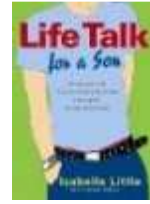


# Life Talk™ Forum Parents' News8



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\* \* \* \*

New book!

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Life Talk books

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**(Suggestion: print for a complete record.)**

## FORUM BACKGROUND

The **PARENTS’ FORUM** provides parents with information and the opportunity to discuss issues and challenges that affect teenagers’ lives. Author of the *Life Talk* books, Izabella Little, co-ordinates the Forum, the format is primarily electronic and input comes from parents, teens, and the panel of experts listed on the last page.

## ISSUES RAISED:

Newsletters 1 – 7 covered: clubs; drugs; cell phones; teenage drinking; pocket money; hubbly bubbly; porn; 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; and helpful reading. (If you didn’t get the newsletter/s, [email us](#) for a copy.)

In this issue we cover topics that have been generating interest or debate in recent weeks.

## SPIKING OF ICE/DRINKS WITH ‘EYE DROPS’

We’ve recently received a number of enquiries about reports of ice and drink spiking in clubs with what looks like eye drops. Upon investigation, we’ve found out the following: The liquid which is used for spiking is reportedly one of the date rape drugs which has been stored in an eye drop bottle.

According to Jenni Wanting from D.A.R.E. (Drug Assessment Rehabilitation Education) the drugs used include: GHB or Liquid Ecstasy (Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate), Rohypnol, Dormicum, Ketamine and Brake fluid (Ethylene Glycol).

A D.A.R.E. update on date rape says that “These ‘date rape’, ‘predatory’ or ‘club’ drugs are used to incapacitate individuals, enabling the perpetrator to sexually and/or physically assault them. These drugs are often put into the unsuspecting victims drink (‘spiking’), alcoholic or otherwise. Many of these drugs are sold legally on prescription, but they are also available on the streets illegally.

“Often they are virtually tasteless, odourless and do not change the drink at all. They can also cause amnesia making the victim unclear of what, if any, crime was committed. Thus also rendering them ineffective as witnesses should a court case result.

“These drugs cause Central Nervous System (CNS) depression, which is aggravated by the alcohol into which they are usually put. Common effects that the person may experience are feeling more drunk than they should after drinking a certain amount of alcohol, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, feeling “fuzzy”, slurred speech, lack of co-ordination or experiencing loss of time. Both males and females can become victims.

“When combined with alcohol the depressant effect is increased, thus making the victim of date rape unable to protect themselves from HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, or unintended pregnancy. Add to this the emotional trauma caused by the rape and it becomes clear that this is a particularly dangerous and damaging crime.”

### **Some advice given by D.A.R.E. on how to take care when going out:**

- Always go out with a group of friends you know you can trust.
- Don't go out alone with someone you don't know.
- Don't go to a date's house, unless you know someone else will be there.
- Make sure you don't get into situations where you don't feel safe or relaxed.
- Avoid going to parties where you know there will be drugs and alcohol.
- Avoid drugs and excessive alcohol intake, you will not be able to take care of yourself.
- Avoid dates who use drugs or drink excessively – drugs and alcohol change the person.
- Don't share or swap drinks.
- Don't leave your drinks unattended while talking, dancing, going to the bathroom or making a phone call.
- If you realize that your drink has been left unattended, throw it away.
- Make sure that you or someone you can trust gets you your drinks.
- Only drink out of a bottle or can that has been opened in front of you.
- Avoid having ice in your drink.
- Choose a person in your group to stay sober when you go to parties or clubs. Have a plan to check on each other every now and again.
- If you feel strange or funny don't leave the venue alone or with a stranger, find one of your friends.
- Arrange your lift home before you even get to the venue.
- Make sure parents or concerned others know where you have gone and when you are expected to be home.
- Avoid drinks such as punches (an easy target for spiking).
- Don't drink anything that has an unusual taste or appearance (e.g. salty taste, excessive foam, unexplained residue, strange colour).

