

# SOAR



**The honest  
and straight  
talking toolkit  
for parents &  
teenagers.**



# Who are Soar?

SOAR BELIEVES THERE IS GREATNESS WITHIN ALL YOUNG PEOPLE.

We release this by creating and delivering early intervention, character development workshops for young people aged 13 to 18 years from all backgrounds, where they can build their Awareness, Confidence, and Emotional Resilience. Our modern world is requiring a different set of skills – emotional agility and range is required to be adaptable for an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Soar is educating for the future.

We believe in engaging with teens early and on their own terms. We know that developing their mental and emotional skills to navigate life successfully is where we can have the most impact. Proficiency at maths or multiple languages will only get them so far. We are educating to ensure that teens can use these skills to the best of their abilities by being prepared for the challenges life throws at them.

## So far, we have:

Worked with over

**45,000 teenagers**

Created

**7 groundbreaking programmes**

**On-boarded**

**40 young adults**

at various stages of facilitator training

**Created 2 online programmes**

to support young people during Covid.

## What young people say about us:

**92%**

participants felt they **had a better understanding of themselves and others**, because of a Soar workshop.

**73%**

**felt more motivated to pursue their dreams/goals** because of a Soar workshop.

**92%**

of young people **felt this program should be available to other young people** their age.

Best practice partners include, AIB, Davy, KPMG & A&L Goodbody

## We have won:

Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Impact Award, Vodafone World of Difference Award, Captain Cathal Ryan Award & Rethink Ireland “Game Changer” 2018 – 2021

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**WE'RE FOR  
TEENAGERS**



Mark McDonnell, CEO

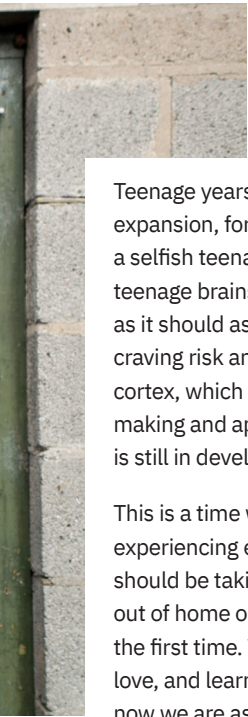
# The way things are...

## HOW INCREDIBLE HAVE TEENAGERS BEEN? NO SERIOUSLY, HOW INCREDIBLE HAVE THEY BEEN?

No doubt the last year has challenged us all. We've faced job insecurity and job loss, isolation and loneliness. We have been separated from the things and the people that bring us joy, and unfortunately for some, we've lost loved ones. Never has this generation faced such a collective challenge; and as a result, the examination of our own mental health and that of those closest to us. It has been difficult for us all.

But I believe as we reflect on the last year we need to halt proceedings and single out our teenagers for special mention. They've had it harder than most.

One of the more maddening aspects of our collective experience since March has been the large sections of the adult population, the media, and public representatives expecting a 17-year-old to be responding to pandemic challenges the same way a 57-year-old would. From a neurological and physiological perspective, they are very different, and for people who should know better to not appreciate the differences is ill-informed at best, and negligent at worst.



Teenage years are a time for exploration, for expansion, for taking risks. This phase is not a selfish teenage indulgence. In fact, it's their teenage brains conducting behaviour exactly as it should as their limbic brain is in overdrive craving risk and adventure, and their frontal cortex, which is responsible for decision making and appreciating other's perspectives, is still in development.

This is a time when they should be experiencing essential rites of passage. Many should be taking holidays with friends, moving out of home or experiencing college life for the first time. Where once they were falling in love, and learning about the world together now we are asking them to stay inside, to not be with their friends, to start school or college on Zoom and to be cut off from all they enjoy and love.

This situation goes against every surging teenage impulse. Rather than berating them, I think we should be taking a minute and offering a nationwide round of applause.

