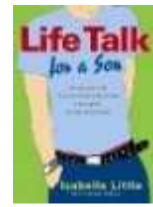


# Life Talk™ Forum

## News 9



### CONTENTS:

- Issues raised recently

-What's worrying parents & schools?

-Life Talk for Parents: the book is here!

-Contents of Life Talk for Parents

-Invitation to the launch

### Q & A:

Self-harm / cutting

Are fake IDs OK?

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To subscribe

Panel members

Life Talk books

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(Suggestion: print for a complete record.)

## FORUM BACKGROUND

The **LIFE TALK 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 IN PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS:

**Newsletters 1 – 8 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; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', counsellors, 'rape me' games and helpful reading. (If you didn't get the newsletter/s, [email forum@lifetalk.co.za](mailto:forum@lifetalk.co.za) or download from [www.lifetalk.co.za](http://www.lifetalk.co.za) )

## THIS NEWSLETTER:

Arising from the excitement which is building ahead of Izabella's much awaited (October 2008) *Life Talk for Parents – an essential guide to issues faced by parents and teens*, hundreds of emails have recently been pouring in.

We summarize the main topics and views being expressed in the emails, and we take a look at some of the issues and solutions addressed in *Life Talk for Parents*.

## WHAT DO PARENTS & SCHOOLS SAY?

The last couple of months have again seen a number of concerning incidents reported by the media, parents and educators. The emails sent in to the Forum include:

- **School stabbings** that seem to be increasing in frequency.
- **Bullying** trends that seem to be catching on even in circles that were previously considered to be virtually free from such intimidation (physical or verbal).
- The tragic '**sword slaying**' has once again focused much concern on the influences of certain types of music and the violent lyrics and concepts conveyed. The possibility of occult-related involvement has also raised concerns among many parents and schools, and we have received a number of requests for further information and for an investigative study to be undertaken. In terms of the sword incident, it's still not exactly clear what led to the actions that took place, but the lyrics and the sinister significance of the masks used, and messages promoted by the group *Slipknot* have given rise to some valid concerns.

- **Teen deaths resulting from drinking and driving** continue unabated. The last few months have seen an increase in emails conveying the news of yet another young life tragically lost on our roads – all due to alcohol abuse. Many traumatised teens have shared their heartbreak at the loss of yet another classmate or friend, and for some this is sadly not the first, or even second, such loss.

They describe the shock and horror of the losses – and they speak of ongoing heavy drinking at teen parties, where even the most inebriated (those with driving licences and some with only a learner's licence) insist on driving home, ignoring pleas from others not to drive in that state. Somehow even the deaths of their closest mates fail to deter the drinking craze that has our youth so firmly in its grip.

- **Cell phones**, mentioned in quite a few of our newsletters, continue to be a source of anxiety and frustration for many parents. The ease of linking to the Internet, the shocking pornographic images found on many of the children's phones, the addictions to MXit, and the family rows about cell phone use – these form a large part of emails received.
- **Depression and self-mutilation** seem to be increasing, and in some circles it's as if self-mutilation/cutting is 'contagious'. Some counsellors feel strongly that as films and articles portraying cutting increase, so do the incidents. The majority of teens we have spoken to in recent months know someone who is cutting, and educators write in, expressing a sense of helplessness and not knowing what they ought to do about what's happening.
- **Unruly behaviour and 'poor manners'** are also sources of much frustration among educators, with quite a few emails recently requesting the reopening of the corporal punishment debate. As one teacher writes 'I know that corporal punishment is supposedly not the answer, but what do I do with pupils who continuously intimidate and disrupt classmates, steal others' belongings and even pour glue into my handbag when I leave the room?'
- **Home-schooling.** Quite a few parents are debating the benefits of home-schooling and they're keen to hear from parents who have selected this route. This thought process often seems to be triggered by unresolved bullying incidents where parents are faced with a continuously unhappy child who doesn't want to go to school. If any of our subscribers have comments, advice or pros and cons to be considered, we will gladly cover these in a following newsletter.
- **Clubs** are an ongoing source of debate among parents, and an increasing number of parents are being pressured into letting their teens, some as young as 13, go to clubs for over-18s. One parent writes "we have had a major family row every weekend for the past three months, and our daughter has now gone on 'strike', refusing to do homework, spend time with us, or eat dinner until we let her go to the clubs her friends go to. She is 15. We've explained, pleaded and grounded, but to no avail. My husband now says we must just let her go and this is causing the two of us to disagree."

