

me, my selfie and I



**UK TEENAGERS,
IDENTITIES & HAPPINESS**





me,
my selfie
and I

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introduction

Being a teenager is, and has always been, a testing but developmentally exciting time. A moment where an overwhelming desire to develop and assert an individual identity is accompanied with a compelling need to belong. To be accepted, in particular, by peers.

This along with all the others things pre-teens and early teens face – like body changes, new schools, increased independence, greater access to the online world and wider social horizons – mean it's an incredibly challenging lifestage to navigate.

Add to this the modern phenomenon of social media and the 'requirement' for profile management, and one might imagine it's never been harder to be a teen endeavouring to feel good. But is this indeed the case?

Numerous studies, academic reports and government papers have looked at the impact of lifestage challenges on teens' behaviour, and how this in turn impacts on society in the short and long term.

We wanted to find how a sample of today's teenagers are doing. To find out what impacts their wellbeing. To ask them how they feel. Find out whether they feel good. And if not, why not?



The result:

The Me, My Selfie and I study reveals the views, thoughts and feelings of 1,000 teens and pre-teens from across the nation (additional qualitative focus group research was also conducted with smaller groups of teens). Developed in conjunction with the renowned clinical psychologist Professor Tanya Byron, a specialist in child and adolescent mental health, it provides an interesting insight into the state and wellbeing of the 11-17 year olds we interviewed and provides useful information for how we think about and support our teens.



Being a teenager can be difficult because life starts to get a bit real.”

Ross, 14



Being a teenager is weird because you're half an adult and half a child.”

Daphne, 16

introducing... Professor Tanya Byron



John Swannell

“As a clinical psychologist I have, over the last twenty five years, specialised in working with children and young people. I work with teenagers who at the most challenging yet exciting time of their life are often struggling with psychological and mental health difficulties. Indeed, I most enjoy my clinical time spent with teenagers who I find refreshingly honest, often perceptively challenging and fresh in their thinking. Also, as the mother to two children, I have loved watching them grow and develop into their own people through their teen years – despite my own sad realisation that they are developing and individuating in order to one day leave the family and make their own way in the world.

This survey provides a necessary, well-researched and thoughtful analysis of how our sample of 1,000 teenagers think and feel about themselves. I have helped compile a questionnaire that is open and unflinchingly straight talking in asking the right kind of questions in order to enable our teenagers to honestly tell us what it’s like to be them today.”

02

foreword from Tanya

“The teen years are a roller coaster of rapid development during the transition from childhood to adulthood.”

“The emotions and behaviours of teens are universal and underpinned by significant physical, brain and social changes that are first triggered by puberty. Puberty heralds the onset of adolescence and often starts before the teenage years around the time of transition between primary and secondary school. A biologically crucial time, it begins the process of sexual maturation alongside the psychological and social development of self-identity, individuality and independence (a process called ‘individuation’).

New research findings show that the greatest changes to the parts of the brain responsible for functions such as self-control, judgement, emotions, and organisation, occur between puberty and adulthood – the teenage years. This explains some teenage behaviours that adults can find confusing and frustrating – such as poor decision-making, recklessness, and mood swings.

During this phase of ‘rewiring’ we see mood and behavioural shifts, but as development proceeds, we get better at balancing impulse, desire, goals, self-interest, rules, and ethics – which results in behaviour that is less complex and more rationally driven as we become adults.

As adults we know the tricky path we navigate with our teens – who crave independence but are also still in many ways dependent – as they transition into young adulthood. Although, many see adolescence as a problematic time of life, the more we learn about what really makes this period unique, the more adolescence starts to seem like a highly functional, adaptive period.

By understanding what our teens are experiencing at both a physical and psychological level and most importantly listening to them as they explain their thoughts and feelings, we can more effectively support our teenagers to be the best version of themselves in terms of their self-belief, health and wellbeing.”

Professor Tanya Byron
Psychologist

introducing our contributors

Who best to offer insight into the findings of this report than two people who talk to teens every day and understand the pressures they are facing. Introducing Amelia Goodhead and Chai Cameron.