There's no doubt the above challenges have resulted in suffering for many teenagers. We are seeing increased levels of anxiety and depression on top of what was already a mental health epidemic amongst our teenagers. For many with underlying challenges it has greatly intensified their struggle. For others, it may be the first time they are experiencing scary and unfamiliar feelings and emotions. This is serious. And worryingly places even more strain on a system already unable to cope with demand.

This is why Soar created an early intervention and preventative approach to teenage wellbeing. We engage with teenagers upstream and work with them to develop essential characteristics such as Self-awareness, Confidence and Coping Skills to navigate what is an increasingly complex and challenging world. We equip teenagers for the future rather than wait for problems to occur.

Encouragingly, what we are seeing in Soar workshops also gives reasons to be hopeful. A 16-year-old girl in a Dublin school responded with "I've learned to respect myself" when asked what she had learned from the previous 10 months. We have heard teenagers enjoy the lack of distraction and manic pace of life. They have spoken about how they have used the experience of previous challenges to cope during this period. Many teenagers have welcomed the increased time and attention from their parents as they work from home, and there has been a huge increase in teenagers openly expressing love and care for their families. It is clear the reality is more nuanced than we may believe....

Teenagers are wise, they are resilient, and they are responding in ways we couldn't have imagined. But we wouldn't know any of this without listening to approx. 3,500 of them through our workshops in 2020. And maybe there's the problem.

Spending more time speaking WITH teenagers rather than ABOUT them would give us all a greater appreciation for how incredible they have been during their greatest challenge.

# The teen Journal



## SUBMISSIONS FROM CREW

### Elliot

**The lockdown has really helped me realise how truly grateful I am for my friends.**

We've had to change how we interact because of Covid but if it wasn't for my friends I don't know how I would've gotten through the year. Like everyone else this year has been really hard on my mental health, the way secondary school going teens are being treated hasn't helped at all.

I haven't learned anything about myself but I have learned how to be alone with myself. Instead of constantly looking for someone to be around I've learned to be my own company and I found I really enjoy being by myself. I miss my friends an awful lot but I'm not afraid to just be alone now.

And the people blaming us are the same people holding anti-lockdown protests, not wearing masks properly or at all, and breaking restrictions. I feel like teens have had to act more like adults than the actual adults. And our concerns aren't being brushed off a lot, it's really infuriating.

I hope people can be more compassionate and care for each other more. I'm not sure if it will happen hopefully people will see the importance of good relationships with your neighbours and just care more about people in the world because we've all missed human interaction during this time maybe that will motivate people to care more when they do see people and stop with certain prejudices.



## Adrienne

**I like my own company. I do need the odd socially distanced walk or coffee but overall I think I'll miss how much time I had to just do nothing in lockdown.**

That it'd be quite difficult to unify us all. When cooperation was most needed, it was quite hard to come by. We saw the best of the world and the worst of the world.

I think I'm much more willing to just do the thing I want to do without hesitation. Since none of us saw the first lockdown coming or any of the ones after that, you never really know if you'll be able to do that thing you want to do but might put off in a couple weeks. So, I'm starting to act like there's a lockdown coming next week and squeeze a month's worth of experiences and fun into each week.

The blame for spreading the virus being put on teenagers. I think a lot has been asked of us, in years of our life that we won't really get to repeat, but still, if one group of teenagers has a party then we're treated like we're all responsible.

## Jamie

**I learned that I don't need to be around people all the time like I thought I did.**

I am a people person. I used to never be alone either with my friends or my family but I can now say I can be alone and it's good.

I have realised that the world isn't as together as I thought it was. Unfortunately when George Floyd died earlier in the year that really stood out to me and how people still don't accept people for who they are no matter how they look or what they believe in.

The lockdown has helped my relationship with my mam we have gotten a lot closer. Not to say that we weren't close before but we really have gotten a lot closer and it has been good for us.



## Charli

**I don't know if it's related to lockdown but this year I feel like I have become more aware and considerate. For example, aware of people's triggers and how to try to avoid them. My own included!**

I think that society has already changed. Lockdown has given us an opportunity to take a breather and a step back to see how we're doing so many things so very wrong. We have adapted and we have tried to change some unjust parts of our world. A lot more needs to be done but we have changed nonetheless.