### **What to do if it happens to you:**

- Get to a safe place and get help immediately.
- Ask a friend to stay with you and to help you get the assistance you need.
- Call the police.
- Go to a hospital or emergency / casualty department to be examined.
- Ask the hospital to take a urine sample for drug toxicology testing; a special test must be done to detect Rohypnol in the urine. Have this done as soon as possible, as many of the drugs pass out of the body within 24 hours.
- Keep as much physical evidence as possible. Do not urinate, shower, bath or throw away or wash the clothing you were wearing during the incident.
- If possible, save any other materials that might provide evidence, such as the glass you drank from.
- Call a rape crisis centre or D.A.R.E. 011-788-0717 for information and support.

## **MXit: OVERSEAS COST WARNING**

We have been alerted by news from a parent who received a terrifying cell phone account (in excess of R 32,000) resulting from the use of MXit during a brief overseas holiday. A summary of the related events and risks includes: MXit, the low cost "chat" connection, relies on a GPRS connection and it seems that some phones, if they fail to find GPRS, automatically connect via CSD (a high cost connection), without informing the user.

Many children who regularly use MXit don't realize the importance of GPRS and when they go overseas, even if previously assured by a cell phone company or service provider that GPRS is available in the particular country, may be unaware of the astronomical bills being clocked up. It appears that some makes of phones are supposed to notify the user about a potential switch to CSD, but it seems that some fail to do so and they switch automatically.

The situation in question has resulted in blame being thrown around between the cell phone company, the service provider and the cell phone manufacturer – and as yet remains unresolved.

The advice given by the unfortunate parent is: "If you're going to use your phone overseas, make sure that it has a limit set so that your cell phone company can cut you off when the limit is exceeded. There is **no** other way of ensuring that you don't unwittingly fall victim to excessive costs when using MXit overseas." He goes on to emphasize that MXit itself is not at fault, and that it's a cell phone and service issue.

### **'BEAT ME' AND 'RAPE ME' GAMES**

Quite a few emails have been received concerning the growing popularity of games which involve 'beat me' and 'rape me' scenarios. A sad reflection of the current times, it appears that pre-teen children (and some teens too) are role-playing some of the more drastic events that take place in our society.

Some parents are highly concerned and they suggest that schools and parents should discuss this 'trend' with their children, instilling values and a discerning thought process, and discouraging the playing of such games.

Whereas the violent and 'drastic' elements seem to vary in the different games, some counsellors express great concern about the effects that these games may have on children's behaviour patterns. In order to ascertain how widespread these games are, any feedback or personal experience you can share with the Life Talk Forum would be most welcome.

### **COUNSELLORS: VALUABLE OR A NUISANCE?**

Should schools employ counsellors? Should teens seek counsellors' help? Or should parents (and teachers) be tasked with resolving any issues that may arise in the adolescents' lives? These are some of the debates that can be heard, and consensus is often hard to find.

And yet, as the various adolescent-related challenges increase, the role of school counsellors is shifting in importance. In many instances Counsellors (and Guidance or Life Skills staff) play a vital role and their presence and input can make a significant difference to the lives of many children and teens.

Still, in some environments, counsellors seem to be seen as a 'necessary evil' and not really part of the essential, mainstream staff. As the various emails flood into the Forum, and as we continually see the complex and disturbing issues faced by our youngsters, we thought it worth highlighting the importance of these caring, patient and often under-appreciated resources.

Many teachers share their stresses with us, and in those environments where counsellors are scarce, the counselling role lands on the teachers' shoulders. Often under pressure from their own workload, or unprepared for the severity of the problems encountered, teachers are sometimes at a loss and are uncertain about what to advise or do. So, from what we see, and from the feedback we get from teens, the role of the counsellor is invaluable for many – and their guidance and input is destined to grow in importance and relevance...

### **PARENTS' SELF-ESTEEM – SOME TIPS:**

Much is written about our children's self-esteem so today Sally Thorp looks at the importance of our own self-esteem. She writes: "How is it that before we have children, we see ourselves as individuals, rather than being defined by the roles we play. This is a dilemma that we as parents often face – there is a life 'before' we have children and then a life 'after' we had children.

In a matter of hours, our identity changes from being a man/husband/partner and a woman/wife/partner, to being that of a mom and a dad. How sufficiently do we prepare ourselves emotionally for this change, if at all? Before the birth, how do we feel about ourselves, let alone how we feel about being parents? This is an area often neglected, to the detriment, I believe, of the self-esteem of the parents, ultimately impacting on the self-esteem of the child. There is so much emphasis placed on the 'physical' space our child is going to be born into e.g. the nursery, the equipment, clothing, accessories etc, whilst the 'emotional' space the child enters is unexplored and often ignored.

