

Using the Viva Phone Mentoring Programme with Teenagers and Adolescents

A Companion Guide



Introduction

The six themes covered within Viva's Child and Family Phone Mentoring Programme are relevant for teenagers and adolescents, and including teenagers in the mentoring programme could have a significant impact in supporting them through the particular challenges and difficulties they face at this time.

You should continue to use the 'conversation guides' provided for each conversation, but this guide provides some advice on adaptations to ensure that your conversations are relevant and helpful for use with young people aged 13-18.

How has the COVID pandemic impacted adolescents?

While every child and young person will have a unique experience, COVID-19 has had specific impacts on adolescents and teenagers which we should be aware of when beginning a mentoring process during this time.

Teenagers are at a key phase in their development, as they go through many physical changes and may be facing issues around sexual and reproductive health, and they are developing a sense of individual identity, social skills, and dreams for the future. Interacting with their peers plays a key role in teenagers' development.

For teenagers, the support of the peer group – their friends – is really important as they try to move away from relying on their family for advice and support. Social distancing and interruption of typical school routine are especially challenging for adolescents. They may be missing school, friends and socialisation even more than younger children. It is important to provide teenagers with extra support as well as giving them the space to express themselves independently.

During an emergency, adolescents in particular may feel disempowered and like they lack a voice to change things. At the same time, they may take on adult roles without enough support or capacity for this. If parents or caregivers are infected, quarantined, or die, this has an emotional impact as well as potentially increasing young people's caring responsibilities at home.

Disruptions to formal and informal work are creating new pressure on livelihoods and family income, increasing the possibility of negative coping strategies such as child labour and early marriage. Young women and girls, or young men and boys, may have been forced into "lockdown" with their abusers. Support structures for at-risk young people such as safe spaces, women's centres, life-skills programmes are likely to be closed due to physical distancing.

'Being a teenager is difficult no matter what, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is making it even harder. With school closures and cancelled events, many teens are missing out on some of the biggest moments of their young lives – as well as everyday moments like chatting with friends and participating in class.'

~ Unicef

How can we use the mentoring programme with adolescents: some principles

For adolescents, it may be appropriate to consider using mentors of the same gender as the young person, and being very clear about establishing boundaries of what kind of information can be shared during the conversation.

General principles for adapting each conversation

Think about each topic through the lens of what is important for adolescents and their development, and make sure you are aware of how the topic interacts with their individual home situation and the issues they are facing. Think about:

- ***Could you turn the introduction activity or game which begins each call with the child into more of a conversation or discussion?***
- ***Can you allow the conversation to go into more depth in some parts, especially where the teenager shows more interest? Try to allow the conversation to be more guided by the mentee.***
- ***Be willing to share your own experiences on the questions and topics being discussed***
- ***Is there anything the young person wants to share about how their life situation or life at home interacts with this theme?***
- ***Could you talk to the teenager about how they could share the call information with younger siblings in the household?***
- ***Help the teenager to think through how the actions they take related to the theme can help them with developing into more of who they really want to be, and empower them to take more responsibility for their own life***

When you talk to the parent, also bear in mind these issues, and the challenges the adolescent is facing.

Think about your context

Read through each script before you begin the conversation, and think through which suggestions and ideas will be appropriate for the teenagers you are working with. For example – do they have outside space, or access to the internet or television? Some activities are more practical in some contexts, so think this through before you start the call, and include ideas and suggestions which are more likely to be engaging for the teenagers you are working with.

Some ideas for each call

Read this section to support your preparation for each call.

Call 1: COVID-19 Awareness

Teenagers in particular may be finding social distancing a real pressure on their wellbeing, so be prepared to help them think about ways to connect with others while still respecting distancing rules. Teenagers can also be empowered by finding ways they can take positive action during the crisis.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt **Conversation Guide 1: Child's Conversation**



For the introductory activity, instead of the 'Changes - good and bad' activity, why not ask the teenager: 'Can you think of a good change that has happened in your life in the last year?' or 'What are some of the big changes you remember happening in your life?' (e.g. a family move, a new school, a new sibling...) and be prepared to talk about changes that have happened in your own life.



For 'Topic 1: COVID-19 - What's the story?', help teenagers to understand their own role in following rules and guidelines, and how by doing this they are proactively helping others in their community.



For 'Topic 2: Talk about it' instead of drawing a picture, there may be other activities you could suggest as ways the teenager can share their feelings about COVID-19, such as journaling, creating a collage, or writing a story or poem.



For 'Wrap up: What can we do together this week?' When discussing actions after the call consider that teenagers can take part in fact-finding and research. They could explore a topic and report back to the family from a radio programme, a newspaper article, or the internet.



Share how teenagers can make a difference like standing up for someone facing discrimination or helping a neighbour with food deliveries if they live alone.



Instead of drawing a picture to encourage others, teenagers could write letters to healthcare workers or support projects providing meals or support to frontline workers

Call 2: Strong families

Many teenagers may feel that they need space and time away from their parents and siblings. This is a normal reaction, especially when opportunities to have social interactions with friends have been removed. Be sensitive to this and try to help the parent and teenager think about specific activities that will be enjoyable or interesting for the teenager. Try to encourage the parent that they might be able to find new activities or start new traditions for the whole family, such as playing a game together after dinner.

Be aware that there may be difficult issues emerging between parents and teenagers as economic pressures and lack of school access may be changing what parents are expecting from older children in terms of taking on more responsibilities at home or outside the house.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt [Conversation Guide 2: Child's Conversation](#)



For the introductory activity, 'Me and my family', instead of the game, use the prompts to engage the teenager in a discussion about the different people in the house and what they appreciate about them.



