

# HOW WILL THEY COPE ON THEIR OWN?

Every parent worries about their children leaving home. How will they cope? What if we can't be there in an emergency?

By Felicity and Gillian Handley



As an exchange student living in Paris, my daughter Felicity was caught up in the recent terrorist attacks. A world away in Sydney, I felt utterly helpless as I realised there was nothing I could do to protect her. Our sms conversations from that night give some insight into the experience.

SAT 14 NOV 2015 8.22 AM AEDT (FRI 10.30 PM PARIS)

Daughter

There's been a shooting in Paris. It's very close to me but we're all OK.

Mother

Stay safe. Where are you?

**Daughter:** After an eight-hour shift, two girlfriends and I were enjoying a quiet dinner at a restaurant on Strasbourg St Denis when my friend received a text warning her of a shooting at a restaurant a few blocks from where we were. We had almost decided on that same restaurant for dinner. Another text informed us of another shooting close by. Before we could react, another message, another shooting. Suddenly, the restaurant grew quiet as people received a barrage of messages alerting them to shootings across the tenth arrondissement, precisely where we were. We left our meal, running through the streets to my friend's nearby apartment. Although I don't like worrying my parents, I sent them a message.

**Mother:** The first message I received was from a friend saying she had heard the news and was Felicity safe? I rushed to the TV and saw the headlines. When I grabbed my phone to call Felicity, I saw the message from her telling me she was OK. I spent the next seven hours glued to the TV trying to make sense of what was happening.

9 AM AEDT (11 PM PARIS)

Daughter

We were at a restaurant close by, but we left and just got back to a friend's apartment.

Mother

Can you stay there for a few hours – maybe for the night?

Daughter

Yes – we're staying put for now. There are still gunmen on the loose, apparently, so we're staying inside.

Mother

I'm watching the news. Coordinated attack. At least 60 hostages in a rock concert. Stay where you are!

**Daughter:** It's hard to describe the chaos of those few hours. We were using Twitter for real-time coverage, and there were countless reports of shootings and bombings throughout the city. It was impossible to know what was true – the entire city seemed under attack. Facebook initiated a disaster-response check-in feature, which was extremely helpful. By this time, the authorities had imposed an unofficial curfew stranding many people, including us.

14 NOV 10.00 AEDT (MIDNIGHT – PARIS)

Mother

Is Katie (flatmate) with you?

Daughter

No. She's with a friend at our apartment.

**Daughter:** My flatmate had gone to a concert just around the corner from our apartment. When I heard about the Bataclan attack I called her repeatedly until she was able to pick up. The security guards at her concert were screaming at people to get out, and those around her were stampeding and crying. The friend she was with had friends inside the Bataclan and was deeply affected by events.

Leaving home at a young age to live in a city so far away makes you realise how vulnerable you are. In Paris, my friends have become my family. Aware of our isolation, we rely upon each other for the kind of support that is normally only found in the oldest and strongest forms of kinship.

14 NOV 17.46 AEDT (7.46 AM PARIS)

Daughter

I just left my friend's place and took an Uber home

**Daughter:** In the early hours, we took an Uber through empty streets back to my apartment. At work, we found traumatised colleagues, many of whom spent the night alone, listening to gunfire.

16 NOV 5.30 AM AEDT (7.30 PM PARIS)

Daughter

I'm OK; it's a really awful atmosphere here. Everyone is deeply affected, everyone is very scared. There have been lots of false alarms around the city tonight. We've had a bunch of people staying at our place since the attacks.

**Daughter:** In Paris, many people live alone. As I live close to my workplace, I offered my apartment as a place to stay for any of my stranded co-workers. Another friend who lived alone in the street where one of the shootings took place moved in with us. Over the weekend, people came to us from work, arrived to have dinner or just watch TV. No one wanted to be alone, so we opened our doors to anyone needing company or support. People all over the city did the same, and one of my enduring memories of the attacks will be the sense of fellowship and community that emerged from such horror.