I learned that I like being alone but not feeling like i'm alone. I like company but in small doses but i'm working on letting more people in.

That it's messy. If covid-19 didn't happen I don't think the planet would have lasted any longer. Also that there is good out there just you need to look in the right places and educate yourself.

I read so much more now, I probably read at least two or three books a month.

I think people have now realised that everything has faults some more than others. i'd like to see less inequality between everyone as in everyone deserves to be treated the same regardless of gender, race, religion etc. Now is the time for change and embrace what makes us different.

I have learned that the world waits for nobody and when things change, we must change too. The world would be pretty boring without change anyway.

—Anon



HAPPY ♡  
Inspired ♡  
Excited



I just wanted to say thank you, for everything. I'll admit I hated the workshop, but ultimately I needed it & the one to one talk at the end but more importantly that boost of confidence you gave me. Consider this & the picture my way of saying thank you & I wish you all the very best of luck in the future.

Thanks again.  
Eric.



## Jessica

Going to school, hanging out with my friends was an escape . . . kinda been learning to cope with it by myself on dealing with emotions during lockdown.

## Taylor

I now appreciate family more, because before this happened, mam would be in work, I'd be in school, she'd be watching telly after work, I'd be out with friends. Now we are sitting at home with a lot more time together, that's appreciated.

## Ben's Poem

**We meet**

**We talk**

**You talk**

**I fall apart**

**You listen**

**You hear**

**You inspire**

**You show**

**You unveil**

**You show good**

**Worth**

**Value**

**Your eyes see a beauty**

**Not because you choose to**

**Because it's there**

**And you have the value**

**You see it**

**You wish for a mirror**

**But my eyes are fogged**

**You talk**

**We talk**

**You distract**

**But you try**

**And it means the world.**





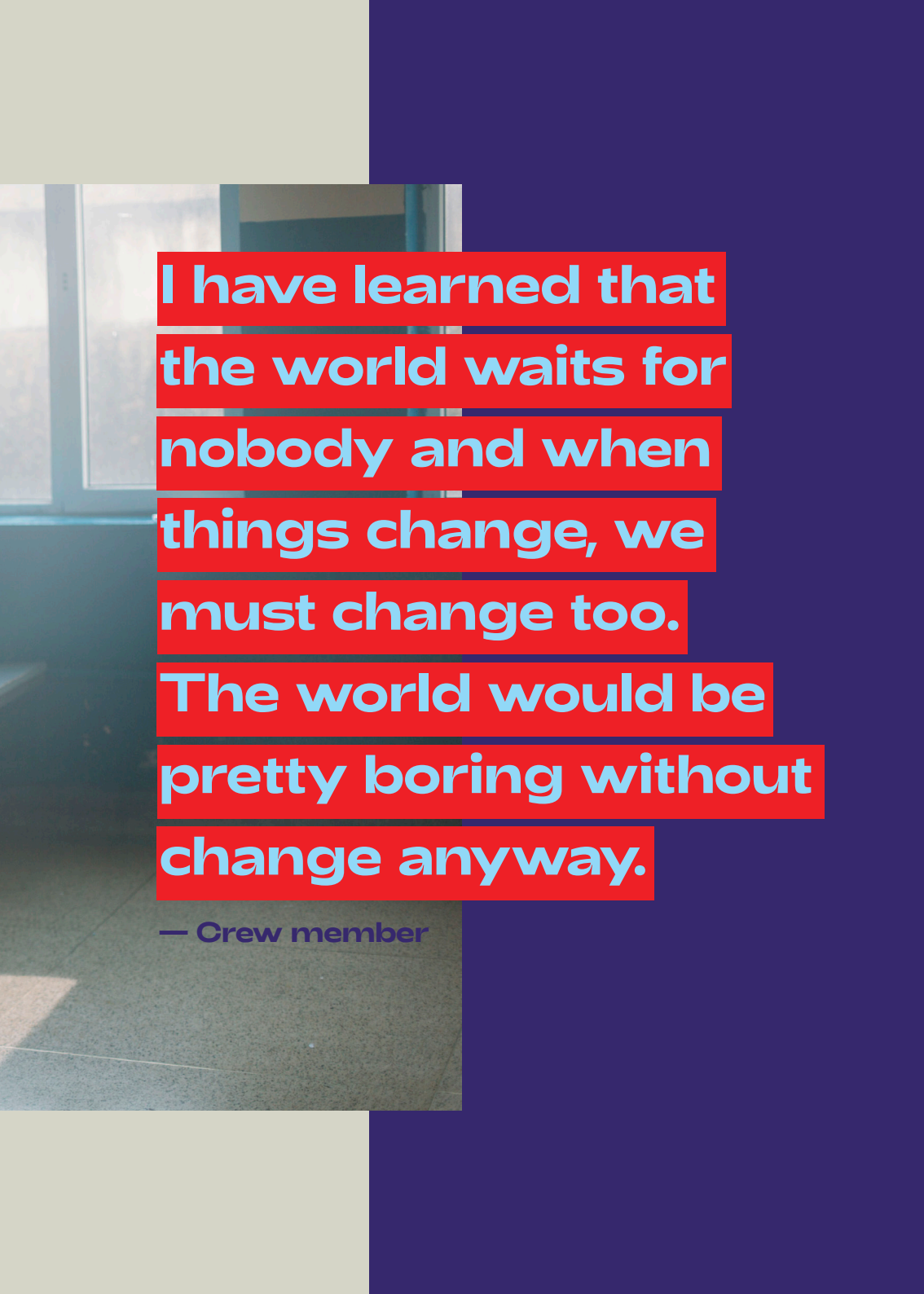
**I have learned that I can decide my own fate. If I'm not happy with myself or how I view myself, I can change that. Sometimes, only I can change that.**