Amelia Goodhead

From the Lifestyle Blog and Youtube channel www.xameliax.com (@xameliax)

Amelia is a Lifestyle Blogger and Youtuber from the Midlands who has been blogging and using social media for the last seven years. She writes articles on the latest beauty trends, wearable fashion, the best places to eat, easy recipes to follow and also creates Youtube videos such as makeup tutorials, shopping hauls and weekly vlogs. Amelia sets out to show both sides of life on her social media from the happy to the mundane and is on a mission to prove that no-one is perfect, but that everyone can be happy. Amelia has a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and is a full time Blogger & Youtuber.



Chai Cameron

From the Youtube channel **MyNamesChai** (@MyNamesChai)

Chai Cameron is a 21 year old who runs two very different but equally exciting YouTube channels. **mynameschai** is a vlog channel covering everything from how to be confident, to documenting Chai's spur of the moment adventures – some on the other side of the world and some at home in London town.

chaiplaysgames is Chai's gaming channel which is growing at an incredible rate, thanks to his love of Minecraft, Sims and "lots of very random games" (in his words) in between, and commentated with Chai's signature witty, observant and occasionally cheeky tone.

“teenager”

Professor Tanya Byron explains the term

The word ‘teenage’ is insufficient to portray the many stages and physical, psychological and social developments that take place during these years.

The many changes that teens undergo begin at puberty which generally starts before 13 years old. We can therefore divide adolescence into three stages which can overlap.

Early Adolescence

(ages 11 – 13)

Triggered by the onset of puberty, development usually centres around developing a new self-image due to associated physiological and physical changes. At the same time, adolescents begin to acquire skills of logical thinking and ability to make judgements rationally.

Mid Adolescence

(ages 14 – 16)

The drive for independence kicks in and these teens strive to loosen ties to their parents so behaviour can become challenging as their emotions and intellectual capacities heighten. Self dependence increases and risk taking becomes heightened as the adolescent experiments with different experiences, identities and ideas.

This is a process known as **individuation**.

Late Adolescence

(16+)

Now with a greater and more stable sense of identity and one’s place in society. Teenagers should feel psychologically integrated and have a fairly consistent view of the outside world whilst having established a balance between their goals and dreams, fantasies, and reality via the development of altruism and self awareness. By the conclusion of late adolescence, teens should be clearer about themselves as an individual and their role in society, and have set realistic life goals.



the H factor

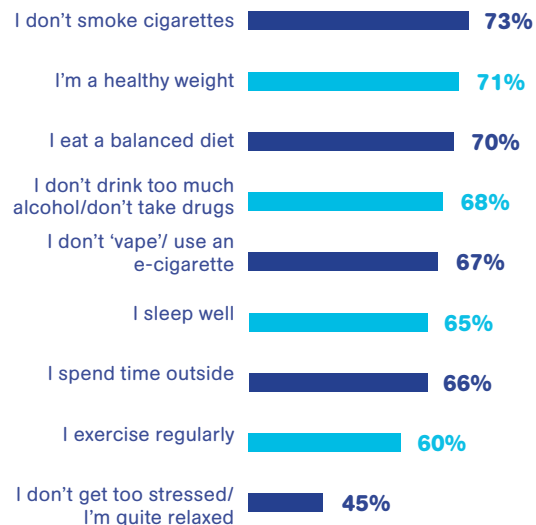
With health and obesity high on the national agenda, it seems a logical place to look next. Our research shows that seven out of 10 teens consider themselves healthy (68%).

What's more there's a recognition among teens that health plays a significant role in how they feel about themselves. 80% of teens agree that being healthy and living healthily helps them to feel and look their best. And encouragingly, 84% say they know how to lead a healthy life.

This holistic view seems to affect the way they see themselves on the outside too. Rather than change aspects of how they look, teens want to be the healthiest version of themselves. For example, 'bigger boobs' comes far down the list of things teen girls aged 15-17 aspire to have. Instead, having toned limbs are more prized (22%).