What are the consequences of not understanding or having awareness about our own level of self-esteem, before having children? All too often, self-esteem is confused with confidence. The impact of this on our self-esteem is detrimental as confidence is a belief in our talents, personality traits, strengths and abilities – i.e. it is about what I ‘do’ as opposed to who I ‘am’. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is being aware of the above and celebrating them, but it is also about my relationship with myself – i.e. the extent to which I believe I have value and worth.

Now, the danger of being too closely attached to the roles we play in life, e.g. mother, father, engineer, doctor, teacher, etc. is that if we allow ourselves to be defined by them, what happens when our children are struggling, or we are demoted or retrenched? Do we then question our validity and worth because what we ‘do’ defines us, as opposed to **who we are**?

When we meet somebody for the first time, one of the first questions asked, is ‘what do you do?’ How different and interesting the conversation could be if we asked ‘who are you?’ Society places a lot of value on what we do thus elevating well educated people from the less educated – does this make them better people, more valuable and more worthy? I believe not. So what does this have to do with parents’ self-esteem?

As a mother or father, using the above analogy, if my value and worth is inextricably linked to my child’s performance, there is a possibility that my own identity, value and worth may be at risk of being lost i.e. I tend to live for and through my child. This inadvertently places huge pressure on my child to perform (do) well in order to not disappoint me; the cycle of continual ‘doing’ in order to feel validated is thus set up in our children too. This sets the scene for parents losing themselves in parenthood.

What happens then when my children leave home to start a life of their own? Who and what do I exist for now? What is my purpose? Where do I start finding myself again? Mistakenly, parents tend to believe one has to be utterly selfless during parenthood, in order to be ‘good’ parents. If we are going to model living in the world with high self esteem, it is advisable to keep the following in mind:

- We existed as individuals before becoming parents. Who is that individual? What makes you happy? What do you love doing? What are your interests and hobbies? Commit to discovering this – the feelings of fulfilment and joy will spill over into other areas of your life.
- Keep your relationship with your partner a priority – this sets the stage for creating a happy, secure and loving home for your children. Spend time together to share ideas, interests, dreams, and ... remain friends.
- Put firm boundaries around ‘me’ time to recharge – this is, contrary to popular belief, not selfish but is showing yourself self-love - by taking responsibility for our emotional health, we are modelling this to our children who will then be in a much better position to take care of themselves in this way.
- Celebrate being ‘YOU’ – become your own best friend. Ask yourself ... how would I treat my best friend? Make a list of this, and explore how you could treat yourself in the same way.
- Be gentle and forgiving with yourself; know, respect and accept your limitations; learn to say ‘no’.

## **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 15 year-old is pregnant. My husband is furious, wants to send her to boarding school and wants to ban the boyfriend/father from ever seeing her again. What do you suggest?**

**A: THOMAS BURKHALTER:** Your teenage daughter falling unexpectedly pregnant is always going to evoke strong feelings. Aside from the serious consequences arising from this pregnancy which you will all have to deal with it

also brings home the reality that your daughter is growing up and that you no longer have the control over her actions that you thought you did. And if you don't have the control, you must be worrying about her ability to take responsibility for her behaviour.

I cannot advise you as to whether you should send her to boarding school, or ban her from seeing her boyfriend, these are options you can consider, but given that this is a very emotive issue, I would recommend that you allow the storm to blow over and consider your response to this problem rationally.

In so doing you may want to consider the following: What do you want to achieve by your response, and how would this best be achieved? This will need to take who she is, as well as her context, into consideration. While there must, and will be consequences, I'm not sure that a punitive approach is usually that helpful. What are the circumstances around the pregnancy? Is this just the tip of the iceberg?

If she is a relatively stable and responsible teen who made a careless mistake that is out of character, then one would want to talk to her about being safe and responsible, and support her through this trial. If the pregnancy is a reflection of how she is going about things generally, and if she is hard to contain or manifests other behavioural or emotional difficulties, then I would want to address the underlying issues.

I would suggest you then consult a professional to help work that out. Boarding school may be an option, so would therapy/counselling. Above all, she needs to feel supported and not alone, in order to help her deal with this challenge, and to allow her to make the most of the lesson to be learnt.

