

Are Young People **Terrible**?

Sadhia Khan, 17, Middlesex



"It's very unfair to group teenagers as 'problematic' for society. Most of us just aren't like that. I have so many extra-curricular hobbies; I have been in a debating society, I play tennis and badminton and the piano. I don't tend to meet my friends on the street but go shopping with them or meet for meals. The media's image of teenagers and these negative reports that have recently been published tend to focus on the idea that young people misbehave and just hang around doing nothing. That's not true for many of us. We have a lot of pressures in our lives, socially and academically. I've applied to do medicine at university like my sister, and many of us are hoping to achieve in life and make a positive impact in society, yet that is an image that rarely comes across in debates on teenage life. My group of friends is highly motivated. Every time I pick up a newspaper or hear another TV report about teenagers, it is always demonising us, rather than reflecting the reality for most of us. At the end of a schoolday, when we sometimes go shopping together, we're looked at suspiciously because we are taking up so much space. People are quite judgmental about teenagers, how we look, where we go, and I think it's a shame that middle-class children are treated with more respect than maybe someone who's wearing a hoodie."

Ed Chapman, 17, North London



"The majority of teenagers are fairly well behaved, and I don't believe there's a higher percentage of teenagers causing trouble than adults, so it is not specifically a teenager problem. Young people are a visible target because for many, their only option is to meet outside the home. I spend time regularly hanging around the estate because that is how we socialise - we can't really have so many friends round to the house - but we don't cause any trouble and we have a good relationship with the residents. The police stop us fairly regularly which I find irritating. Two of my friends were stopped and searched by an officer who was rude and aggressive when they were doing nothing wrong. I have been stopped and searched twice and asked questions four or five times. I'm a Scout leader and help to look after around 50 kids every week, and am responsible for taking them on camps. I plan to go to university and become a barrister."

Jennifer Whitfield, 14 , North Yorkshire



"The perception that people have of all teenagers as troublemakers annoys me. It's just a small section of young people that are out to cause trouble. When I'm shopping with friends, I notice that we're followed around by a shop assistant who stays behind us at all times as if we are going to do something wrong. Of course, there are teenagers who spend time hanging around on street corners but they are not all trying to scare adults, just trying to have a good time with their friends, and they have nowhere else to gather. People tend to assume they are causing trouble when they are actually just standing there. It's wrong to judge teenagers, who in the majority, are not out to harm others but just to have fun. Sometimes I'll go to the park with friends but not often. Most of the time, I play netball and the saxophone in the concert band at college, or go camping with my family in holidays but not everyone can afford to do these things, so maybe that's why some stand on the street, to meet and chat."



Helena Gavrielides, 16, London

"There are so many teenagers who are good citizens. Most teenagers do drink but it depends where they do it. I think it's silly to drink standing on a street, and I understand that can be intimidating for adults. But it's difficult because not everyone's doing this, although people are going to pick up on the worst cases. I go to a liberal comprehensive school. The younger children meet on the street and I've seen police asking them to move although they were not doing anything. Elderly people seem suspicious of young people, even when we are polite, as if they assume we are going to steal their bags."

I've got friends who do charity work so it's not all about us drinking, and drugs and partying. I am busy every night except one with yoga, choir and piano and I've just taken a course to qualify as a swim instructor. With reports on obese teenagers, a lot of young people are really stressed about being overweight. I see so many girls on diets, and I don't think reports on obesity do anything to help their self image."



Charlie, Bristol

"Watch out! - I am from the evil and hated generation. Believe it or not, not every single teenager around my age goes around beating up people and smashing up cars. Can you seriously claim that today's youth are that much worse than the mods and rockers of the former generation? My generation never gets a positive thing said about them - GCSEs for example - we do better than the past generation and the courses must be getting easier - obviously. Is it really any wonder then certain youths rebel?"