The minority of teens that **don't** consider themselves healthy know why, citing lack of exercise, junk food and avoidance of their 5-a-day.

Why teens consider themselves healthy



Perhaps it is this collective awareness among teens (of the role health can play on how they look and feel) that leads them to think they are healthier than their parents' generation.



32%

disagree that teens of their parents' generation drank less.



53%

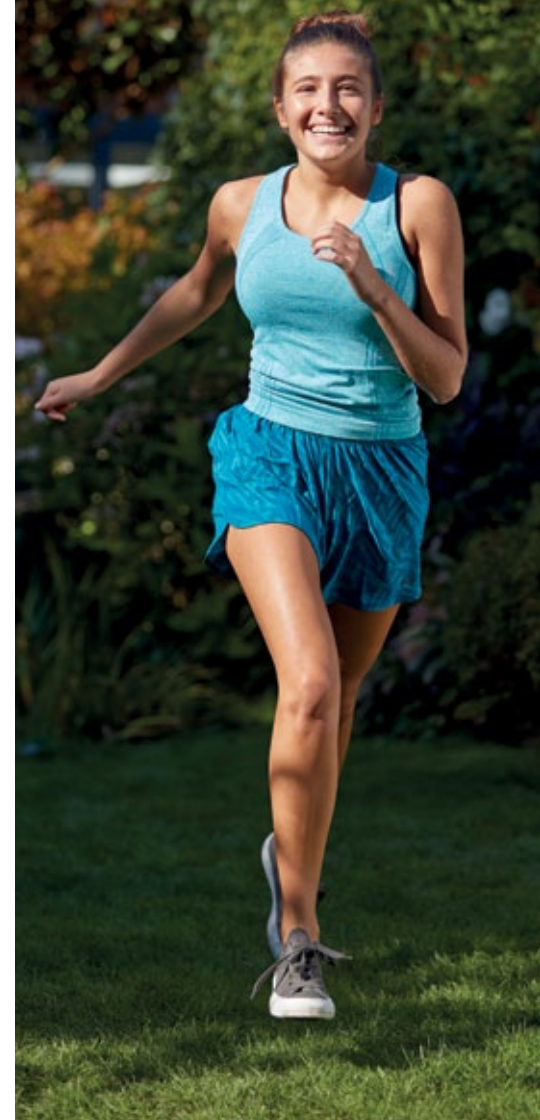
disagree that teens of their parents' generation smoked fewer cigarettes.

"Online personalities are helping to change the way young people think about health and lifestyle. For example, there are now Youtube stars with millions and millions of subscribers that promote a healthy lifestyle who have a positive influence on the young audience watching them." **Chai Cameron**

"Public awareness of health and wellbeing has increased in recent years as public information and health promotion campaigns highlight the importance of good nutrition and exercise. In addition the development of the PSHE curriculum in schools shows how we recognise the value of educating young people on their health and wellbeing, as strategies for the prevention of obesity and ill health." **Professor Tanya Byron**

"I thought I was aware of healthy habits when I was a teenager but looking back I wasn't. It's great to see that the younger generation are making smarter choices about their health!"

I recently posted about my gradual, but healthy weight gain which has happened naturally over the last few years as my body has developed from a teenager into a young woman. The reaction was incredibly positive with everyone saying I looked better as a size 12 instead of the photo of me as a size 8. I think as long as you show confidence, happiness and are healthy, it doesn't matter what size you are. This is a very important message for teenagers, especially today with the growing pressures on appearance and the seemingly perfect lives of others online." **Amelia Goodhead**



I've grown up to be fit and healthy and it is part of my lifestyle, so I'm not concerned about what I look like or what others think of me."