**— Jay**

**The leaving cert got cancelled and it took me a while to figure out if that was a high or a low. This year has felt both the longest and the shortest.**

**— George**





**I have learned that  
the world waits for  
nobody and when  
things change, we  
must change too.  
The world would be  
pretty boring without  
change anyway.**

**— Crew member**

# Raising resilient teens

RICHARD HOGAN



As a systemically trained family psychotherapist working with teenagers, I have noticed a shift in what adolescents are presenting with in the therapeutic setting. Traditionally, identity, bullying rupture with peers would be the most common issues in therapy but over the last several years more and more teenagers are struggling with anxiety. It is impacting their ability to go to school, play sports or simply meet friends. I have found myself analyzing this rather modern phenomenon over the years. Why is it these teenagers are experiencing such a high level of anxiety. You could argue that the statistics illuminate that we are in the middle of an anxiety pandemic.

So, what has caused this? Well, I think we have the perfect storm for anxiety. We are mammals, which means we love to be connected. Meeting friends and receiving positive feedback from those interactions change the neural pathways in the brain in a positive way. With the arrival of devices like smartphones and multiplayer games children are not connecting like they used to. Technology has disrupted our sense of connectivity with one another, which is rather ironic seeing as they were invented to connect us. Like a Trojan horse we welcomed them so completely into our worlds.

So, we must parent this and make sure our children are not excessively on their devices or games. I mentioned the perfect storm, technology is not solely to blame. We must always look at how we are parenting our children. Why is it, some children are more resilient than others? Are some children just born with more resilience than others? When talking with parents I like to utilise the analogy of how we teach our children to cross the road. How do we do that? We walk down to the crossing and we model for them how to cross the road safely. We point out the dangers and we explain they will pass and then they will be safe to cross the road. We would never say 'don't worry about the cars, I'll always be here to hold your hand'.

