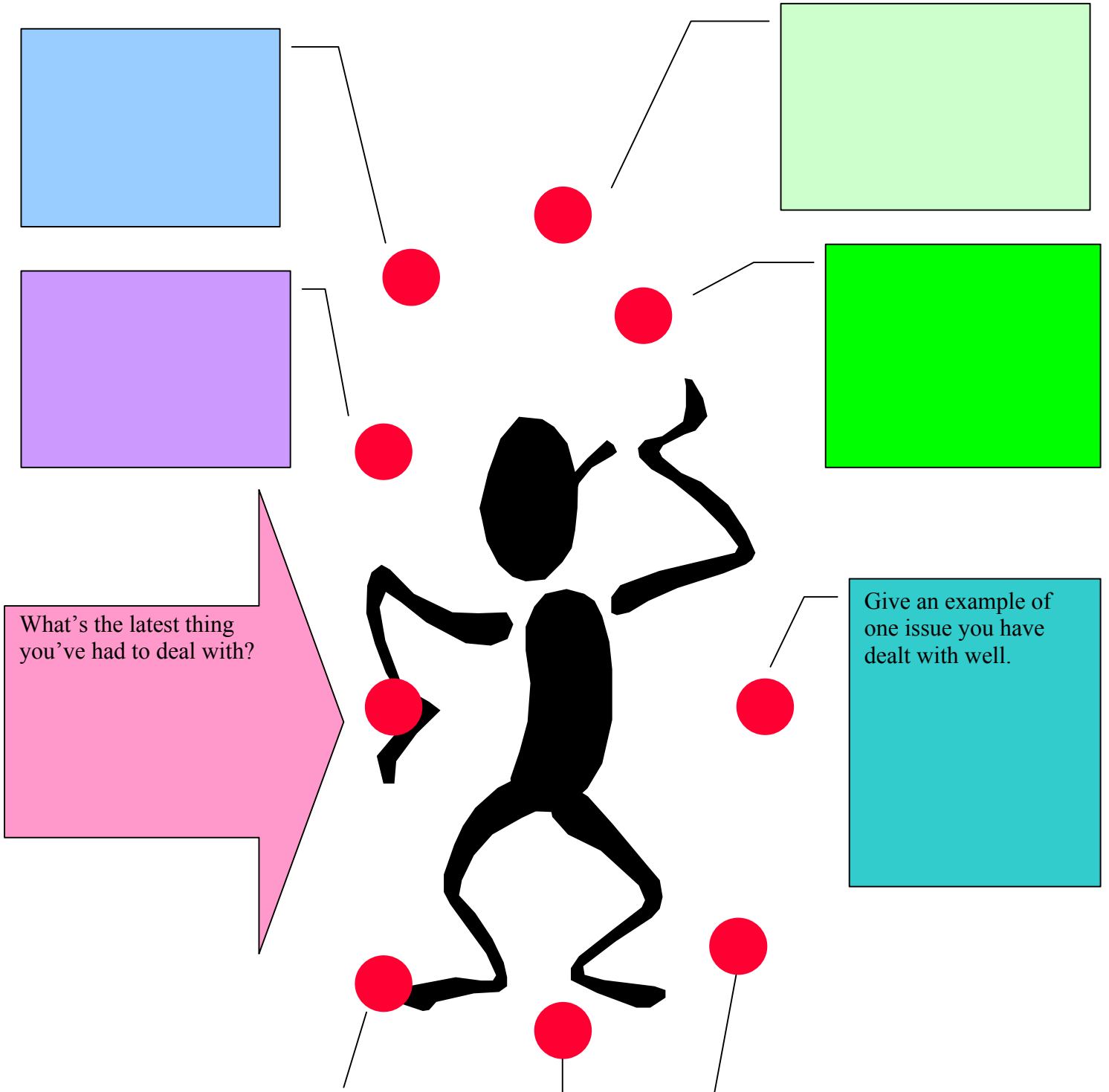
Time line:



Juggling Act

Juggling Act

Parents and carers have several jobs and issues that they need to juggle and prioritise. Take some time to note these down and number them in order of most important. Then note which you can let go of.