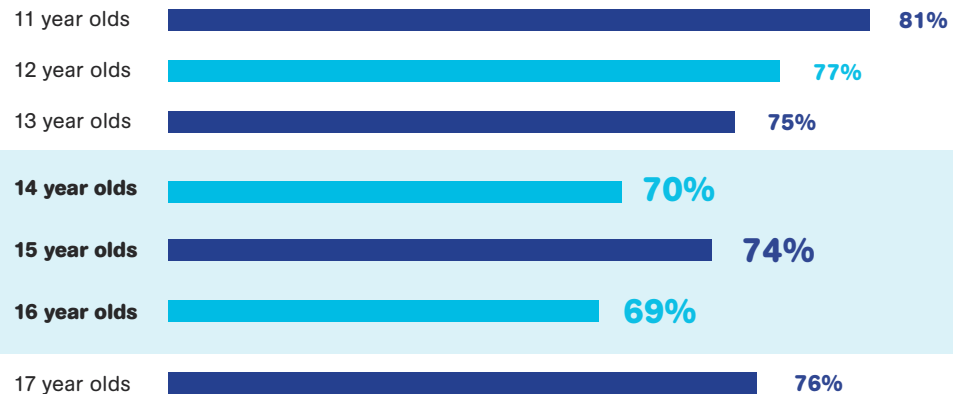
Matthew, 15

threats to 'feel good'

So teens are in a more feel good place than we may have assumed. But is this true of all teens?

A closer look at the figures show that the younger ages are holding up the older ones. Between the ages of 14 and 16 the teenage 'feel good factor' takes a definite knock.

Teens who feel 'positive' about themselves



To take feelings about appearance as an example, while less than a fifth (18%) of 11 year olds are likely to say something negative about the way they look,

this doubles to **37%** by the time they are 16.

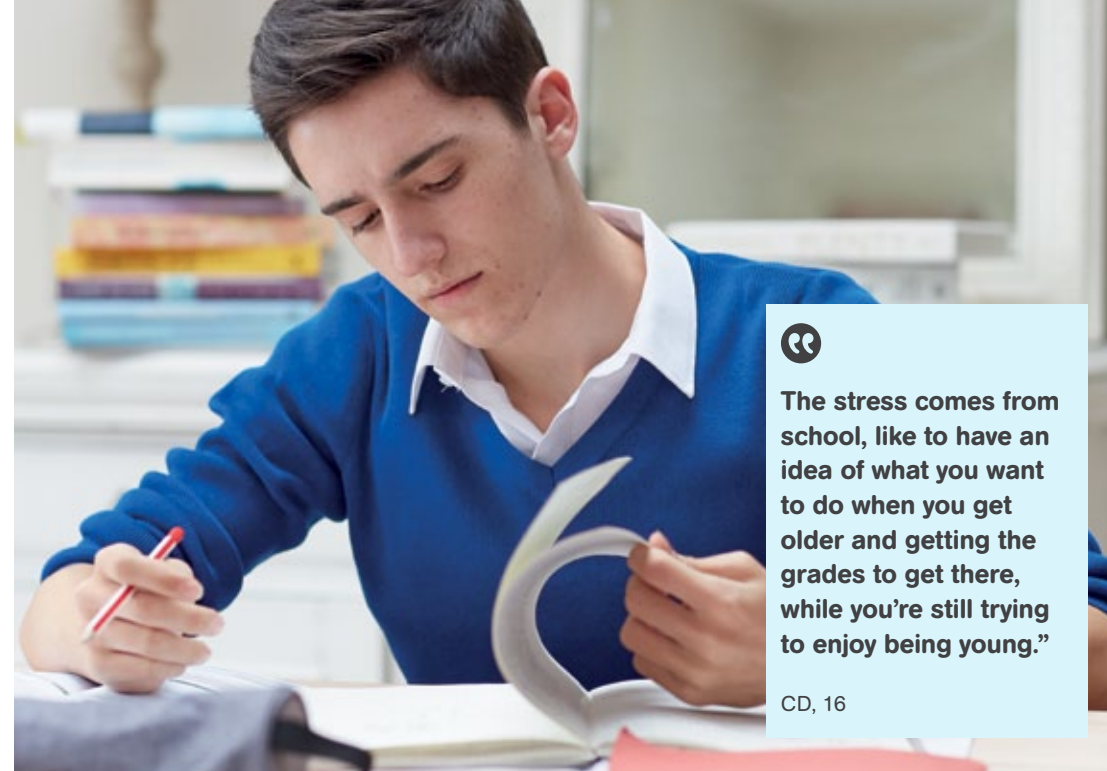


Similarly, when it comes to **personality**, only a small fraction of 11 year olds

4% think they have more negative than positive personality traits – this trebles by 16 years.



