

12 October 2018

Expert panel challenges Berkhamsted, St Albans and Harpenden parents to recognise the signs of mental illness and anxiety in tweens and teens

Parents are the guardians of their future, need to stay connected, not judge but be a 'safe haven'

Earlier this week local parents had the opportunity to attend a thought provoking seminar with a distinguished panel of experts that focused on teen and tween anxiety and mental health. The panel discussion, hosted by local family law firm Rayden Solicitors at The Town Hall, Berkhamsted, discussed what life looks like for tweens and teens in 2018 and how parents can support their children through often stressful and upsetting teenage years.

Dr Lisa Barkley - Principal Clinical Psychologist at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Sue Atkins - Parenting Expert and regular guest on ITV's 'This Morning', and Lotte Stringer – founding trustee of local mental health support charity Hector's House, met over 40 local parents, who participated in the debate. The experts highlighted that teenagers will have mood swings and suffer from stress caused by a range of stimuli – hormone shifts, social media, exam preparation, bullying – but often parents are less aware of how to recognise the signs, how teenagers are affected emotionally and physically, and how to help them through these challenges.

Dr Lisa Barkley offered reassurance that mood changes, hormonal shift and attitudes to risk are usually a normal part of teen development. The challenge for parents is to discuss consequences and in the face of more challenging behaviour work to ensure that "the door is left open" for teens to come home and they are reassured that home remains a safe haven.

Sue Atkins who has a series of parenting blogs, discussed how tweens' and teens' lives are fundamentally different to their parents' childhoods, with social media and the internet ensuring that their every move is documented and privacy is non-existent. Their approach to life is all about the 'here and now' and parents need to understand that taking risks, being judged by social media, their peers and the world they move in is King.

Lotte Stringer spoke passionately about Hector's House, a local charity in Berkhamsted set up after the devastating suicide of her brother, Hector, when he was 18. Hector's House now provides outreach into schools and other organisations in relation to maintaining mental good health through their #EatMoveLoveMovement initiative. They also provide advice and support for teens who might be struggling with depression or anxiety, as well as concerned parents.

Rayden Solicitors Partner, Emily Watson, who facilitated the discussion said "As family lawyers we have first-hand experience of a number of stressful and highly emotional situations that parents and children face. Our clients often deal with huge personal upheaval to their lives and the mental health and wellbeing of their children is a significant issue for them. In facilitating these discussions with highly regarded experts, we hope that we have given local parents some insight into how to deal with tween and teen mental health and a better understanding of how to tackle problems and support their children before mental illness and anxiety takes hold."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Photo: from left to right: Emily Watson, Partner at Rayden Solicitors, Lotte Stringer, Hector's House, Sue Atkins, parenting expert, Dr Lisa Barkley, Clinical Psychologist Great Ormond Street Hospital
2. Rayden Solicitors is a specialist family law firm which advises on all aspects of family law, including divorce and relationship breakdown, financial disputes and issues concerning children.
3. The firm has offices in Berkhamsted, St Albans and Beaconsfield and has grown to be the largest specialist family law firm in Herts
4. For press enquiries please contact:
Emma Kent, Marketing Manager at Rayden Solicitors on 01727 734 260 or ek@raydensolicitors.co.uk

For further information:

Dr Lisa Barkley, Clinical Psychologist specialising in working with children and families. Currently, Principal Clinical Psychologist at Great Ormond Street Hospital

Lisa qualified as a Clinical Psychologist in 2006 and specialises in working with children and their families. Lisa works as a Principal Clinical Psychologist at Great Ormond Street Hospital, working with children living with health conditions. She has also worked locally at the Hertfordshire Clinic in St Albans, seeing children with a range of mental health difficulties and presentations, including anxiety and low mood.

Sue Atkins, parenting expert – Twitter @sueatkins; Instagram sueatkins18; Facebook Sue Atkins The Parenting Expert; www.TheSueAtkins.com

Sue is an internationally recognised parenting expert, broadcaster, speaker and best-selling author. She offers practical guidance for bringing up happy, confident, resilient, well behaved children with strong self-esteem, covering from toddler to teen. She regularly appears on the ITV show 'This Morning' and 'The Jeremy Vine Show' on BBC Radio 2 and is the parenting expert for many BBC Radio Stations around the UK.

Lotte Stringer, Hector's House - <https://hectorshouse.org.uk/>; Twitter @house_hectors; Instagram hectorshere; Facebook Hector's House

Lotte is a founding trustee of Hector's House and regularly delivers talks in schools about mental health. Hector's House is a local charity set up with the vision of helping everyone to have access to the mental health support they need, to ensure people don't ever reach crisis point. They promote open discussions around mental health issues to end stigma and seek to normalise mental health issues by creating opportunities for people to talk openly about how they feel.

Recommended reading/guidance:

- Sue Atkins, Parenting made Easy – How to Raise Happy Children
- Cathy Cresswell, Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques
- Dr Melanie Fennell, Overcoming Low Self-Esteem, 2nd Edition: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques
- www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/myteenbrain
- Abraham-Hicks Emotional Guidance Scale