We know that's not true, and we want them prepared for when we are not there. The same can be said of adversity. We have to build our children's reservoir of tools so that they can meet challenges as they arrive. When we do this, our children will have the skills to meet any obstacle that comes into their life. Remember be by your child's side, not on it. When you're on their side you are problem solving for them and depleting that reservoir of tools. Never resolve the issues for them but teach them how to think it through for themselves. When we do this we will help our children to manage their anxiety when it arrives.

**Richard Hogan** is a systemically trained family psychotherapist registered with the Family Therapy Association of Ireland. He writes every Thursday for the Irish Examiner, where he explores mental health issues for teenagers, couples and families. Richard was shortlisted for a Fulbright scholarship and he is often invited onto shows such as The Hard Shoulder with Ivan Yates (Newstalk), The Today Show (RTE) and Weekend AM (Virgin Media) as an expert in the field of human behaviour, where he offers his expertise and strategies on how to overcome teenage mental health issue.



# The real-life impact of Covid-19

OUR LETTER TO PARENTS  
AND GUARDIANS:

## THIS YEAR HAS BEEN AN EXTREMELY CHALLENGING ONE BUT PARTICULARLY FOR PEOPLE RAISING TEENAGERS.

Parents and guardians have been fighting a battle to keep teenagers safe while also considering their mental health and their quest for freedom and independence. It can feel like family life has been stunted. We speak to teenagers every day of the week and they are resoundingly telling us that their key frustrations involve not seeing friends or being able to hang out. This year for the first time our conversations in schools have pivoted from peer pressure and friendship groups, to isolation and anxiety. These are unique challenges for young people who are experiencing a global pandemic. However, these are not the only things they are tell us. They are also happy to tell us that lockdown allowed more time to spend with family.

Teenagers are relishing the opportunity to get to know their parents as individuals. They tell us they love having the time with them to watch movies or bake. They are relieved that the pressure to always be out has been replaced with peace of getting to spend quality time with themselves and their families. “I loved the family movie nights which none of us have had the time to do for years”.

Overall, we have seen remarkable resilience from our teens who although they make up a small percentage of cases of Covid-19 are experiencing some of the most extreme disruptions to their lives. It is worth remembering the cost-benefit analysis they are perceiving when they choose to do the right thing and to praise them accordingly.



**I now appreciate family more, because before this happened, mam would be in work, I'd be in school, she'd be watching telly after work, I'd be out with friends. Now we are sitting at home with a lot more time together, that's appreciated..**

**— Taylor**

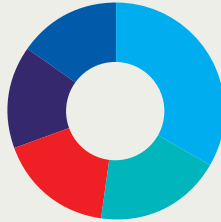
The outlook of most  
young people looking into  
the future is **optimistic\***



According to the “How’s Your Head?” report by SpunOut  
and The Department of Children and Youth Affairs.



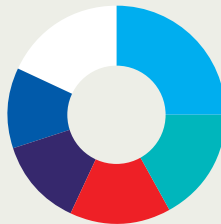
WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN FINDING HARD OVER COVID, THE ANSWERS WERE:



Missing Friends **35%**  
Health Affected **20%**  
School/College problems **18%**  
Cabin Fever **16%**  
Isolation/loneliness **16%**

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WHILE MANY WERE HAPPY TO INTEGRATE POSITIVE HABITS, THEY HAD FORMED INTO THEIR LIVES IN THE LONG-TERM, WHICH INCLUDES:



Exercise **25%**  
Self-care **17%**  
Quality time with Family **15%**  
Hobbies **13%**  
Self-development **12%**  
Other **18%**

**Resilience does not come from special qualities, but from the magic of the ordinary, not from resources in the minds, bodies of children, in their relationships, and in their families. This has profound implications for promoting competence and building social capital in individuals and communities.**

**– Ann Masten**

A photograph of a man standing on a paved street next to a long, weathered stone wall. The man is wearing a dark jacket and jeans, looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a two-story house with a grey roof and a dormer window, and a large green tree. The sky is clear and blue. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image in white font on red rectangular backgrounds.