41% of all teen girls worry about what their friends say about them behind their back.



The stress comes from school, like to have an idea of what you want to do when you get older and getting the grades to get there, while you're still trying to enjoy being young."

CD, 16

"The physiological, physical and brain changes that take place during adolescence help us understand the way our adolescents think, feel and behave and why this challenging developmental period is necessary.

Around the age of 14-16, teenagers are also managing a complicated set of social pressures, the challenges of sexual awakening and forming relationships and also under increased academic pressure in the lead up to their GCSE exams.

Pulling these biological, psychological and social factors together, while also adding into the mix the social pressure of belonging (we need to attach to our peers in order to begin the process of leaving our family), being seen as attractive (from an evolutionary perspective – in order to find a mate), the need for validation of the emerging 'self' (e.g. the teen preoccupation with Instagram likes of a photo they have posted) and the pressure of 24/7 online and social media which gives you access to the world and the world access to you, it is not surprising that the 14-16 years feel tougher and teens express feeling more unsettled or challenged by aspects of themselves and their lives." **Professor Tanya Byron**



Body image affects girls so much I think. I'm always making sure my make-up is perfect and checking how much I weigh constantly."

India, 17

"It's easy to blame social media for teens not feeling good about their appearance or for their lack of self-esteem because they are consuming media that has been altered by others. Not everyone is a supermodel... and that's fine!" **Chai Cameron**



“In order to ‘individuate’ we need to shift how we socialise in order to achieve independence. One marker of this change is seen in the fact that teens prefer the company of those their own age more than ever before partly because of the teen’s general attraction to novelty. Teens offer teens far more novelty, challenge, risk and fun than familiar family does.

However the main reason teens gravitate toward peers is in order to invest in the future rather than the past. We enter a world made by our parents but we will live most of our lives in a world run and remade by ourselves and our peers who we therefore need to attach to, understand, and build relationships with in order to succeed.” **Professor Tanya Byron**



There is pressure to be perfect - where you’re smart, polite, attractive and confident.”

Hannah, 15



I’ve suffered from acne for about 9 years and I got bullied a lot from it. It’s taken a massive toll on my confidence, I couldn’t imagine leaving the house without make up on.”

Hannah, 17



Teens crave confidence at this age...

nearly half, **47%** of 14 - 16 years olds say they would **want to be more confident**. Of those teens who want to be more confident,

33% think it would help them **fit in better**, and even more

57% say it would help them **feel better about themselves**.

Hormonal changes also contribute to this mid-teen crisis of confidence:

By 15 years old, **skin** becomes one of the biggest health concerns for teens.



42% of teen boys aged 15-17 and

55% of all girls this age want **clearer skin**.



This affects how they feel.

Our research shows that **41%** of those who want clearer skin say more negative than positive things about themselves.



It’s often imperfections that make people more interesting. There is no perfect person, people should be happy and positive with what they see in themselves.”

Chai Cameron

“I suffered terribly from acne as a teenager and was bullied for years. My confidence was knocked very badly and still to this day it gets me down when I’m having a breakout. The internet has given some of us the opportunity to spread the message that no-one is perfect and if you’re suffering from acne you’re not alone. I make it a priority in my weekly vlogs to show a breakout and not constantly cover up with makeup because if the 15 year old me watched that instead of a perfectly concealed or clear-skinned teenager on TV, I would have felt a lot better about myself.”

