

Relationships Australia

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“SHARE THE CARE” – TEENAGERS NOT FORGOTTEN

Relationships Australia (RA) welcomes the focus of Families Week 2006* on the importance of parenting for young people aged 12 to 18 years in their transition to adulthood. To celebrate this year's Families Week, RA is piloting its new “Share the Care” parenting plan booklet to help separated parents plan for the needs of their children – particularly teenage children.

This period is one of the most important and eventful in our lives and it is essential that young people are provided with adequate support and role models to empower them to make the fullest possible contribution to the community as adults. Now more than ever young people need the support of parents, aunts, uncles, peer group, schools, sporting and cultural groups and the community at large to guide them in the journey to adulthood and support them when they face the inevitable challenges along the way.

While children in all families face enough obstacles in life, Relationships Australia is particularly concerned about the challenges facing the approximately 1.1 million children and young people in Australia who are growing up in separated families – many of them adolescents.

According to Relationships Australia National Director Mary Mertin-Ryan, “Separation in families does not mean that parenting responsibilities end. For this reason, Relationships Australia is working together with policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to develop ways to assist separating parents to reach agreement for the ongoing care for their children through non-adversarial methods that also encourage equal shared parenting responsibility”.

“The need for separating parents to reach practical parenting plans for the future care of their children is no less important for older children – especially with their added educational and financial demands. Parenting agreements need to reflect this, but what is most important is to provide an environment in which parents can put aside conflict and enmity to refocus on the needs of their children”, Ms Mertin-Ryan said.

To help parents through this difficult process, Relationships Australia has developed and is trialling nationally a new booklet “Share the Care” that contains tips on how to produce a parenting plan that covers practical issues like living arrangements, parenting style, communications, finances, education, religion, health care and emotional wellbeing. “Share the Care” is available from RA branches throughout Australia as well as on our website: www.relationships.com.au. It will be further updated in the near future to reflect input from stakeholders and the changes to the family law system.

“Young people aged 12 to 18 years need the ongoing love and encouragement of both their parents and Relationships Australia is confident that our ‘Share the Care’ booklet will prove to be a useful resource helping parents provide a degree of certainty in their children's lives at what is often a time of considerable uncertainty and stress”, Ms Mertin-Ryan added.

* National Families Week runs 14-20 May 2006

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Editor's note:

Relationships Australia is a leading provider of professional relationship support services throughout Australia. It is a not-for-profit, secular, community-based organisation with partial funding from the Federal, State and Local Governments. RA operates in approximately 100 locations Australia-wide.