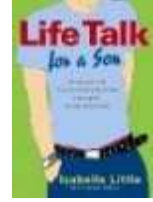


Life Talk™ Forum

News 11



Please forward to anyone who might be interested
(Suggestion: print for a complete record) ©Izabella Little

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FORUM BACKGROUND

Author of the *Life Talk* books, Izabella Little Gates, co-ordinates the Forum and our aim is to: create awareness, highlight areas that can make a positive difference to the lives of adolescents and parents, help to facilitate communication, and create happy, successful and fulfilled youth guided by sound values.

PREVIOUS ISSUES:

Newsletters 1 – 10 covered: clubs; drugs; cell phones; teenage drinking; pocket money; hubbly bubbly; porn; chewing tobacco; fake IDs; communication; discipline & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; sexual activity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; self-esteem; bullying; sexual abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; teen values; MXit; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', head injuries; counsellors, 'rape me' games and helpful reading. (If you didn't get the newsletter/s, download them from www.lifetalk.co.za or email forum@lifetalk.co.za)

ENHANCED ANTI TEEN-DRINKING INITIATIVE

In spite of all the repercussions, teen drinking continues at an alarming rate. Of the hundreds of heartbreaking stories shared with the Life Talk Forum, alcohol lies at the root of about 80% of them. Thousands of young lives are being damaged or totally destroyed by alcohol, and all communities are affected, from the wealthiest to the poorest.

In the book *Life Talk for Parents** chapters 3 and 4 cover the reality of what is happening and the reasons cited by teens and counsellors for the increase in underage drinking. We are facing a crisis in this area, and it continues to increase, hence our expanded drive to alert parents to the dangers and key areas and solutions to focus on.

Alcohol is a gateway to drugs and other problems, and some of the emails received recently include "We went to a party on Saturday, got trashed, smoked some weed and things got out of control. My friend was raped, another guy got stabbed, and I tried Ecstasy for the first time..." and "We all got drunk and fooled around, and I let my mates video me having sex. Now everyone's seen it and my life is over. I can't go back to school. Please help me..." and "My son is at a top school but he's become aggressive, his marks have dropped, he's admitted to drinking every day and now he's smoking hubbly through vodka instead of water..." and this one: "I always serve booze at my kids' parties and it's been OK, but last night a fight broke out and a boy was badly injured, now everyone says it's my fault...". These are just a few of hundreds of such stories.

Somehow we **have to increase** parents' awareness of the realities. We have to do something to reduce what's happening. One development is that Life Talk is undertaking a joint initiative with the ARA (the Industry Association for Responsible Alcohol use) to address the crisis of underage drinking. More details will be available as the initiative gains momentum.

And if you would like to help, either by hosting talks, disseminating newsletters, mobilising others, or any other way, we'd love to hear from you!

INITIATION OR BULLYING?

Many heated debates are taking place about some of the recent incidents of “initiation” and bullying at schools. We’ve received plenty of feedback and some of the polarising taking place is fascinating, with three distinct groups being apparent:

1. **The “boys mustn’t be wimps” group.** Many fathers (and some moms) feel that “a bit of initiation-linked bruising doesn’t do any harm” and one must avoid encouraging a society of softies. Discussions get quite heated when this group springs into defending the goings-on covered in recent media reports. They express their frustration with many of today’s adolescents and young adults who, in their opinion, display a lack a strength of character and drive, and have a tendency to ‘drift’ through life without knuckling down and taking charge of their lives.
2. **The “any kind of violence is intolerable” group** comprises mostly moms, and also dads who themselves were bullied.
3. **The “relaxed/not that interested” group** who feel that much ado is taking place over the issues, that serious incidents are unacceptable, but some initiation or bullying has always been around and always will be, “life goes on”.

Based on reports from various schools, parents and teens, intimidation that masquerades as being “initiation-linked” still takes place in a number of schools, and some instances can be pretty drastic. In our opinion, initiation that involves pain or humiliation has more to do with bullying than initiation. Much as those in Group 1 may have valid concerns about some of the perceived lack of drive or gumption, violence and intimidation are also not the answer.

