

To all young people! (Calling all parents, educators & leaders: please send to all young people)

Dear parents, educators, grandparents and all our leaders

Please send this letter to every young person you know – children, high school learners and university students alike. Its content is needed for urgent nationwide thought and debate. Thank you!

Kind regards
Sally Thorp (director - Life Talk Forum)

To all young people

Three things happened today, prompting me to write to you. A girl died at a birthday party, yet another teenager was diagnosed with schizophrenia triggered by smoking weed, and the Anti Drug Alliance's latest survey came to the alarming conclusion that drug-use is now so out of control that the war on drugs has been lost, and that the only solution might be to legalise them.

Making drugs legal?! Surely that's insanity?! Or is it really the only option? What do you think? Should you even think – or is this solely for the country's decision-makers to address? It's got everything to do with you! Any such decisions will affect your life and your future (and your whole generation) so surely it's vital that you engage your thought-process too?

You (and your peers) possess amazing power right now. Power to influence the outcome and future, of your own life, and the lives of millions of your peers. An exaggeration? Nope, it's a fact! Right now, the choices that you and your friends make not only affect what happens in your life, they have a ripple-effect throughout the world. With that power, however, comes responsibility. Responsibility to engage in thought – about your choices, the consequences, your actions, and how to achieve the positive outcomes you strive for. (Emphasis is on the word 'positive' because there's no room for anyone who strives for any kind of destructive result.)

It doesn't matter what home or background you come from. It doesn't matter if you do (or don't) have parents who want the best for you, or who don't set boundaries to protect and guide you. It doesn't matter if life is over-tough or over-easy, or if it's fair or unfair. What matters is whether you take charge of your life and your choices. What matters is whether you allow yourself to be swept along by your peers, doing things because 'everyone else does it', believing that somehow any harm 'won't happen to me' – or whether you assert your right to choose actions that will lead to great outcomes and a wonderful future for you.

Life is all about choices. Choices and consequences. In fact, life is often like a tug-of-war (hence our *Tug-of-Life* initiative). Picture the scene: on the left you have a whole lot of challenges and troublemakers ('Challengers') whose only agenda is to destroy your life. On the right are all the positives (the Galvanizers) that'll help you to get to being your 'goal person'. You're on the right, tugging to win, and your success depends entirely on your stamina and the quality of the Galvanizers that you've chosen.

Right now, your generation faces some of the toughest tug-of-life contests ever encountered. You also face many of them on your own, for a variety of reasons. As parents we too face our own 'contests' and we're not always there for you the way we ought (or would like) to be. That very fact, however, presents you with huge opportunities. It empowers you to take charge of your choices and actions. So what will you do with this power you've got? Will you chuck it away or will you grab it with both hands?

Those who chuck their power away so often end up in the kind of heart-breaking stories that get shared with our Forum. This 'power-discarding' bunch, when you get to know them, are those who binge-drink, smoke weed (or try other drugs), have various meaningless sexual experiences, and usually don't give much thought to their values or morals. They think that their choices are liberating and 'cool', for a while, but the happiness or success that they seek tends to evade them.

So, let's get back to you and the power you now hold. What exactly is this power, and how can you use it? It's the power to own your decisions and actions. It's the power to define your 'game plan for life' based on the positive outcomes you want. And it's the power to resist being swept into any negative activities that others are engaging in.

Once you've decided to use the power you have, then it's time to define what you strive for. Asking yourself some questions can be most helpful. Questions such as: "What kind of person do I want to be, i.e. what is my 'goal person'?", "What outcomes do I want in my life?" (Do you, for example, want to: be happy; safe; successful; have a good reputation; good communication with family; strong faith; a positive attitude; great relationships; kind and trustworthy friends; good marks; confidence; or any other aspects?) From then on, you'll find amazing clarity if you check every decision you're contemplating to see if it will lead you towards, or away from, your 'goal person'.

Once you engage your power, don't wait for society to declare that the war on drugs has truly been lost. Don't wait until some policy-maker legalises drugs, thereby forever destroying any chance of winning the war against them. Don't wait for binge-drinking to lure ever more of your peers into making bad decisions, destroying their brain-cells, and preventing them from ever knowing what their true potential could have been. Don't wait until the race to engage in meaningless sexual encounters forever jeopardises your generation's ability to experience the true depth and beauty of love-filled relationships. Don't wait until the power you have today has been whittled away into oblivion...

Galvanise your friends, your class-mates, your educators, your parents and their friends, your business leaders and your politicians – galvanise them into becoming 'agents for positive change' wherever you feel it's needed! Are adults serving alcohol to underage kids at parties? Remind them that not only are they breaking the law, they're sabotaging lives. Are your mates smoking weed? Remind them of the risks of triggering schizophrenia (or other psychosis) as well as the reality that they're entering a gateway that so often leads to stronger drugs. Are your parents perhaps focusing on being your friend and forgetting their parenting responsibilities? Remind them that it's in your interest (much as it might not always feel like it J) for them to tackle their parenting responsibility as their top priority. Remind them that boundaries, much as you'll push against them, actually make you feel secure and loved. Don't be afraid to speak your mind. If someone is doing something destructive help them to see the possible consequences. And when you find yourself lost or uncertain of what to do, don't be afraid to ask for help from someone who is wise and who has your interests and well-being at heart.

It's you and your generation who are tomorrow's leaders. Building a successful future entails building strong foundations today. Don't wait till tomorrow before you take action where it counts! It's what you do from today that will affect your life and your future.

If you need advice or information about how to be most effective, write to us. If you'd like to be a Tug-of-Life 'ambassador' in your school, college or community, write to us and we'll send you some tips. We will do everything we can to help you succeed. (You're welcome to visit our website www.tugoflife.com for any additional tips or information.) Harness your power and watch your world thrive!

With warmest regards and the best of wishes

Izabella Gates and the whole Life Talk Forum team

* Izabella is the best-selling author of *Life Talk for a Daughter*, *Life Talk for a Son*, *Life Talk for Parents* and *The Tug-of-Life*, and she runs the Life Talk Forum for teens and parents. You're welcome to email her on Izabella@lifetalk.co.za

