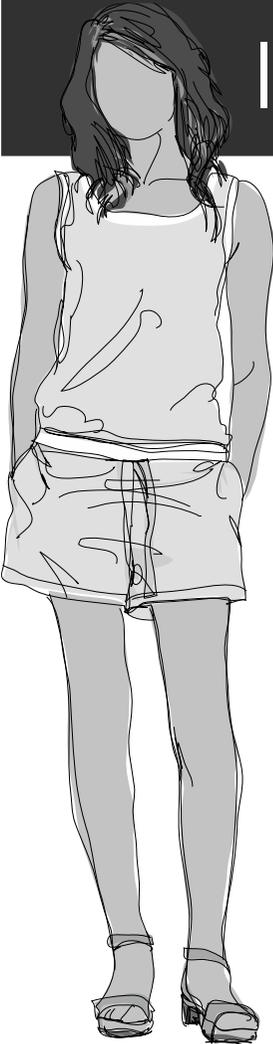


By Jessica Platt

music living dying no responsibility trapped food



Introduction

My name is Jessica and I'm 17.

In January I was admitted to an adult ward in Addenbrooke's Hospital with pneumonia, and in the three nights that I was there I witnessed amazing care of the women surrounding me but I felt that there was a gap in the confidence of many members of the clinical staff when it came to interacting with me.

I decided that I wanted to understand what this gap was, what its causes were and how they could be fixed. To do this I read parenting books on bringing up teenagers, books on the teenage brain and did surveys of students at school and doctors I know.

This booklet contains hints and tips on how to talk to us teens in a way that we will (hopefully) listen to. I hope it will make having 16 to 18 year olds on adult wards a little bit easier for everyone involved.

The 'teenagers' I refer to in this booklet are specifically aged 16+

As part of my research, I carried out two surveys: one aimed at teenagers and one at doctors. I had 182 responses to the anonymous teen questionnaire that was sent to all the students at Hills Road Sixth Form College. The majority of those who responded were 17 years old, However there were some 16 year olds and some 18 year olds who also answered.

My questionnaire aimed at doctors received 68 responses from doctors mostly based in Royal Derby Hospital and Nuffield Health Derby. Many doctors from different areas of medicine responded, including 33 anaesthetists and 13 general surgeons.

I am the over 16 chair person of ACTIVE, a board of 8 to 18 year olds working to improve the hospital for young patients. While working on this project I ran some meetings with the other board members to get their input on how they think hospital could be improved for teenagers. I have included some of their ideas in this pack.

Added to this, I read books, articles and other sources that discussed interaction with teenagers in lots of different situations.

I will reference any information gained from all my sources in grey boxes like these at the end of each section.

For more information, please email me at this address: teens.in.hospital@gmail.com

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Understand

My brain is going through a lot at the moment...

It's a completely different shape to what it was when I was a child, and what it will be when I'm an adult.

Since starting adolescence I've lost 15% of my grey matter as synapses I don't use have been pruned away and the ones I need have been strengthened.

Having my frontal cortex closed for refurbishment makes being rational quite challenging...

Added to that there's all the freedom I'm just discovering! It's amazing but comes with pressures – image is a big one. And anxiety about exams!

Having to go into hospital right now would be a nightmare!!



Understand

So please forgive me ... if I'm not as polite as I could be, being sarcastic and snappy is just a shield to mask how scared I am. I hardly ever have to let my guard down and interact with adults I don't know well. It would be great if you would familiarize yourself with me – learning my name and smiling at me when you walk down the ward could make a big difference.



I also struggle ... when lots of med students are brought in to have a look at me! They are very close to my age and I look terrible in hospital!

Asking me first and then bringing them in a few at a time would be helpful and would mean that I have a little bit of control over what is happening to me.

"The frontal lobe is often called the CEO or executive of the brain. It's involved in things like planning, strategizing and organizing... I think that [in the teenage years, this] part of the brain... is not done being built yet... Its sort of unfair to expect [teens] to have adult levels of organizational skills or decision making before their brain is finished being built..."
Dr. Jay Giedd, a neuroscientist at the National Institute of Mental Health, USA in his interview, *Inside the Teenage Brain* on the Frontline website.

When asked 'I think the best part about being a teenager is:' 21% of the teenagers answered 'freedom/independence'.

In answer to 'I think people our age worry most about:' 24% of the students said 'image' and 15% said 'exams'.

Respect



I don't mind it if my friends listen to music in one headphone when they talk to me. I know its nothing personal –

...they just like having their own soundtrack to life.

And because we're all so busy, most conversations with friends at school occur while walking between lessons so

...there's hardly ever eye contact.

When I talk to you, please don't be offended if I keep a headphone in, or don't look at you much. I will probably still be listening to most of it! Asking questions at the end to check would be fine. And if the headphones and eye contact is really bothering you, just ask and we probably won't mind changing our behavior.

Its not a sign of disrespect, its just us forgetting about the 'cultural' differences between adults and teenagers, and sometimes we need reminding.

Respect

If you leave your preconceptions about me outside our consultation, I promise to engage with you without attitude or distrust.

I know the media enjoys painting unflattering images of us, but we're really not that bad.

Please don't jump to conclusions if you see me wearing a hoodie!!

And let me know that you won't judge me for things I might have done.