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# Guide for Parents



## Guide for difficult conversations

Soar talks to over 5,000 teenagers a year. They share with us their fears, the first loves, their dreams, and the thoughts that keep them up at night. We feel really privileged that they welcome us into their world, and we know it is because we are experts at difficult conversations. There is nothing too small, nothing too scary, nothing too weird for us to talk about. We believe that clear communication is the cornerstone of good relationships, so here is our guide to having a difficult conversation.

## Getting the basics right

- Find a common goal and start from there, i.e. “Look, we both want a home where we feel respected, so lets talk about how we can make that happen”
- If you hold them accountable to agreements, then they get to do the same!
- If it’s getting heated and emotions are high, you should breath, lower the tone, and return to the common goal.
- Don’t go into a conversation with expectations. You may leave the best of friends, or you may have to walk away and calm down. Having the courage to sit and talk it through is the important thing.



- Trying to guess what the other person may say or do in advance is often not helpful.
- You may find that the other person was also dying to have this conversation with you but had not found the courage yet. It may be a relief for them too.
- Make sure that the person you are telling is in a position to hear it. You may have just come up with the courage to have a conversation but allow yourself to choose the right time to have it for you and the other person.

## What teens want adults to know

“A lot of teenagers want to be treated like adults and a lot of adults are aware of that. Unfortunately, some of them don’t know how. I think that this involves being honest and listening. When teenagers are listening to adults, although it may only be occasionally, we want to be told the truth and told all of the truth. It works both ways though and when we do speak, don’t just hear it, listen! Teenagers have a lot to say if you listen :)”

“I would have liked it if they didn’t blame this whole thing on us. Ok fair enough some people were still going out but there were a lot of adults not wearing masks and letting there kids go out and party. I just didn’t find in fair.”

“I think I wanted them to realize just how much of an effect this had on us and let us complain about it. Let us wallow a little. Family tensions can rise when you’re all around each other 24/7 so making an effort to change that. I loved the family movie nights which none of us have had the time to do for years. “

“We needed to be treated more like the kids we are, in a gentler manner. We’re extremely stressed and afraid and I’d say lonely during this time but adults have been very focused on themselves or they’re blaming us. They seem to forget that most of us aren’t adults or we’re barely adults. We needed more kindness and reassurance during this time than we got. It’s not fair. “

## How to hold a courageous conversation:

- Sometimes just listening is enough, you don't have to have all the answers.
- When holding someone else in a conversation try not to compare their situation to your situation straight away if you're trying to make them feel less alone in it. What they're saying can need its own space and time first.
- Watch Brene Brown's Empathy VS Sympathy short clip on YouTube. It's very helpful for seeing what someone might need to hear when they have just shared something with you.
- Try a new environment- sometimes getting out of the house or familiar surroundings can help you to have a different kind of conversation with someone. This might be a new coffee spot, a walk somewhere new, the car etc.
- Be willing to ask and answer questions, when you are opening up a conversation for a young person, they need to know it is a two way street not an interrogation. They will respect your honesty, and willingness to go there.

## Some pandemic specific questions:

- How are **YOU** really finding this time?
- This time is a little challenging for me because...
- Has being in lockdown impacted your relationships? (friends/family/self. etc)
- What's been the highlight of lockdown for you?
- What have you noticed about society in general/the world around you during this time?
- What has been the biggest changes in your life as a result of lockdown, will you take any with you from this experience?

**Remember you are doing great! There is no rule book and the fact that you are looking for answers means you are on the right path. So be good to yourself!**



## General conversations with teens:

- What was your childhood dream job? Is that still your dream? Why is/isn't that your dream?
- Who is someone you look up to/admire and why?
- What do you like most about yourself?
- When was the last time you cried? Can you remember why?
- What is a trait that you value most in a friend/friendship?
- Where do you want to be ten years from now?
- How are you really doing?
- Is there anything you need from me right now?
- Something I don't talk about enough is...
- One compliment that's always stuck with me is...
- The thing that I am most insecure about is...What's your favourite thing about me?
- If you really knew me, you would know...

