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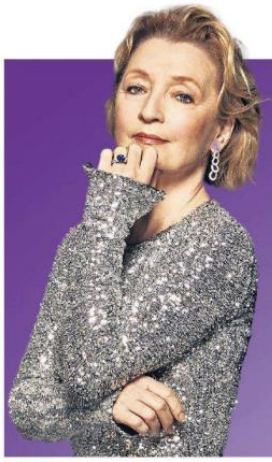
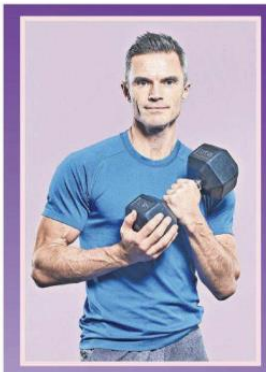


Lesley Manville

Younger men, sex scenes and my part in The Crown

MAGAZINE



How to age-proof your body and brain It's never too late

WEEKEND

State can't fix all your problems, says Sunak

PM seeks to rebuild trust after Truss 'sugar-rush'

Steven Swinford Political Editor

Rishi Sunak has warned that people cannot expect the state to "fix every problem" as he vowed to regain the trust of voters by being honest about the scale of the economic difficulties ahead.

In his first big interview since he became prime minister, Sunak admitted that trust in the Conservative Party had been damaged by his predecessor Liz Truss's "sugar-rush" budget.

He told The Times that his job was to restore economic credibility and win back trust but said he was "confident" that the public would judge his autumn budget on November 17 to be "fair and compassionate".

The prime minister and his chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, are preparing to announce £50 billion of tax rises and spending cuts in an attempt to balance the books and help to bear down on inflation.

Sunak said he recognised the "anxiety" that millions of people had about soaring mortgage repayments and said he would do "absolutely everything" he could to "grip this problem". However, he made clear that there was a limit to government intervention.

"It's right we're honest about the trade-offs we face — everyone now talks about borrowing, everyone appreciates that the government cannot do everything," he said. "How does government do everything? It just does it by borrowing money, which ultimately leads to, as we saw, high inflation, a loss of credibility, spiking interest rates. Actually, the argument in one sense was made over the summer.

"So I think it's just honesty with people about why you got here — that's why you have to prioritise. You have to make sure that as you're doing things, you're doing it in a way that's fair and being honest with people that, of course, no government can fix every problem. Life is not that simple."

In his interview Sunak also:

- Disclosed that he had not expected to become prime minister, having lost the summer leadership campaign, and had "moved on".
- Revealed that he told Boris Johnson he would not step aside for him during face-to-face talks, insisting that he was the "best person for the job".
- Said he hoped that becoming Britain's first Asian prime minister would be a "source of collective pride" for the nation.
- Defended claims by Suella Braverman, the home secretary, that Britain was facing an "invasion" of illegal immigrants and pledged to cut overall levels of migration.
- Declined to say whether he stood by the Tories' commitment not to increase VAT, income tax or national insurance.

Sunak said that Truss's budget had damaged trust in the Conservative

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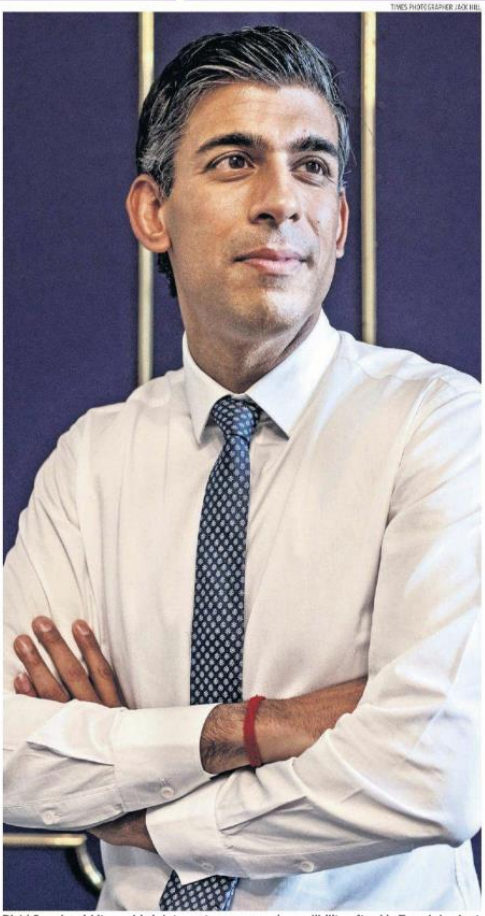

Rishi Sunak said it was his job to restore economic credibility after Liz Truss's budget damaged trust in the Tory party. Cuts and tax rises of £50 billion are to be announced

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Teen girls and bullying — how parents can help

Bullying amongst girls seems to be increasingly toxic. Anna Maxted asks the experts for their advice

Bullying is not new, of course, but as worried parents of today's schoolchildren know, it appears to be getting more extreme. It also seems to be particularly toxic among girls. Experts say bullying is at its worst between the ages of 9 and 14, for developmental and social reasons. And while not every girl is involved, girls are more likely to be perpetrators — and victims. "It's mostly girls who do it to girls," says Dr Shadi Shahnavaz, head of family therapy at the Soke, a private mental health and wellness clinic. Boys bully too, but are usually less tenacious about it. "They just want to move on and do other things — especially at this age. It's not this persistent bullying that goes on online, in school, all the time. Girls can be fixated on wanting to be popular, wanting to be liked."