In many environments bullying is on the increase and it is causing much trauma and heartache. In the book, the chapter on **Bullying*** looks at the kinds of behaviour that can be classified as bullying, and it explores the reasons for what’s happening and why we are seeing an increase in bullying. This is an area that calls for an urgent focus on addressing the causes, behaviour and solutions.

A DRUG-DEALER’S ALERT FOR PARENTS

With the ever-increasing availability and use of drugs, here’s some input from a drug-dealer (now in rehab for the fourth time) who shared the following with Izabella:

“Please tell parents that it’s vital for them to be more aware of the realities of what’s happening. My story starts like this: A good family and school, drinking at fifteen, weed at sixteen, steroids for 1st team rugby at seventeen, an uncontrollable drug habit by eighteen, a great physique and work as a bouncer at clubs.

“I could now easily fund my drug habit by dealing. The clubs, frequented by underage-teens, are the easiest place to sell drugs to your children. Parents think their kids are safe there because they’re in large groups of mates. They don’t realize how many drugs are available, and how people like me operate.

“Any child is a target for me. Not just the obviously disturbed, unhappy or insecure ones – **any child** is my target. With the exception of some who truly are not interested, I can get the majority onto drugs if I choose to.

“Alcohol is my best ally. The kids are all drinking, their inhibitions reduce, their decision-making is impaired and many will happily try a joint or an E (Ecstasy) once I approach them. I’ll offer them one E for a good price, and two more for free. I might lace the first joint with something more ‘fun’ like Heroin if I think it’s necessary. Or, if I think I’m struggling to succeed, I’ll lace their drink and drop their inhibitions some more.

“My greatest success comes from clubs frequented by affluent teens with plenty of pocket money, but even R20 in their pocket will bring me success. I’ve made good bucks in seedy clubs too. A habit like mine can cost R2,000+ a day on drugs, so the more kids I get the better. Divorce is another powerful ally. I just sympathise with them, offer an ear, some kind words - and an E, a joint or some Tik. Some of my mates don’t do drugs at all, but their sales go to pay for fancy cars, travel and other luxuries.

"I'm now 24, I've failed in rehab a number of times, I look good and trustworthy, and my skills are hard to resist. But I'm now determined to change, I realize my mistakes, and I want to help prevent some of what's happening in every club, in every town.

"Please don't let your children go to clubs. The ones that forbid alcohol and target the fourteen-fifteen year olds are just as bad as the popular over-18s. Drug dealers are everywhere and your child will for sure be targeted at some stage. **No-one** can ever be 100% safe from that approach. No matter how strong your child is, how well brought up with the best values, you **never** know how he/she will react one night, when under pressure, feeling down, celebrating or just having fun.

"If you totally insist that clubbing is OK then take and fetch your child yourself, and never stop re-enforcing your cautionary messages, and never stop checking for any worrying signs. This applies to parties too, especially the 'open parties' where large numbers are welcome. If you don't check you might well end up like my folks: they love me but they've exhausted all options and have now packed me off to rehab again – and this time they don't want to see me for two years. I might end up 'clean' but I'll always be an addict, and no-one, not them or me, will ever be able to trust me to remain clean forever. Whatever Life Talk tells you about, please listen to every word – they see what happens, they know people like me – and they're trying to help you and your kids avoid the hell that my family and I are in."

DIVORCE: A GROWING PRESENCE

Divorce is extremely tough on everyone involved and the after-shocks continue to be felt for years, often in areas that pop up unexpectedly. In the last few months we've had so many emails, both from adolescents and from parents – and some serious brainstorming is needed to see about minimising the heartache and fall-out involved. Some excerpts include:

- "My folks used to fight all the time and I thought they'd be happier apart. Now they've split & mom works two jobs, cries all the time, I have to change schools, they hate each other and I hardly see my dad. I wish I was dead!"
- "Why shouldn't I drink and do weed when life at home's such a mess? Mom's dating and dad's married to someone who doesn't like me, and us kids must just carry on. Taking stuff makes all the pain less, until one day when I can get away"
- "I wish I'd known that single-parenting would be so tough. I thought my marriage was bad, until I experienced this nightmare! My kids are angry and rebellious, I'm lonely and exhausted and struggling to make ends meet, and I'm not sure of how I'll survive..."
- "Please help! The challenges of step-parenting are threatening to destroy my second marriage, my relationship with my kids is strained, my step children resent me and I just can't cope."