What's the latest thing you've had to deal with?

Give an example of one issue you have dealt with well.

Which items or factors are you willing to let go of? Which are not in your control?

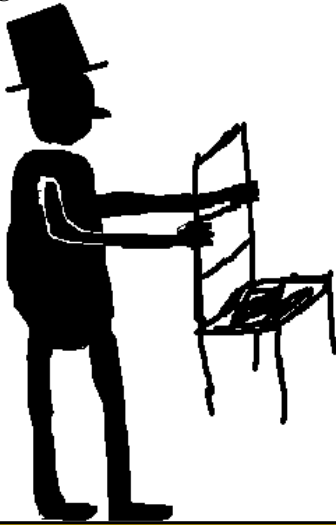
Seal Act

Young people also experience stresses and can sometimes feel as though they are having to 'perform' for others (for example doing well at school). How 'heavy' or serious these pressures feel can be influenced by the young person's ability to manage them. *In each segment of the ball write down a stress or pressure that your child is currently facing. Then in each segment of the stand, put a word for each of your child's skills and talents.*



Lion tamer

Rules and rule breaking can become a sore point in the family home. When they reach adolescence young people will naturally push boundaries. The power struggle can sometimes start to feel like you have had to become a lion tamer, trying to deal with a 'lion of a teenager'. Rules and boundaries that take into account the young person's age and their need to negotiate them can sometimes make a big difference. Take some time to think about the rules in your family:



What are the rules in your home?

Number in order of priority

How confident do you feel in being able to enforce the rules?

(not very) -----(very)

Are the rules generally followed?

(never) -----(always)

Give some examples of the consequences of rule breaking:

Those that worked well

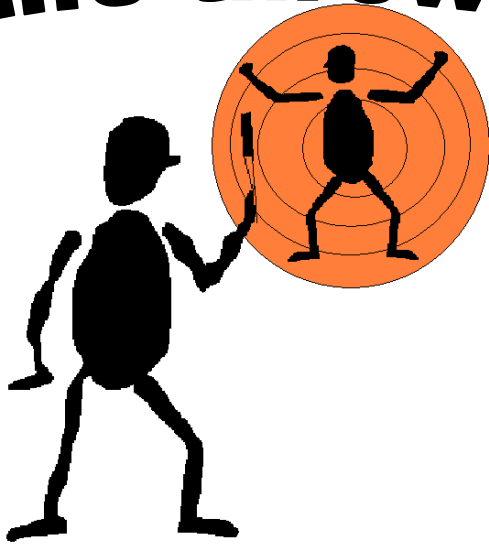
Those which are no longer working.

Do you negotiate the rules with your child?

(none) -----(all of them)

Circle the rules that you would be willing to negotiate. How could this be done?

Knife throwing



Having a fair and open discussion involves skill and trust. More so when the topic for discussion is sensitive or painful. Just as in the art of knife throwing, both parties need to trust each other to give and receive the information carefully and accurately. It is also important to be able to understand the situation from the other person's point of view.

*First, recall an argument or difficult discussion that you had recently.
What was the topic of this discussion?*

What was the other person trying to say / put across?

What were you trying to say / put across?

What was the most important issue for you?, that you would not back down on?

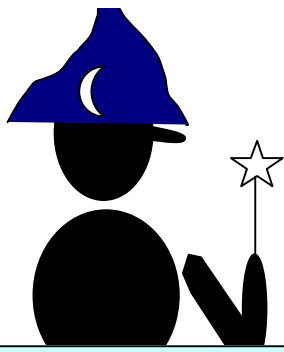
Why was this so important?

How did you express yourself – what was your tone of voice / body language?

How did you show that you were listening to their side of the argument?

How could you have said / done things differently?