Last month an inquest was told that Charley-Ann Patterson was bullied online for months before she killed herself, aged 12. A 2020 ONS report found that almost one in five children aged between 10 and 15 had suffered bullying behaviour in the preceding year — that's approximately 764,000 children. So what do parents need to know? And what can they do?

Help your child to understand what a good friend looks like

One of the best things you can do for your child is to help them to recognise good friendships. Parents can remind girls that little hurtful comments, sarcasm or micro-aggressions shouldn't just be brushed off, says Shahnavaz. "You get that bad sense in your body, you get upset, and then you tell yourself, 'Oh no, they didn't mean it.'" Sometimes a friend doesn't mean it but, Shahnavaz says, tell your daughter to "be aware, that's your alarm bell going off". (And if you've experienced this yourself in friendships, share that with your child so you normalise it.) She adds: "Lots of children have that inner sense — they need to listen to that. You can sense when a friend has a tendency to be jealous, to be envious, to not be on your side. All of those are signs of someone who's not a good friend and at some point is going to back-stab you."

You observe their friendships, use your instincts and encourage your child to use theirs. It's easy to sense when a friend isn't supportive or loyal if they're hanging out together at your house, Shahnavaz continues. This strategy, she says, has always enabled her gently to guide her own daughters. "I'd say to them, 'I know you really like so-and-so but let's be careful because I just have this sense about them.'" Often your daughter will sense something is amiss too, she says, but needs your encouragement to pay attention to bad vibes and move towards other friends.

Be engaged in their friendships

Whenever possible, welcome your daughter's friends to your home and

GETTY IMAGES; BRITTNEY YOUNG

host weekend sleepovers. Parental engagement in your child's social life is crucial, says Shahnavaz, and that means having an open house. If her daughters asked if they could visit a friend, she'd say yes but suggest they also invite the friend over so she could meet them. "That's how you get to know their friends and that's how you can gently influence your children." It's our responsibility as parents to know who they are out with, who they are texting and what they are doing, she says. "Have a feel for their friends." After all, if you can be reassured that they have good friends who are supportive and there for each other, "well, you don't have to worry very much about anything".

Teach your child how not to be an accidental sidekick

Many girls who go along with bullying know it's wrong but fear being ostracised themselves. Shahnavaz works with many adolescent girls who didn't want to join the bullying, and feel bad about it, but tell her, "I felt like I had to." To bring home to our daughters the very worst possible consequences of being incidental henchwomen, have continuing discussions about bullying, even if they're uncomfortable. "All parents should be telling their children about this young girl [Charley-Ann Patterson], 'This is what happened, it's awful — what do you think?'"

Discuss instances where bullying has led children to take their own lives and ask them, "Why do you think children might bully?" If they suggest that a child might have in any way "deserved it", she says, correct them. Eating dinner as a family is valuable because it provides an opportunity to have these important conversations and to discover what your child believes.

> Social media can amplify fears of being rejected and excluded, and warps how girls see themselves

Erica Komisar

Cliquey behaviour is at its worst between the ages of 9 and 14

In many cases there's one instigator, often a popular girl, influencing the group mentality, says Shahnavaz. "She starts a rumour — 'she's not like us' — and then the others, for fear of being bullied themselves, go along with her."

Those years are the toughest of adolescence because you're changing from small child to fully fledged teen, says the leading psychoanalyst and parent coach Erica Komisar, author of *Chicken Little, The Sky Isn't Falling — Raising Resilient Adolescents in the Age of Anxiety*. "And that transition is really hard. Kids are jockeying for position. They're trying to understand where they fit in — the cool group, the nerdy group, the sporty group, the arty group? And where in terms of their gender and sexuality? There's a lot of shifting of friendships."

Aggression at this stage is partly fuelled by hormonal changes and their situation, says Komisar. "School can feel like the Wild West — cruelty, rejection and exclusions among girls peak at this time." Consequently, "they feel vulnerable, and do what gives them a sense of power and control, which is having power over other kids. It's a reaction to feeling vulnerable."

Monitor your daughter's online activity until their mid-teens

If your child is under 11, Shahnavaz recommends that they don't have a phone with internet access. If they need to call or text you for safety reasons, she says, a basic phone will do, even though children may feel left out. If you do give an iPhone to your child, insist on having access to their accounts and monitor their activity. "You can't just let a child get on with it. Not before they are 15, 16 at least."

She advises that after a certain hour in the day they shouldn't have access to their phone so they can sleep. Children want guidance from us, and when she works with 12 and 13-year olds who don't confide in their parents, it's because they don't like the reaction they get, she says. But "if you're not punitive, if you show your child you won't be appalled by what they tell you, that you can accept and talk about things, no matter what, the child will want to share things with you".