These are just a tiny sample of the stories shared, and many teachers also write in for advice, and many say that the majority of children in their classes are now from divorced homes. The pressures of life, financial struggles, affairs and communication breakdown are some of the factors contributing to the high divorce rate and the shattered lives being seen. And as the momentum grows, the environment our adolescents are in is becoming ever more challenging.

To explore some helpful areas, one of the organisations Life Talk is now working with is Retrouvaille and we've enlisted their help in answering some of the questions coming in. (We've also explored some of the issues in the chapter *Divorce: to split or stay?**)

CULTS IN SA

Having received a number of questions about cults, and reports about cult activity in SA, here is some input from Sean Semple, a counsellor we work with who is doing research into cults and cult-activity in SA:

"Dr Stephan Pretorius, a leading SA expert on cults and an academic at UNISA, offers the following definition of a cult: 'A group of people zealously following a leader with a special gift. The cult exhibits radical new religious beliefs

and practices in opposition to traditional beliefs. The leader and his or her followers believe that they are the final arbiters of what is or is not the truth. The cult isolates itself from the outside world, exhibiting inward innovative behaviour that both differentiates and makes for conformity among group members thus establishing a group identity. Sophisticated techniques are utilised in order to bring about thought reform (mind control), group identity and dependence on the group.

“The leader of a cult is frequently charismatic, self-appointed and persuasive, and claims to have a special mission, gift or knowledge. This leader will be charming and will tend to focus his/her follower’s allegiance on him/herself.

“The marks of a cult might not be immediately obvious to family, friends or associates of someone who has joined a cult. What will stand out is their sudden, dramatic and negative change in personality and behaviour.

How does a person come to join a cult? “It is essential to understand that a person does not decide freely to join a cult – they are **recruited** and become victims of a subtle and systematic recruitment process that relies heavily on mind control, which is commonly spoken of as ‘brain washing’.

“The aim of **mind control** is to replace a person’s individuality with a persona acceptable to the cult. Thus individual ambitions, opinions, critical thinking and decision making ability are challenged and undermined to bring about conformity to group or cult thinking. Typically, a person who has undergone mind control is incapable of thinking critically, is indecisive, dependent and lacks ambition. This guarantees dependence on the guidance of the leader and thus the leader’s control over the cult member.

“It is difficult to imagine how such change can happen without the knowledge or consent of a person. Yet an individual who finds him/herself in a group where they appear to be loved, appreciated, understood and seen as special is well on the way to becoming “brain-washed”. This atmosphere causes individuals to lower their critical defences. Hence when the cult leadership proposes something that contradicts what a recruit has historically understood about themselves or the world, the recruit is very likely to resolve the resulting cognitive dissonance by abandoning the historic belief rather than challenging the leader.

“The third step in cult recruitment involves **fundamental personal change** and increased commitment to the cult. Any misgivings felt by an individual are soon swallowed by the innate desire to conform to the thinking and behaviour of the group. Prolonged dietary changes and exhaustion from sleep loss are forms of sensory deprivation used to further lower personal defences and mould the identity of the individual to the prescribed behaviour of the cult.

“**Commitment to the cult** is presented as a death to a former way of life – finances are sacrificed, as are possessions, family and friends. All bridges to a life outside the cult are burned, which further makes the recruit dependent on the cult as they have no other support network. The commitment to cult identity and lifestyle are promoted by subtle techniques such as fear, guilt, internal spying, and punishment if someone does not act according to the rules of the group or leader (Singer & Lalich,1995:77). It is clear how powerfully an individual is ensnared by a cult and why they find it difficult to escape.”