Give some examples of ways in which you could say the most important point in different ways:



Magician's tricks

Unfortunately there is no magic wand when it comes to parenting. However it is always helpful to have some tricks up your sleeve to deal with difficult situations. As with the magician, the more practiced the trick the easier it will be to perform.

“Capturing the audience”

Think about what the young person is interested in (what are most important to them?) How could you use these to get them to comply with rules (removing or increasing them depending on behaviour).

If a consequence to breaking a rule or agreement involves something that is important to them (eg: pocket money) then the young person is more likely to comply with the agreement.

“The art of distraction”

Which rules would you be willing to negotiate with the young person? In what way?

If the young person has the impression that they have had a say in the negotiation of a rule or agreement then they are more likely to stick to it. An agreement is an understanding between all involved.

“The finale”

Think of a rule or agreement you want to establish. Say why this important to you:

What areas could be negotiable?

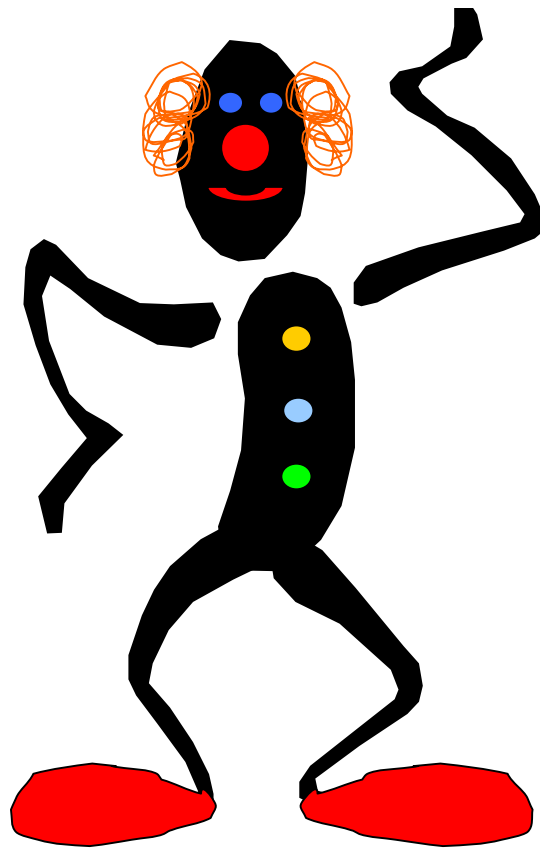
What would be the consequence if it is broken?

What would be the consequence if it is broken again?

How will you know that the young person has understood this agreement?

If you follow through with your promises then there is more chance the young person will too.

Clown act



In the circus performance the Clown Act is used as a 'time out' inbetween the more technical acts. It provides a light relief and space to laugh. Just as in family life, it is important to share good-times and give yourself and your children time to do things that are fun.

What are some activities that you enjoy doing for yourself? Try to think of things that don't cost any money and also may require a little saving.

What are some activities that your child enjoys?

What are some activities that you or your child/ren enjoy doing as a family?

Acknowledgements

The first exercise in this booklet was inspired by my own mum. When I was 16 years old she wrote a note in my birthday card that spoke of her fears and hopes for me as a teenager. She referred to a letter she had read in a book, between a mother and her daughter, that spoke of the trapeze artist and the safety net. She said that she hoped her parenting was able to act as a safety net that was not too tight or too loose.

She has continued to be a strong safety-net while I've travelled, embarked on a career of Social Work and started the most amazing journey as a step-mum and then mum.

This booklet and the additional exercises came about from further discussions with my mum while I completed a course titled 'Supporting Parents of Teenagers' delivered by the Trust for Study of Adolescence. The questions and tips are drawn from different studies that have looked at 'what works' for parenting teens.

It is hoped that parents will benefit from reflecting on the questions in order to consider positive steps forward.

Wishing you all the best in your journey as a parent.

Dr Roberta Evans