Social media can amplify fears of being rejected and excluded, and warps how girls see themselves. The stress-regulating part of the brain is very vigilant during adolescence, adds Komisar. "It causes girls to be incredibly self-conscious and much more vulnerable to rejection, exclusion and bullying online — look at what a great time we're having, you're not here. It makes girls paranoid." Social media magnifies and intensifies bullying, says Komisar, though she notes that 90 per cent of children bullied online are also bullied face to face.

Playing team sport can protect girls

Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that children involved in team sports are less likely to be bullied, Komisar notes. They also feel less stress and are more likely to stand up for themselves in a confrontation. Encourage your daughter to exercise, she says. It boosts self-esteem. "Exercise helps to regulate emotion. It makes you feel empowered, strong and healthy." And team sport is even better as it gives girls a community. "It gives you a tribe. They're sublimating some of their aggression into their sport."

Be careful how you react — it can make the problem worse

Parents can struggle to react appropriately if their child is having problems. We may unintentionally imply they're in some way to blame ("'Is it something you're doing that's making you stand out?' — No.").

Children need parents to be sensitive, empathise and listen — but often we get it wrong by either feeling their pain so acutely that we become depressed and anxious or exploding in outrage, which to our child looks like anger with them. Komisar cites a survey on student bullying that found about 58 per cent of victims didn't tell an adult because they feared being judged or punished for being "weak". Parents must find objective distance to be supportive, she says.

Accept that your own child could be behaving badly

It's very hard to accept that your beloved daughter could be a manipulator, but if you have suspicions or, worse, the evidence is undeniable, what do you do? You might say, "Look, I've been listening and I'm hearing a lot of aggression towards your friends." If you suspect your child may be involved in bullying, stay calm, says Komisar. "Show sensitivity and empathy to try to understand where that aggression is coming from." Most likely it's home.

"You need to be open enough, secure enough and self-aware enough to take responsibility for a dynamic in the family that probably is causing that child to go out and repeat it" — for example, if one parent is being unkind to the other parent. She says that when there's conflict at home and it's not dealt with, families are in denial about it and children are afraid to talk about it, "kids will take those conflicts out into the world. We need to make it possible for them to talk about the challenges at home."

If moving school is an option, offer it

In early adolescence children are extremely vulnerable. They're susceptible to depression and anxiety, even suicidal ideation, says Komisar. This is because their focus is on the immediate present. "If they're in pain, they don't have a sense of pain lessening in the future." Moving them away is not possible for all families, she acknowledges, but if they can change school, offer that choice. "I am a firm believer in allowing kids who are bullied to reinvent themselves in new environments," Komisar says.

If moving isn't an option, parents must fight to get as much support for their child at school as they can: "guidance counsellors, social workers, teachers and head teachers who understand their situation and are a safe harbour for your child". Be persistent — it can be hard to get support. Komisar says: "Parents really have to be very proactive." Prioritise your child. "Being as emotionally and physically present as possible is critical when your child is under this kind of pressure and stress."

A mother's story 'It was heartbreaking for my daughter'

Almost every school will tell you that bullying is forbidden and the rare and exceptional examples are dealt with swiftly. In our case we had sent our sporty, outgoing daughter to a highly prestigious girls' boarding school with exceptional facilities and many famous alumnae. We were assured that the school had a "zero tolerance" policy to prevent all aspects of bullying and that she would end up loving it there, even if it took a bit of time to settle in.

As my daughter tells it, the bullying began with the sly whispers, just out of earshot, then led to the not-so-subtle barging out of the way. Then she was followed by a small group of girls who were always just a few steps behind her. This kind of relentless, hard-to-prove bullying destroys self-esteem and has a horrific effect on mental health.

It was when the bullying escalated from verbal insults to online that life became unacceptable. She stopped going to meals, lost a lot of weight, became pale and withdrawn. Eventually we persuaded the school to bend the rules so she could come home every other weekend. But the return every Sunday was heartbreaking.

The final breaking point happened shortly after she went back to school in January. My daughter called me, incoherent with sobs. Eventually I gleaned that an innocent smiling photograph of her aged 13 had been posted online and sexualised in a way that was truly abhorrent. An investigation discovered that two girls from the year above had stolen another pupil's laptop and used it to defame my daughter's reputation. She was only 14. The next morning her father drove to the school, packed her belongings and brought her home. No one even seemed to realise she had vanished.

At this point you might have hoped that the school's pastoral care/antibullying team would have leapt into action. But the mood from the headmistress down was to play down the five months of bullying, offer placating words, explain to us that the two culprits had willingly gone to her to confess their misdemeanour and had seen the error of their ways. It was almost uttered with the jocular "girls will be girls" and the belief that the situation was not that bad.

The truth was that in just five months my daughter had suffered a complete loss of confidence and a radical change of character. She struggled for a long time even after she left the school with crippling anxiety/depression and disordered eating. She was privately tutored for a term on a one-to-one basis and had several months of therapy.

Eventually she was able to return to mainstream education at a different school. As a parent, though, I still feel guilty about that time and wish I had acted sooner.