**Mother:** That weekend, the focus of my world became a flickering TV screen as I trawled news channels for updates. Communication by sms in a situation like this is brutal. Text messages can't relay unexpressed emotion the way that the tone of voice can do via the phone or a look in the eyes can do via Skype. I needed to know she was safe every hour, but would that be suffocating her? I wanted to tell her that we were afraid for her safety, but would that inflame her own fear? I wanted her to be in constant contact, but she had friends she needed to locate. I wanted to reassure her, but what advice could I give in a such a volatile situation? Above all, I wanted her to be home where I could keep her safe.

As parents, we understand the need to let go as our teens grow up – in theory. In practice, whether your children are two, ten or twenty years old, when danger threatens, the visceral urge to shield them is as fierce as ever. All parents face the dilemma of how to let go when their instinct is driving them to protect. The answer is we have no choice. Our teens must take risks in order to grow. All we can do is trust that the values and principles that we have instilled in them will continue to guide them.

My daughter returns to Paris tomorrow – on a one-way ticket. It will be agonising to say goodbye, but part of me goes with her and will always be with her. That's just the way it is for parents – it's a job for life, and no matter how much we loosen the strings, the bond is never broken.

# YOUR TEEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS

## Many laws applicable to your children change when they hit the ripe old age of 16.

By Katherine Hawes

If you have teenagers, it is important to know what their legal rights are as they move into adulthood.

Your teenagers right to...

### 1. Leave school

Australian States and Territories apply different laws for school attendance. However, if you are based in NSW, your teenagers must attend school from when they turn 6 until they finish Year 10 or turn 17.

In addition, if your child has finished Year 10 but hasn't yet turned 17, he or she would either need to:

- do some other form of education or training (like TAFE or an apprenticeship)
- do full time paid work (at least 25 hours a week)
- do a combination of work, education and training.

There are strict guidelines for the above and your child may need to get special permission from the Department of Education or the school principal.

### 2. Leave home

There is no law that says at what age your teenagers can leave home. The truth is that they can leave home at any age providing they have a safe place to go to. As a parent, you have a right to file a Missing Person's Report to Police if your child leaves home and he or she has failed to notify you of his or her whereabouts.

### 3. Have a Facebook page

In order to have a Facebook page, you need to be 13 or over. This law is set by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. (Federal Law in America in 1998). Facebook's guidelines state no one under 13 is allowed a profile on the site, but a recent study found that 55 per cent of 12 year olds are registered, often with the help of their parents.

### 4. Get married

The marriageable age in Australia is 18 years for both men and women, and two people under the age of 18 cannot marry each other. In addition, the marriage of somebody who is 16 years, but less than 18 years is only possible if the person they are marrying is 18 years or older. In this situation, parental consent and a judge or magistrate's order are required for the minor.

### 5. Obtain a passport

You can apply for a passport at any age although usually children under the age of 18 would need to get consent from their parents. However, in exceptional circumstances the need for the parents' consent can be waived.

### 6. Alcohol

It is illegal to sell or supply alcohol to people under the age of 18. However, there are no laws against teenagers drinking at home if their parents supply the alcohol. Be careful — if you supply alcohol to your teenager's friends, you can get into trouble unless you get permission from the parents of anyone who is under 18.

### 7. Medical treatment

Within Australia, a child aged 14 and above can consent to simple healthcare treatments without obtaining the approval of parents or guardian, as long as health professionals believe the teenager understands the consequences and risks involved in the course of treatment.

In addition, from the age of 16, a child can consent to medical and dental treatment with the same authority as an adult.

*With over 20 years' legal and business experience, Katherine Hawes is the founder and principal solicitor of New Age Legal Solutions, which offers fixed price legal solutions for individuals and businesses. To find out more about her work visit [www.newagelegalsolutions.com.au](http://www.newagelegalsolutions.com.au)*