These and other issues are prompting parents, schools and counsellors to suggest that debates and discussions are urgently needed around some of the aspects – and that solutions and creative ideas need to be explored and implemented without delay.

# LIFE TALK FOR PARENTS – THE BOOK

*Life Talk for Parents* tackles the issues that have been raised within the Forum, and it explores solutions and helpful areas to focus on. The contents are split into three sections and the chapters cover:

Teen Issues & Challenges	Parents' Dilemmas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationships</li> <li>▪ Peer pressure</li> <li>▪ Teen drinking – an alarming reality</li> <li>▪ Teen drinking – reasons &amp; solutions</li> <li>▪ Drugs – why your teen could be at risk</li> <li>▪ Drugs: the spiral down &amp; signs of use</li> <li>▪ Sexual activity – what's happening?</li> <li>▪ Sexuality – why the wild behaviour?</li> <li>▪ STIs, HIV, condoms &amp; other aspects</li> <li>▪ Problems: trivial or serious?</li> <li>▪ Bullying</li> <li>▪ Divorce and its impact on teens</li> <li>▪ Depression: signs, symptoms &amp; causes</li> <li>▪ Eating disorders</li> <li>▪ Sexual abuse</li> <li>▪ Self-harm</li> <li>▪ Suicide</li> <li>▪ Crime: what our children feel &amp; say</li> <li>▪ Pornography: what's different nowadays?</li> <li>▪ Steroids: good, bad or ugly?</li> <li>▪ Learning problems, ADD &amp; ADHD</li> <li>▪ Back-to-school jitters</li> <li>▪ Help – I have nothing to wear!</li> <li>▪ End of school – first-year studies</li> <li>▪ Subjects, careers &amp; aptitude tests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ But Mom, everyone is going!</li> <li>▪ Communication – when the gap widens</li> <li>▪ Parenting styles &amp; dilemmas</li> <li>▪ Sleepovers &amp; related debates</li> <li>▪ Parties: quandaries &amp; tips</li> <li>▪ Clubs, teens &amp; fake IDs</li> <li>▪ Curfew times: to set &amp; how to set?</li> <li>▪ Cell phone, camera &amp; Internet challenges</li> <li>▪ Cell phones &amp; the Internet: tips &amp; solutions</li> <li>▪ Cheeky &amp; rebellious teens</li> <li>▪ Pocket money: could less be more?</li> <li>▪ Guilt: valid or unnecessary?</li> <li>▪ Single-parenting issues &amp; quirks</li> <li>▪ Divorce: to split or to stay?</li> <li>▪ Driving lessons – oh, preserve us!</li> <li>▪ End of school: its impact on parents</li> <li>▪ How teens help us grow</li> </ul>

## 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

*Life Talk for Parents* is written by Izabella Little, with input from co-author Thomas Burkhalter (psychologist and Forum panel member) as well as: Prof Tim Noakes of UCT; Iyavar Chetty of the SA Film Board and a leading expert on child pornography; Luke Lamprecht CEO of the Teddy Bear Clinic for abused children; Adrie Vemeulen (SANCA); Liz Dooley (FAMSA); Sally Thorpe; Jenny Shain; Melinda Ferguson and Paul Shiel.

According to reviews "*Life Talk for Parents* is a must-read. It provides powerful and thought-provoking material – and it can facilitate a highly successful

and solution-driven process to address many of today's challenges. It is an invaluable handbook that every family should have." (More reviews are available on [www.lifetalk.co.za](http://www.lifetalk.co.za))

## 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.)

**Due to the recent flood of emails and questions** (about the issues mentioned at the beginning of the newsletter), we are answering a couple here and it is our hope that *Life Talk for Parents* will provide much of the sought-for information.

### 1. Q: My daughter tells me that two of her friends are into self-harm/cutting. What exactly is it, why does it happen, and what should be done?

**A: SALLY THORP:** Self-mutilation is a hard to treat phenomenon which, according to experts worldwide is on the increase, specifically amongst young adults. Dr Whitlock, a psychologist, claims that findings report "no racial or socioeconomic group is more vulnerable than another". In Britain, it is estimated that 1 in 10 teenagers may practise some form of addictive self-mutilation; in the US it is perceived as 'cool, a trend'. There are no figures available in South Africa, but the existence of websites dedicated to self-mutilation is very concerning. According to Dr Juan Schröner, a psychiatrist at Panorama Medi-Clinic in Cape Town, "self-mutilation overwhelmingly affects females more than males. It is estimated that only 20 to 25% of people who self-harm are male."