For 'Topic 2: My family', remember that teenagers often appreciate having extra responsibilities. Help them to think about if there are activities at home that they would like to help with or learn more about from their parent.



The game sent after the call could be led by the teenager for the rest of the family, or the teenager could read the story 'My Hero is You' to younger siblings.

Call 3: Mental health and resilience

Adolescents may respond in similar ways to adults during an emergency, but there are some specific reactions that are more common in teenagers. Adolescents may sometimes respond to the emergency with isolation, irritation, rejection of rules and aggressive behaviour. Some risk-taking behaviour such as recklessness, alcohol or drug abuse, self-harm, and eating disorders are also possible. Others become more fearful and anxious. Help the parent to think about any unusual behaviour or response from the teenager during the parent's call.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt [Conversation Guide 3: Child's Conversation](#)



For 'Introduce the theme: My feelings and emotions' ask the teenager about if they can remember something that made them feel each of these emotions in the last few months



When talking about how the teenager is feeling in 'Topic 1: How do I feel?' give them a chance to talk about what they have been missing or have missed out on in this time, and think together about creative ways to find the same types of connections in new ways. Allow the teenager to express negative emotions and reassure them that it is ok to find things difficult.



For 'Topic 2: What can I do with my feelings?' encourage young people to think about their own solutions, for example ways they could celebrate ending the school year or any other events they have missed out on. How could they celebrate virtually or with family?



When thinking about strategies and solutions together, think about ideas appropriate for teenagers, such as watching a movie or reading, learning a new skill, cooking, gardening or connecting with others. Reassure them that it is ok to do something you enjoy and to spend time on your own, but also encourage young people to include coping strategies that help them to stay connected to others.

Call 4: Staying Safe at Home

While most parents are trying hard to keep children safe, be aware that some adolescents will be facing difficult or dangerous situations at home and we should be sensitive to this possibility during this conversation. Teenagers may be facing additional pressures at home such as being pushed towards involvement in child labour or early marriage. The risk of physical violence or sexual abuse at home may have increased due to lockdown. Your mentoring call should not try to take the place of professional support or intervention, but you may become aware of these issues during your call. If this happens, make sure you refer this concern according to your organisation's child protection reporting procedure.

During the conversation with parents, when discussing challenging behaviour in teenagers, suggest that they allow their teen to make suggestions about alternatives and decide together on clear and fair rules and boundaries.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt [Conversation Guide 4: Child's Conversation](#)



During 'Introduce the theme: Staying safe at home' you might think about having a general discussion about things we can do to be kind to each other, or to hurt each other, and why this sometimes happens with our friends, or at home



When discussing 'Topic 1: Me and my body', allow the teenager to share anything they want to and to guide this part of the conversation. Don't push the mentee to share anything they feel uncomfortable talking about.



If appropriate, tell the teenager about available services or who they could contact if they faced violence or abuse, and if you have any concerns based on your conversation, report this to your programme supervisor or safeguarding officer.

Call 5: Online Safety

It is important to make sure that adolescents are using social media in positive and healthy ways. Adolescents may depend on their mobile devices to connect with their friends, and it is more important for parents to help them use time online in a positive way rather than simply limiting it.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt [Conversation Guide 5: Child's Conversation](#)



In 'Topic 2: How I can stay safe online', adapt your conversation to focus on issues that may affect adolescents more, such as online harassment and grooming, and online bullying. Allow the conversation to be guided by the young person and what they share about the challenges they face online.



When thinking about the amount of time we spend online in 'Wrap up: What can we do together this week?' be aware that being online more might be important for teenagers during this time to enable connection and interaction with peers. Rather than focusing purely on the amount of time spent online, help the teenager to think about what they are doing online and how this affects their wellbeing – some activities, such as reading the news very often, or those which expose them to bullying, may actually increase their anxiety. Help the teenager to think through how they can choose to use social media and time online in positive and healthy ways.

Call 6: Learning Together

Bear in mind that there may be several challenges facing teenagers who are spending more time at home and where school is closed. These young people might be at risk of becoming involved in child labour, or early marriage, or may simply be being asked to take on caring responsibilities or household chores which prevent them from continuing their learning.

Be mindful of this and try to help the family to prioritise the wellbeing of the child, and their developmental opportunities. Talk with the parent about how this can be possible in their current circumstances, and help the teenager to think about how they can continue to learn and grow even within these circumstances.

Also be aware that these issues may affect girls and boys differently, and encourage parents to give equal opportunities and responsibilities to girls and boys.

Use these suggestions to help you adapt *Conversation Guide 6: Child's Conversation*



In 'Topic 2: Activities in my day', help the teenager to think about how they can balance learning with other responsibilities at home, and how they can advocate for their needs



Encourage the teenager to have a good balance with time to relax, along with structured time for chores and schoolwork.



When planning their day, the adolescent should include time for homework or distance learning as well as time to exercise and get outside the house (if possible) even for a short amount of time. A routine can help young people to feel grounded and reduce stress.

Key resources for more information:

- **John Hopkins University, The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Adolescents' (May 2020) <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/05/11/covid-19-and-adolescents/>**
- **Unicef, Practical Tips on Engaging Adolescents and Youth in the COVID-19 Response <https://www.unicef.org/documents/practical-tips-engaging-adolescents-youth-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-response>**
- **Parenting Tip Sheet: 'COVID-19 Parenting: Tips for Parenting Teens' available at <https://www.covid19parenting.com/>**
- **Unicef, 'How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus (COVID-19)' <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>**

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