It is difficult to admit to things I am ashamed of, and letting me know that you won't lose all respect for me if I tell you would be helpful.

Two of the 68 doctors I surveyed said that one way we (teenagers) could help clinical staff interact with us more effectively would be to take our headphones off.

3 also highlighted lack of eye contact as an issue.

This page is opened with a statement directly derived from a comment by one of the doctors surveyed, saying: "If I leave any preconceptions about you outside our consultation, will you engage with me without attitude or preconception also?"

A member of Active emphasized the importance of not feeling judged by doctors based on age or bad choices.

Communicate

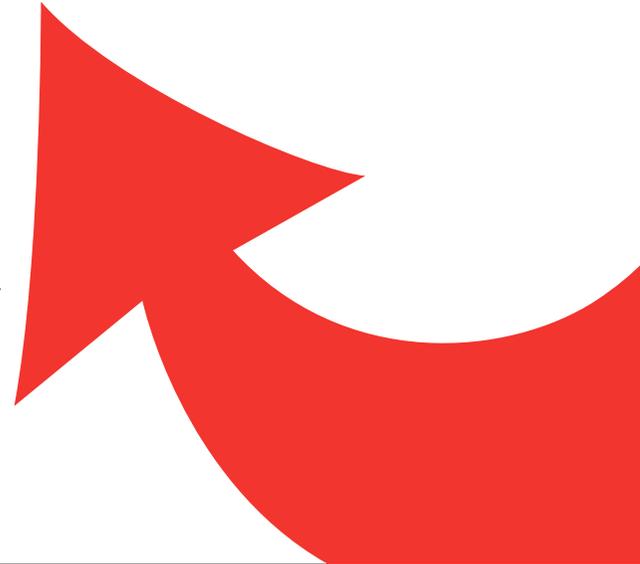


It would be really nice if our conversations could be relaxed and chilled out.

I know you're in a rush, but feeling time pressure makes the consultation feel like an exam and suddenly everything is harder to remember!

And it would be really nice if you eased me into the questioning – ask me about my day or school or something so I feel like I get to know you a little bit first.

I want to tell you everything you want to know, but I might clam up if I don't have time to acclimatize to who you are.



Communicate

My female teenage brain works in a very different way to my brothers ...

(VERY different – he is so weird!!) and he finds it much more difficult to talk to people, but if you give him time, he'll probably give you much more accurate details of what's bothering him than I could!

Please don't get frustrated ... with me

if I sometimes can't remember details – I don't find them very interesting so I forget them more easily.

Asking different, more specific questions could help me remember everything you need me to.

96% of students surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that they would like members of clinical staff to create a relaxed environment.

'Blame My Brain: the amazing teenage brain revealed' by Nicola Morgan explains the key differences in the way that male and female teenage brains work. Here I have outlined a few important differences in the way that boys and girls tend to communicate.

Boys	Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tend to be tongue tied, stutter more.• More interested in details and how systems work.• Less likely to talk about emotions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk more, using more words and fewer language errors.• Less interested in details.• Often find talking about emotions easier.

Collaborate



Once you have told me what is going on with my body,

...it is really important to me that I feel like I have a say in what my treatment is.

Please chat to me about all the options and give me all the information.

I can handle it...

I'm quite grown up...

but please tell me in a way that I will understand – the doctor jargon can be a bit intimidating!

Collaborate



But please really try to not be patronizing ...

... we are usually pretty intelligent

but when adults don't seem to understand that, the inner **demon teen** that we work so hard to suppress can come out, and that doesn't help anything!

In a meeting that I ran with ACTIVE, it was emphasized that it is really important that the doctors aren't patronizing interacting with teenage patients.

Patronizing behavior on the part of clinical staff lead to teenagers no longer wanting to talk to any of the adults at hospital.

In '**Do adolescent inpatient wards make a difference?**' Findings from a national young patient survey¹ by Russell Viner, it was shown that if teenage patients didn't feel that there was enough collaboration in their care, it affected how they viewed the standard of care they received.

Support



This could be my first time in hospital...

It could be my tenth...

Regardless of the number of times I have been here before, coming into hospital is going to bring up a lot of strong memories for me.

I know you work here every day so for you this place is normal, but...

I might be feeling scared or angry or confused.

Although I might seem grown up, having you listen to how I'm feeling and acknowledging that these feelings are OK could really help me feel supported while I'm in hospital.

Little things like telling me what time the tea trolley will be brought round and when visiting hours are will help too. Knowing what the routine for the day is will mean I don't feel completely powerless because I'll have some knowledge of what to expect.



Support

...and sometimes I really need my mum.

Even aged 17, having mum or dad there can make everything seem less scary.

Please let them stay overnight if I want them to!

It could make your job easier – I can process any new information with them, leaving you free to talk to other people.

If you explain that you don't want them doing all the talking, I will try really hard to give you all the information you need.

Making me feel welcome, whichever ward I end up in will make me feel supported too. I don't want it to feel like I'm a total pain in the neck who is just making your job harder.

When I went into hospital, the lack of information given about the daily routine made me feel really uncomfortable and on edge because I didn't know what to expect during the day.

57% of the students surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that they would want to have the option of having their parents stay with them if they were admitted to hospital.

4 of the doctors surveyed said that having parents around during consultations with a teenager made talking to us harder.