**2. Q: My 13-year old has sleep deprivation from sms'ing till midnight every night. If I try to remove her phone at night we have rows and tears. Help!**

**A: THOMAS BURKHALTER:** It would seem, at first glance, that there is a problem involving power and control in your family. You're saying that your daughter has the freedom to sms all night, and chooses to do so, despite it having negative effects on her, and you feel powerless to do anything about it because she throws a tantrum in response to you being a parent.

In your judgement, it is inappropriate for her to be up that late, and if she has her phone, she will be awake and sms'ing. You feel she is unable to use the phone responsibly, and if so, you need to be the controlling agency that she lacks – ie she can have the phone if she is responsible with it. The problem then becomes one about your fear of asserting that control. What makes it hard to do that? Is it a question of having to survive the tantrum?

It can leave a child feeling insecure if they feel more powerful than their parents and are able to emotionally manipulate them. Asserting your control does not mean that you shouldn't be understanding, and try and talk to her about why she feels compelled to maintain contact with her peers (and who are these others that are up that late?).

It is important that we learn to manage our frustration and develop the capacity to delay gratification, if we are to live comfortably in civil society, and it is the parental responsibility to not only meet a child's needs, but to also be the agent of their frustration. In other words, firm and consistent limits and boundaries are critical.

**3. Q: I've just heard that my daughter's boyfriend smokes dagga and he's trying harder drugs. Should I insist they break up? Talk to his parents? She says she loves him and doesn't want to lose him.**

**THOMAS:** I find this a really difficult question to address. There are many unknown variables to your scenario. If your child is a young teen (and I'm not sure where I would draw the line – this is also dependent on the individual), but then I would want to act firmly and stop their associating. She is too young to be introduced to that world. You need to judge what you are comfortable with, because you will need to follow-through and deal with the consequences of what you initiate.



If your daughter is older, I believe the issue is more complex. First up I would want to say that I think that teens should be strongly discouraged from trying drugs. They are already dealing with many things, both internally and externally, and to compound that with the use of intoxicants is risky. I also want to stress that I would include alcohol in this category. But humans have been using intoxicants since before recorded history, and we have to accept, unfortunately, that if your teen has not experimented with a drug by the time they leave school they are probably statistically deviant. So with respect to your daughter, the issue for me is less about drugs than about who she is and where she is at.

The same goes for her boyfriend. I would not want to suggest a course of action that does not take that into account. You have a sense of her, and it is more important than ever for you to engage her about life, drugs, relationships etc, and to have her share her thoughts and feelings about it. You want her to think things through, to develop her sense of responsibility, to weigh up consequences. Most importantly, you want to be in on the decisions she makes. If she wants to do drugs, she will do them, you cannot keep her from it. Hopefully, she decides not to.

Regarding a course of action, what would the consequences be if you told his parents? If you insist they break up, will that happen or will it become an illicit relationship. Would she resent you and withdraw, or would she be relieved? Drug use in adolescence is often tied in with identity, and so she may not be attracted to a boy who happens to take drugs, but that part of his attraction is an association to a subculture or an identity that is more complex than merely drug use.

So if she could not see him would she just gravitate to another within the same subgroup or someone that exemplifies what is attractive to her, and who probably also does drugs? This needs exploring, and she could do with parents that are prepared to not let this go, who will be there with her through this risky period. Parents to whom she can turn to when she is confused, when she needs guidance and advice. There are no easy answers or solutions, but a difficult, and challenging process. She is interested in something of that world, so at the very least, keep a close eye on her and monitor any changes.

**4. Q: My son's teacher doesn't like him and seems to victimise him daily. How should I tackle it. He's afraid that if I say anything it'll get worse.**

**A: THOMAS:** If there is an issue, avoiding it is not going to make it go away. As a general rule, issues are best confronted and negotiated. But there is always a risk, and there are always unanticipated consequences to any intervention, and you will need to put that into the equation. If you are to confront it, it is probably best to approach the teacher in an exploratory way, not be too accusatory, and to see it as a problem that he can help solve rather than one he can be blamed for.

