



## Making a real connection with young people this Youth Day (16 June)

Youth Day in South Africa commemorates the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976, when Black school students marched in protest of the Apartheid government's education policies. Sadly, an estimated 500 students lost their lives on this day, when fired upon by heavily armed police. This massacre led to a widespread revolt against the government and gained international attention exposing the brutality of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

As these young people sacrificed their lives for the freedoms that we enjoy today as South Africans, let's reach across the divide and truly connect with our young people this Youth Day.

Can you blame young people if they act out? They face endless reams of scary news plus constant social media on how to look, act and live. Add to that our country's heart-wrenching past and the challenge of choosing a career and finding employment. Young people tend to feel everything more intensely but may lack the impulse control and decision-making skills to make sense of it all.

### THE DANGERS OF THE DISCONNECT



All that pressure is leading to an increasing number of young South Africans finding escape in addiction, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school and even suicide. A big part of the struggle is the lack of connection with adults who are willing to listen without judgement and work with them to build a better future.

These tips may help to re-engage with the youth in a way that creates meaningful and healthy co-operation, steering them away from mind-numbing substances and behaviours.

### BE ENGAGED

Key to engaging the youth is to truly listen to them, which means being open-minded and non-judgemental. One tip is to take a walk together or to chat while busy with an activity. When there's less eye contact, it feels less like an interrogation and teens may find it easier to open up.



### FAMILY FIRST



Establish family traditions early on, such as eating dinner together or movie nights, and stick to them, no matter how much your kids act like they're hating it. Research has shown that family rituals are a powerful way to bond generations and provide a sense of stability, identity and place in the world.

### GET MOVING

Physical activity boosts self-esteem and mood – and it doesn't have to be a slog around a field. Allow young people to try out multiple options and encourage their efforts without force or judgement. The aim is to find something that's exciting and engaging, be it running, netball, a hip-hop dance class or dog training, so they'll want to do it regularly. PS.: Kids learn by example so get your own exercise shoes on too.



### KEEP TABS



No, this doesn't mean snooping through their search history. It means staying involved and the earlier you make this the family norm, the better. Remember, to provide a much-needed safe space in a turbulent world; you're responsible for sensible rules and boundaries, e.g. making sure you have met all their friends. Don't be put off by push-back – explain that it's not because you don't trust them; it's because you care and are genuinely interested.

### GET HELP

Sometimes, young people need more help than we can give. Fortunately, be it a church counsellor, psychologist or social work, there is professional help available. The **South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)** can point you in the right direction.

Whitney Houston was spot on when she sang that the children are our future and that we should teach them well, show them the beauty they possess and give them a sense of pride. This is the most precious gift we can give to the youth of today – and it's a gift that will keep on giving.



**If you need to open up to someone, contact your employee health and wellness programme for professional and confidential counselling.**

#### References

- Destinations For Teens Mental Health Treatment Center
- Independent Online (IOL)
- Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment journal
- Partnership to End Addiction
- South African Government
- South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP)
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)

- Education department toll free: **0800 111 011**
- Send a USSD to: **\*134\*664\*38#**
- Email: **wced@mhg.co.za**

**Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves**