Q & A: QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY PANEL MEMBERS

(Questions are submitted on the understanding that all advice given is given in good faith and the advisors/panel members take no responsibility for any consequent actions arising therefrom.)

1. Q: My daughter has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and many of her class mates and (my friends too) make fun of it and say it’s from stress and it’ll go away. How can I explain mental illness to them, and what others are there?

A: LINDIWE SHAYI, Programme Manager at the SA Federation for Mental Health: Mental illness is a result of abnormal brain functioning. Mental illness is a brain disorder and it is rarely if ever caused by stress alone. It is not the

consequence of poor parenting or bad behavior. It is not the result of personal weakness or deficits in personality. It is not the manifestation of malevolent spiritual intent. It is not caused by poverty. Only in exceptional cases is it caused by nutritional factors.

Many mental illnesses begin during childhood and persist into adolescence.

Some of these mental illnesses include:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

BUT... some illnesses begin during adolescence. The illnesses that most often begin during adolescence include:

Major Depression (MD)

Schizophrenia

Bipolar Disorder (BD)

Panic disorders

Social Anxiety Disorders

Eating Disorders

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder & Addictions

Most people with mental disorders live productive and positive lives while receiving treatments for their mental illness. Some people have severe and persistent mental disorders which respond poorly to current treatments (as in all other illnesses). Mental illness does not respect any boundaries of race, class or geography. The majority of people have a friend, acquaintance or family member who has or has had a mental disorder.

If you think that someone in your family might be suffering from mental illness it's important to get help from a social worker or psychologist as soon as possible.

2. Q: My marriage is breaking my heart and I'm beginning to think that the only way is 'out'. Our two teenagers are begging us to reconcile, but we've been to counselling and it didn't work and I'm quite desperate. Is there anything else you can recommend that might work?

A: IZABELLA: One organisation that uses a very different approach and has tremendous success with healing marriages is Retrouvaille (pronounced 'retro-vi'). Life Talk works with **Mike and Caryl Melly from Retrouvaille** and this is what they (and www.retrouvaille.co.za) say: "Retrouvaille is the place where we, as a desperate and hurting couple, found hope and healing, and the results are truly amazing. There are 4 Stages of Marriage: 1) Romance, 2) Disillusionment, 3) Misery, and 4) Awakening. Due to the high divorce rate many couples never make it to the 4th stage of Awakening."

"Romance. Most of us are familiar with this first stage. Life was so wonderful we couldn't stand to live without the other and little differences between us were cute and endearing.

"Disillusionment. At some point those little differences started to annoy us. We felt bothered by some of those same things that may have been cute a short time earlier. We had entered into the 2nd stage of Disillusionment. During this stage we start to realize that our spouse is not the perfect person that we had envisioned him or her to be. Sometimes, especially if our Romance Stage had been particularly intense, we are hurt deeply by this Disillusionment. We realize that the expectations we had of the perfect marriage were not going to happen. For some this realization is too heart wrenching and they give up on the marriage and get divorced during this 2nd Stage.

"Misery. Many people stick with and try to work through their problems during Disillusionment. They seek the counsel of family, friends, clergy and marriage counsellors. Some of these people find the key they are looking for from these resources. Many others continue to struggle and their troubles worsen. Often the marriage deteriorates more deeply due to drug, alcohol or other addictions. Sometimes a third party relationship in the form of extramarital affairs result. As the couple finds themselves in this 3rd Stage of Marriage they know they have entered the Misery Stage.

“The Misery Stage is where many couples find themselves considering a marriage separation or divorce. When children are involved this 3rd Stage of Misery is particularly difficult on them. Regardless of whether the couple stays together in misery, or divorce, the children often believe it is their fault regardless of assurances to the contrary. The effects of divorce on a child cannot be over emphasized. For the couple the pain is so intense during the Misery Stage that it is common to only want it to STOP. Much like the pain of a toothache that consumes your whole being you cannot seem to think of anything else besides stopping the pain. One spouse may be pushing hard for the divorce while the other wants to stop divorce. If the couple ends the marriage at this point and remarry other partners they are more likely to experience the effects of divorce with their second or third spouse.