## A helpful guide to self-care:

**You are important. You are raising a human during a pandemic.** Give yourself a break. Self-care is not just an excuse to check out of life, it is a vital part of allowing us to check in, but in a way that is manageable and connected. Make time for just yourself. Do something that makes you feel joy. Here are some recommendations from our team.

- **Roar** – Go to the nearest cliff, sea, lake or empty field. Breath in, open your mouth and roar and scream that tension away
- **Exercise** – sometimes getting a good sweat on can be a great physical release to the stress we hold
- **Talk** – start with a mate or someone you trust. If you're worried about yourself then seek out a therapist or counsellor. We all need to talk.
- **Laugh** – watch a comedy or call that mate that always gives you belly laughs.
- **Dance** – Even if it is around your kitchen. Be silly and shake that energy through your body.
- **Get creative** – Pick up that guitar, camera, pen, paint and just go for it. Let yourself explore, you don't need to be good.

# Do & & & & & & & & &

## Make time to listen.

You must listen to the small inconsequential stuff to earn the right to hear the big stuff. Would you tell someone your secrets if they hadn't proven they were interested.

## Involve them in decisions.

Like managing any team if they are part of the decision making, they are more likely to get involved productively with the task.

## Let them figure out their own stuff.

Teenagers are constantly telling us that parents swooping in to save the day makes them feel useless or that they can't be trusted. A little bit of stress and problem solving is not a bad thing.





& & & & & & **Don't** & & & &



## **Undermine or make fun of their friends.**

You might not approve of them, but they are the first person your young person is going to for advice. You don't want to alienate them.

## **Expect them to get it right the first time.**

Teens are processing so many emotions all the time, the expectations on them from friends, family, school are often vast and contradictory. They are bound to make a mistake. Show them that there is a way back from a mistake.

## **Compare them.**

This world is constantly putting teens on a scale. Be it exam points, weight, sports. There is always someone to be as good as or better than. Who they are is perfectly fine.

# Let's talk...

The previous pages have given you the tools for having a great conversation. Here is the challenge to go and do it. Below are some prompt questions for adults and teens to answer together to get you started. Remember great conversations are a two-way street. If you want to get honest answer, that means being brave and answering honestly yourself.

**What is the hardest challenge both of you have experienced through lockdown?**

**Would you have  
done anything  
differently?**

**Can you remember  
what made you  
laugh your head off  
during lockdown?**

**Who has been  
important to you,  
and why?**

**With no fear and  
anything possible what  
would you be doing  
this time next year?**



**How will that  
make you feel?**

**The work of Soar would not be possible without the support of our partners. Their collaboration is essential to Soar's long-term sustainability. The organisations listed below provide us with funding, expertise, and buckets of moral support. All ingredients we need to create the authentic spaces that our young people so desperately need.**

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### **Corporate Partners**

AIB  
DAVY  
Golden Bake  
LED Group ROBUS  
PEI Surgical

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### **Foundation Partners**

One Foundation  
ReThink Ireland

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### **Associate Partners**

The Ireland Funds  
The Ireland Funds Australia  
Community Foundation for Ireland  
Social Entrepreneurs Ireland

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### **Support Partners**

A& L Goodbody  
Emerald Travel  
Fenero  
GroupOn  
Irish Times  
KPMG  
McLardy, McShane  
Rothco  
Salesforce





**Text SOAR  
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donate €4 .**

Text costs €4. SOAR will receive a minimum of €3.25. Service Provider: LIKECHARITY. Helpline: 076 6805278

**WE'RE FOR  
TEENAGERS**

**The Soar Foundation**

The Chocolate Factory,  
26 Kings Inn Street, Dublin 1  
CHY - 20551  
Email [info@soar.ie](mailto:info@soar.ie)

f @soaireland  
@soar\_\_foundation  
@soar\_\_foundation



I thought if  
I don't think  
about it, it  
will go away  
but it didn't.

- Jack



**SOAR**