Amelia Goodhead

public image management: me™

With celebrities selling books full of them, a selfie-stick designed to help you take them and charity initiatives piggy backing on their success – it's safe to say this really is the age of the **selfie**.



As a woman in her late 40s I am a 'digital immigrant' while my children and their peers are the 'digital natives'. The online and social media worlds offer opportunities to learn, create and debate in ways my generation never knew."

Professor Tanya Byron

But for one in five teenage girls, seeing photos of themselves on social media makes them feel worse about themselves – and this is most true for 15/16 year olds. 15% even say they "dread it" when they are tagged in a photo.

And it seems a huge part of this is down to image control. Girls' use of social media seems to be about curating an 'image' online – creating it and then guarding it from infringement by others. So much so in fact that only 19% of teens would describe their social media profile as a true reflection of who they are and how they feel: both good and bad.

For others, 25%, say they only post positive things about themselves on social media and 13% say their profile shows only the best possible version of themselves.

While this behaviour is true of all teens, it is the girls who are far more affected by social media than boys – both the positive and the negative effects.



It would be embarrassing if a photo was taken from a bad angle, like if my face looks bad. If I look good then I'd look like I'm prepared for the pic and look smiley not ugly."

Laurie, 17



Everyone makes their lives look so amazing and special and perfect and it makes you sad when you look at how average your life is."

Daphne, 16

"Today's teens live lives that are both online and offline, their identities are created and moulded by what they see, how they present themselves and the feedback they get. This is a challenge to navigate at a sensitive time of personal, biological and brain development.

Our digital natives, the 'selfie generation', have the opportunity to live their lives, 24/7, in the public eye and many do. Acceptance and a need to belong to the peer group mean that many teens can regard social media likes as authentic validation of themselves. With the opportunity to photoshop their images, our digitised teens can create a false image of themselves adding confusion to a challenging time of individuation and the development of identity.

We need to understand this and empower our teens to develop the critical thinking skills needed to develop confidence and self-belief built around one's values and ideologies rather than an external locus of control (i.e. a sense of self developed around external markers such as looks and body shape)." **Professor Tanya Byron**

"It's important teenagers understand that most people only put the best part of their lives online. It's not always the full story."

Chai Cameron



Twice as many girls vs boys "dread it" when they are tagged in photo

6% vs 14%

35% of girls (vs only 22% of boys) admit they 'love' getting likes and comments on photos.



"Celebrities can look fantastic on the red carpet, but it doesn't mean they don't sit on the sofa in old pjs eating beans on toast and watching Friends re-runs every now and again! I receive lots of personal questions and comments on my blog about my skin, such as, 'your skin is so perfect, and I wish I had skin like yours'. It made me think that by using lights and a fancy camera, my skin can look unnaturally perfect, when in reality it really isn't. It made me realise I have a great responsibility to show people reality in my posts." **Amelia Goodhead**

"There's a difference between making sure you're happy with how you look online and making your online profiles look different to how you really are. There's a balance, and it's finding that balance to continue to be the real you, which in turn will make you and other people feel better about themselves." **Chai Cameron**

changing the conversation

So we know what is bringing down the teen feel good factor, and we know when teens are most affected. So does this help to show how we can bring them back up – giving them confidence and self-belief right at the time they need it so they feel better about being a teenager?

While listening to what dented teens' sense of 'feel good', we also kept an ear open to the things that boost it. And interestingly this is where social media comes back in.

22% of boys and **35%** of girls **love getting 'likes'** in a photo or social media post they are tagged in, saying this affects the way they feel about themselves.



But above all, teens are grounded in the real world when asked to think about what boosts their confidence. While 12% of teenagers admit that lots of likes on their social media channels or photos would raise their self-esteem, more (38%) would rather have a compliment from a friend, in person. And this comes above compliments from boyfriends or girlfriends.

What do they want to be complimented on, what would make the biggest difference to how they feel? Listening to what teens love about themselves is a good place to start.

Eyes and hair had the biggest response with:

42%
of teens saying their eyes are their favourite facial feature, and



36%
saying it is hair.