“**Awakening.** Most people whose marriages end in divorce are not bad people. Rather, they are often people who never learned the proper tools for a happy marriage. This is where Retrouvaille can help. Teams of couples who have experienced all 4 Stages of Marriage present the Retrouvaille program. Instead of giving up they found solutions. In Retrouvaille they learned the tools they needed to live a happy marriage. They learned that marriage does not follow the Romance and Happily Ever After formula portrayed in literature and media. Rather, they learn that there are certain learnable skills, attitudes and tools that they can use to deal with the inevitable problems of the real world. These skills, attitudes and tools give them what they need to move from the 3rd Stage of Misery into the 4th Stage of Awakening.

“Whether you are in the Disillusionment Stage grieving the loss of that magical Romance or if you have moved firmly into the Misery Stage, Retrouvaille can give you the marriage help you need to rebuild your marriage. Many tens of thousands of couples have turned their marriages around by giving this program a chance.

Can you save your marriage by attending and working the Retrouvaille program? You will never know until you try. Call the phone number or send an email to the caring Retrouvaille volunteers in your area. Ask them those tough questions that keep nagging at you in the back of your mind. The people answering the phone or responding to your email are people just like you who have been there and pushed through to the 4th Stage of Awakening. They will be able to relate to your feelings of hopelessness and loss. They will do their best to give you the answers you need about this program.”

If you'd like more information you can phone Mike on 082-850-0500 or look for contact numbers in your area on www.retrouvaille.co.za (or www.retrouvaille.org) All contacts are held in the strictest confidence.

3. Q: At one of your talks you mentioned that some schools have set up Parenting forums and groups. Where could we get some information about setting up such a group – or is there one we could join?

A: IZABELLA: The one group I mentioned call themselves “PUPS – Parents Under Pressure – Positive, Understanding, Proactive, Supportive”. You're welcome to contact Tracy Newman their co-ordinator for some tips on what they cover, how best to promote the group to parents, how often they meet etc (and Tracy says that parents from all schools are welcome to come to their get-togethers). Tracy can be contacted on newman@beaulieuprep.co.za

4. Q: Where can we find help or do workshops about communication, relationships, families and other important aspects?

A: LIZ DOOLEY: FAMSA runs monthly groups and workshops on such topics as: 1) “Remarrieds – dealing with parenting issues”; 2) Emotional Intelligence; 3) Communication; 4) Assertiveness vs Aggression; 5) Families and how to survive them; 6) Listening skills; and more. To book please contact Family Life Centre on 011-788-4784 and ask for Glenis.

THE FORUM: HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Life Talk Forum is overwhelmed with emails that describe so much heartache which, when explored, is so unnecessary and should never have happened.

We are highlighting the issues and aspects that contribute to this heartache, but we need to speed up the awareness building to enable some of the key issues to be tackled urgently. A number of people have asked us how they can help, and here are some suggestions that have come up:

Parents:

- Select issues that are close to your heart, or those that you feel are of concern, and seek opportunities to discuss them and explore helpful areas and solutions with fellow parents, friends and relevant people in the community.
- Host get-togethers for parents to discuss specific issues, concluding with a plan of positive actions and areas to focus on. Eg: agreeing on approaches to teen drinking, bullying, pocket money, curfews, clubs, values, boundaries etc

Schools:

- Promote awareness of the important issues, and encourage ongoing discussions and an active focus on all important and helpful areas.
- Encourage parents' forums and discussion groups. One school's parents have formed "PUPS" (Parents Under Pressure), others have "chat-togethers".

Business people and organisations:

- Address parental challenges, and host talks to staff about parenting issues. (Productivity suffers when parents stress about their children, and companies are finding that investing some effort in helping parents can pay dividends.)
- Sponsor awareness-building initiatives as a social responsibility drive.

ALL SUGGESTIONS ARE WELCOME!

If we all get involved, at all levels of society, we can make a powerful difference to the outcome of many lives. The Forum team is available to facilitate initiatives, provide information, give talks, and help where possible.