**5. Q: I'm a recently remarried dad and my daughter is furious with me. Should I give her space and not contact her for a while and hope she'll call me when she's calmer, or should I insist on seeing her regularly?**

**A: THOMAS:** It might be useful to think through something of the following: First up, you need to ask why she is angry. There may be a reasonableness to her anger, which you would need to address with her, or perhaps she is angry because she fears she is being replaced, that she will no longer be a priority or the like. Reconstituted families can be difficult to establish, because the dynamics can change significantly, and individual's positions within the family change. This involves loss (as well as potential gain), and the emotional responses to this can include hurt and anger. There needs to be an acknowledgement of this and an understanding of what this all means for her.

As a broad rule, such understanding can usually only happen if there is an engaged relationship with open communication. Maybe she can talk about it. If she does, what would be your response? Do you worry about dealing with her anger? Do you worry about your response? She has to accept that your life moves on, but you would need to accept and allow for her feelings in that regard. An added issue involves the role of your current wife, and whatever children she might have. Their attitudes might be crucial in developing an understanding, and facilitating a

solution. Your ex wife's feelings might be playing out in this scenario too. Respect her space, do not be too intrusive, but let her be in no doubt that she is important to you, that you want a relationship with her, and you are not prepared to let this go unresolved (although it may take a little time). You are saying to her that you love her and want a relationship with her despite the fact that she is angry, and that a relationship with you is not conditional on her not being angry.

### **\*NEW BOOK: LIFE TALK FOR PARENTS – OCT '08**

We have received many enquiries about Izabella's new book *Life Talk for Parents*. The book covers the challenges and issues faced by teens and parents, and it explores the reasons, solutions and areas to focus on. Co-authored with psychologist Thomas Burkhalter, and with input from a number of other experts, the books are being highly recommended by a number of S.A.'s top schools. They will be launched in October, and will also be available in Afrikaans.

We will let you know as soon as they are available in the bookstores.

**BULK ORDERS (100+ BOOKS) CAN NOW BE PLACED DIRECTLY WITH THE FORUM BY EMAILING: [forum@lifetalk.co.za](mailto:forum@lifetalk.co.za)**

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*If you would like to be involved in the Forum and help in any way, all input is relevant and appreciated.*

### **PANEL MEMBERS & CONTRIBUTORS**

Our panel of contributors includes:

**Thomas Burkhalter.** A leading psychologist, 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).

**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.

**Izabella Little (Gates).** International author of *Life Talk for a Daughter* and *Life Talk for a Son* (with P. Wilson) and the translated *Lewenspraatjies met 'n Dogter* and *Lewenspraatjies met 'n Seun*. Each book covers 60 topics and is a tool-kit of tips, guidelines and values for teenagers and young adults. She runs the Forum, gives talks and continues to write.

**Jenny Shain.** Social worker and Deputy Director of JPCCC (Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre, 011-484-1734/5/6)

**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.

**Jenni Wanting.** Jenni and Debbie Moroney started D.A.R.E. (Drug Assessment Rehabilitation Education) in 2006. D.A.R.E. has developed various programmes for life skills and substance abuse education, which are implemented in educational institutions and the corporate world. They also have CARE (Chemical Assessment Referral Education) teams who have been trained to identify individuals who are at high risk in the school or workplace. (011-788 0717).

**Sally Thorp.** Works with parents and children in the area of building healthy self-esteem and equipping them with tools to face life with optimism & self-reliance.

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

**Esha Brijmohan.** A journalist, Esha raises awareness among her readers and community regarding important parenting/teen issues.

**Phillip Lowe.** Business consultant and father of teenagers, coordinates involvement from schools, interested organisations & media.

To utilise any of the panel member's services, email [forum@lifetalk.co.za](mailto:forum@lifetalk.co.za)

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

The FORUM email address is: [forum@lifetalk.co.za](mailto:forum@lifetalk.co.za)

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

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

**[www.lifetalk.co.za](http://www.lifetalk.co.za)**

*Life Talk for a Daughter, Life Talk for a Son, Lewenspraatjies met 'n Dogter and Lewenspraatjies met 'n Seun* are a tool-kit of life's tips and guidelines for teens

They're a great gift and are available at leading bookstores and on [www.kalahari.net](http://www.kalahari.net)

*Life Talk for a Daughter* now also in the UK, on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and currently being translated into Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese

**\* \* Proceeds fund the Forum. \* \***

***Life Talk for Parents - an essential guide to issues  
faced by teens and parents* NOW AVAILABLE!**