This is true for both boys and girls aged 11-17, but hair is more important to the younger teens – eyes become more cherished after the age of 15.



Beyond physical appearance, our research shows that teens feel at their best when they are around friends, their family and when doing things they love (hobbies and sports). So this is another important signatory for how we can promote a more feel good feeling in teens.

Above all, teens are still looking for advice – but it would seem that girls are more likely to ask for it than boys. Whereas half of boys (49%) say they don't need advice about anything when it comes to being a teenager, **girls want advice on:**



21%

building confidence



17%

how to get in shape



17%

how to get healthy skin

and it becomes most pronounced from 15-17 years.

Is this an opportunity for us to offer a helping hand?

conclusion

We've listened to teens and heard from them directly about some of the factors that both boost and threaten their 'feel good factor'. In doing this we've identified, that with the right inspiration, help and encouragement, teens can feel better.

The Big Deal About the Unreal

Young girls in particular feel they have to project an image of themselves that's unreal. They admit their social media profile and the images they post don't reflect who they really are and what they really look like. They filter and they photoshop in a bid to attract likes and to help them feel good.

Surely we need to help move 'feel good' away from this distorted, two-dimensional version of reality and bring it back to being and celebrating the real person... so much more than a picture on a screen.



Deeper than Skin Deep

It may not be an earth-shattering discovery that many teens desperately want clearer healthier, skin and that this affects their confidence. But what's apparent is that the need in today's world of social media is more acute than ever.



The Power of the Positive

Every teen has crises of confidence – the most common thing they wished for was to feel more confident in themselves. Our research shows that teens are aware of the things that make them great – the aspects of their personality they value most, the talents they have, in short, their best bits... glossy hair, a cheeky smile and being a loyal and kind friend. Indeed, they want to be able to help each other and themselves. Perhaps this is where we should start looking for ideas on how to help raise confidence across the teen peer group.



Of course all of these factors are interlinked, each one or a combination can determine whether our young people feel good or bad. Boots UK wants to help ensure that more often than not, it's the former.

We recognise that this is only the start of the journey. We need to continue to listen to teens and encourage them to talk – sharing their feelings and opinions – so that we can learn and understand how, where and what we can do to provide support.

“Despite the prevailing public perception that teenagers today are an unhappy generation, what we see in our study is that most of our teens manage to hold onto a positive view of themselves despite the challenges of the adolescent years. This is fundamentally important for all of us who raise, educate, work with and support teenagers to take on board as this data shows that many of our teens are insightful and honest and while sharing some of their more difficult feelings and behaviours, the majority in our study manage, at times, to maintain a positive and emotionally resilient outlook on themselves and their life.

This tells us something important about this generation of teens because it highlights that they can both struggle with the challenges that their time of life throws up for them and also hold a positive mindset. Support, advice and interventions for teens therefore must not only be aimed at those who are really struggling and unhappy but also for those that take a realistic and mature view of life and come from a place of emotional resilience so that we can empower them to manage their positive outlook while navigating the challenges of their adolescence and maintain their physical, psychological and emotional health.” **Professor Tanya Byron**





For more information please contact the Boots UK Press Office:
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About Boots UK

Boots UK (boots.com), the UK's leading pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer, is part of the Retail Pharmacy International Division of Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc. (Nasdaq: WBA), the first global pharmacy-led, health and wellbeing enterprise. With 2,510* stores in the UK, Boots UK is committed to providing exceptional customer and patient care, be the first choice for pharmacy and healthcare and offer innovative 'only at Boots' exclusive products such as the UK's leading skincare brand No7, all delivered with the great value customers love. Created over 165 years ago, the Boots brand is still at the heart of the communities it serves.

*As at 31 August 2015 excluding equity method investments

Research was conducted by YouGov amongst 1,000 UK teenagers aged 11-17 in August, 2015. The sample has been weighted by age and gender to reflect a nationally representative audience. Qualitative focus groups were also held among smaller groups of teens.