TO SUBSCRIBE (FOR FREE):

Click on **FORUM** on www.lifetalk.co.za and complete your email details

If you would like copies of the past newsletters you can download them off the Forum page on www.lifetalk.co.za or you can email forum@lifetalk.co.za.

PANEL MEMBERS & CONTRIBUTORS

Our panel of contributors includes:

Thomas Burkhalter. A leading psychologist and co-author of *Life Talk for Parents*, Thomas has two practices, focuses on: children, adolescents, parents, adult psychotherapy and couples therapy, and is case conference consultant at the Parent and Child Counselling Centre(NGO).

Sally Thorp. Full-time on Life Talk issues, Sally gives talks and runs workshops and also focuses on the area of building healthy self-esteem and equipping children and teens with tools to face life with optimism & self-reliance.

Izabella Little Gates. Internationally published author of the best-selling *Life Talk* books. She runs the Forum, is a regular guest on radio and TV programmes about teens and parenting, gives talks, and continues to write.

Liz Dooley. Director and Counsellor at FAMSA (Family Life Centre) - 28 years experience as a social worker/counsellor specializing in family and marital relationships and parenting skills, youth and individual counselling.

Melinda Ferguson. Author of *Smacked - a harrowing story of addiction and survival*. From her own traumatic experience she offers insight & advice on drugs.

Liz Norman. Clinical social worker with 22 years experience in the field of child and family welfare, specialising in group dynamics and adolescent mental health.

Mike and Caryl Melly. The Retrouvaille liaison couple for Africa, Mike and Caryl work with couples and communities in South Africa and abroad.

Sean Semple. Therapist and counsellor specialising in marriage, family, depression and trauma issues.

To utilise any of the panel member's services, email forum@lifetalk.co.za

** References to **Life Talk for Parents** are marked with an asterisk**

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO ANYONE WHO
MIGHT BE INTERESTED**

The FORUM email address is: forum@lifetalk.co.za

The Life Talk™ Forum is endorsed by:
FAMSA, the CIE, the ARA, KHULISA (crime prevention initiative)
Retrouvaille, Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre

For more about the **Life Talk™** books or about the Forum visit:

www.lifetalk.co.za

The books make a great gift and are available at most bookstores,
on www.kalahari.net, and internationally in: UK, Portugal
(and soon in Spanish, Chinese & Arabic)

****Proceeds fund the Forum ****

Life Talk for Parents –

an essential guide to issues faced by parents and teens

(and Lewenspraatjies met Ouers)

GET YOURS TODAY – it's "A must-read for parents and educators!" and covers:

Teen Issues & Challenges Peer pressure; Teen drinking – reasons & solutions; Drug – signs of use; Sexual activity – what's happening?; Problems: trivial or serious?; Bullying; Divorce & its impact on teens; Depression: signs, symptoms & causes; Eating disorders; Sexual abuse; Self-harm; Suicide; Pornography: what's different nowadays?; Steroids: good, bad or ugly?; STIs, HIV, condoms & other aspects; Learning problems, ADD & ADHD; Back-to-school jitters

Parents' Dilemmas: But Mom, everyone is going!; Communication – when the gap widens; Parenting styles & dilemmas; Sleepovers & related debates; Parties: quandaries & tips; Clubs, teens & fake IDs; Curfew times: to set & how to set?; Cell phone, camera & Internet challenges; Cell phones & the Internet: tips & solutions; Cheeky & rebellious teens; Pocket money: could less be more?; Guilt: valid or unnecessary?; Single-parenting issues & quirks; Divorce: to split or to stay?; Driving lessons – oh, preserve us!; End of school: its impact on parents; How teens help us grow

Ten Points to Ponder:

Communication; Family; Values: powerful & important; Self-esteem – important or a buzzword?; Boundaries, consequences & discipline; Faith & spirituality: uncool or important?; Parenting responsibility vs. abdication; Exercise & healthy diet; A positive attitude; Love

BULK ORDERS (100+ BOOKS) CAN BE EMAILED to: forum@lifetalk.co.za