#### What is it?

Self-harm or self-mutilation is the physical manifestation of a strong emotion which one is unable to put into words or thoughts, due to an inability to communicate or express feelings effectively. Often it is an expression of deep distress and has been described as an "inner scream". Emotional levels reach such a height, that in order to gain relief, they engage in harmful activities - for a short while, they feel better. According to Dr Schröner, this behaviour can become addictive and is used as a form of escapism. Emotional pain is substituted for physical pain. Dr Schröner goes on to explain that, after the cutting episode, 'the person experiences adrenalin rush and feels euphoric for a while'. However, as the emotional pain starts to build again, they feel the need to repeat the cycle and so addiction starts. At first, in the case of cutting, the feeling is good. Once the realisation of what has been done kicks in, self-mutilators feel guilty and try to purge this by opening up the wounds again.

#### How does it manifest?

- **Physically** – cutting with knife, razor blade, safety pin (deep enough to bleed) or burning; hitting themselves against objects, scratching, ripping or pulling skin or hair, pinching, biting, swallowing toxic substances, needle sticking and breaking bones.
- **Emotionally** – deep emotional scaring occurs leaving behind more than surface damage

#### Who is at risk?

Background factors prompting self-injury:-

- Sexual and/or emotional abuse
- Childhood neglect
- Social isolation
- Unstable living conditions
- Families where communication is suppressed; not open
- Individuals who haven't developed healthy coping mechanisms
- Children who perceive themselves as 'problem' children
- Individuals with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem (the belief that you have little value and worth) could increase vulnerability to opting for self-mutilation as a coping mechanism; individuals with low self-esteem find it very difficult to express feelings constructively believing they have no right to the feeling or

feeling guilty for having the feeling.

### **Role of the internet**

Information available from the Canadian Mental Health Association, states that there is a rising trend to discuss cutting on the Internet and form cutting clubs at school, thus fulfilling the role of needing to belong and feel part of a group.

### **What to look for**

- Groundless/unsupported explanations for self-injury, or cutting.
- Secrecy, as it usually happens behind closed doors
- Out of the ordinary wearing of long sleeves to cover up

### **Treatment**

Research indicates that there are no specific medications to treat self-injury but that medication that treats underlying emotional problems like depression and anxiety may help. Dr Schröner stresses 'if the problem of self-mutilation is ignored, it will not simply disappear. Professional help should be sought, and medication may be needed to control behaviour – every case is unique'.

**Sources:** MindinfoLine – [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk); [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com); [www.health24.com](http://www.health24.com)

**2. Q: I recently found out that my 15-year old daughter has a fake ID she uses to get into clubs. Some friends say it's OK, but I'm worried she'll get caught.**

**A: IZABELLA LITTLE:** Making or being in possession of a fake ID is a criminal offence, and if your daughter gets caught the consequences could be very serious. The police are known to raid clubs in the search for fake IDs and under-age drinkers, and if they press charges the teens end up with a criminal record. (The full realities of this are often only experienced when travelling overseas or applying for work permits in foreign countries.)

The advice of the Forum, and of many schools, is not to let under-age teens go to clubs for over-18s. We understand that peer pressure can be strong (teen-to-teen as well as parent-to-parent), and that's why this issue needs addressing on a broad scale. Not only are these clubs frequented by adults, but alcohol is served, many teenagers get very drunk, drinks can be spiked, drugs are often present – and the risks to adolescents are not worth gambling with. We hear too many heartbreaking stories of things having gone wrong, and we implore parents to address this issue with their teenagers and with all their teens' friends' parents.

## **FOR COPIES OF PAST NEWSLETTERS (1 – 8):**

If you would like to receive copies of the Parents' newsletter, email [forum@lifetalk.co.za](mailto:forum@lifetalk.co.za) and list:

**Your name, email address, whether you'd like Newsletters 1–8, or only future ones, and any particular topics of interest to you.**

## **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).** Internationally published author of the best-selling *Life Talk for a Daughter* and *Life Talk for a Son* (with P. Wilson), the translated *Lewenspraatjies met 'n Dogter* and *Lewenspraatjies met 'n Seun*, and the new *Life Talk for Parents* and *Lewenspraatjies met Ouers*. She runs the Forum, is a regular guest on radio and TV programmes about teens and parenting, 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.

**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 re important issues.

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

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Fascination Books, others and on [www.kalahari.net](http://www.kalahari.net)

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

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