



Campaign Briefing: Seriously Awkward

Ask your MP to give older teenagers the support they need

Thank you for agreeing to speak with your MP about the work of The Children's Society; it means a lot to have your support.

We want to make sure vulnerable young people's issues are top of the Government's political agenda, and you can help us achieve this. We are asking you to meet with your MP to discuss the findings of our new research as part of our Seriously Awkward campaign.

As their constituent, you have the power to ask your MP to speak out on issues that are important to you. They care about your views, and will want to hear what you have to say about why you're a supporter of The Children's Society.

In this briefing:

- 1) **Key Points on Seriously Awkward**
- 2) **Action you can take**
- 3) **What your MP can do**
- 4) **Further information**
- 5) **Practical tips for meeting your MP**

1) Key points on Seriously Awkward

- In June 2015, The Children's Society launched its Seriously Awkward campaign that highlighted how vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds are not getting basic protections to keep them safe, healthy and happy.
- Our original report showed that vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds can fall between the cracks of childhood and adulthood. This is often due to the lack of support available to children of this age, combined with a mistaken belief that, because they are older, they are more resilient and able to resolve issues on their own.
- The next phase of our campaign is focussing on a group of nearly 60,000 16 and 17 year olds who have been categorised as a 'child in need' by their local authorities.
- Due to the limited support this group receives, the difficulties they experience in their lives and the lack of statutory support once they turn 18, they continue to struggle as they move into adult life.

- Unlike younger children, the problems they face are more likely to relate to themselves, rather than their family environment. These typically include going missing, sexual exploitation, substance misuse, and mental health problems.
- For many, these problems can continue to impact on their lives as they become adults. As a group, they are more likely to be homeless, and not be in education or work than other young people. Despite this, we know that it is very rare for children to have their case transferred from children's services to adult services when they turn 18.
- Right now, there is a review of the support that these young people receive. We want the Government to use this review to propose changes for how this group of 16 and 17 year olds are supported into adulthood.

2) What you can do

- You can help ensure that every MP knows about this campaign and that these young people gets the support they need. You can email you MP, call their constituency office, or better still, meet them in person.
- Please tell your MP why you campaign for The Children's Society, why you care about this campaign, and ask them for their support. At the end of this briefing, we provide more tips to help you feel comfortable and confident in meeting with your MP.
- We can provide you with a copy of the Seriously Awkward 'Crumbling Futures' campaign summary for you to give to your MP, it includes further information on:
 - The kind of serious problems 16 and 17 year olds are facing
 - The scale of the issue
 - How 16 and 17 year olds interact with children's services
 - The recommendations we are making to national and local decision-makers

3) How your MP can help

MPs like to know exactly what you are asking them to do. These are some specific tasks or activities you can ask of them.

1. **Write a letter of support:** Please ask your MP to use the findings of our Crumbling Futures report to write a letter to the Children's Minister to support our call for more help for 16 and 17 year olds.
2. **Take a photo:** If they are happy to agree, a photo of you handing them the campaign summary is a great thing to tweet to them, to show their support for the issue
3. **Follow up:** If they have any further questions, they can follow up meeting with a member of our Public Affairs team – matthew.hussey@childrenssociety.org.uk

4) Further information

- **Read up on the campaign:**
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/seriously-awkward-summary-report.pdf>
- Find out more about Seriously Awkward: [link]
- **Watch the video:** [link]
- **Hear from a project worker:** [link]
- **Fact and figures about children and young people in your area:** [link]
- **Contact us** to find out more, or if you have any questions about this briefing by emailing jacq.mcnee@childrenssociety.org.uk
- **Read our guide on lobbying to get more useful tips for meeting with your MP -**
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/campaign-for-change/how-to-lobby-a-decision-maker>

5) Practical tips for meeting your MP

Meeting your MP is your right as a constituent, and is a vital way in which MPs find out about issues that matter to you.

Step 1: Find your MP

If you are not sure who your MP is, you can find out by:

- Checking out www.theyworkforyou.com. Simply type in your postcode and it will tell you which constituency you're in and who your MP is; or
- Calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 quoting your address and postcode.

These sources will also supply you with your MP's contact details. You can then write to your MP, or preferably arrange to meet them. The following steps explain how.

If you know who your MP is, you can also check their website or social media pages to find their contact details.

Step 2: Arrange a meeting

Most MPs will have 'surgeries' – these are times when they are available at different places within their constituency for constituents to meet and discuss problems with them. Your MP's secretary or local party office will also be able to advise you when your MP will next be holding a surgery. Ask to speak to the MP's diary secretary, explain to them that you are a constituent and would like to meet with your MP, and briefly explain the reason for the meeting.

Step 3: Prepare

If you have been successful in arranging a meeting, please keep in touch and let us know as we can provide helpful advice and local facts and figures to help you prepare. The 'Further Information' section of this briefing provides some additional reading material which you might find useful.

It is often helpful to know some background about your MP before you meet them. Here are some things you might like to find out in advance (we can help you with this of course):

- What party is your MP a member of? Are they a member of the governing party or the opposition?
- Are they a backbencher, or do they have a senior or ministerial role?
- What are their interests?

- Have they asked any relevant questions or made any relevant speeches in Parliament recently? (you can find such information on www.parliament.uk or www.theyworkforyou.com)
- What have they been doing in your local area recently (you can look at their website and their social media accounts to find this out)

When you have answers to these questions, think about how this might affect how they will respond to your questions. Are they likely to be interested in finding out about how they can support the work of the Children's Society, or might you need to persuade them about why it is important?

Sometimes you may meet with a member of staff who works for your MP instead, they will be able to provide information to you, or they will feedback your concerns to your MP on your behalf.

Step 4: Think about timing

It might seem obvious but if an MP has given you a particular meeting time, make sure you are on time.

If attending a surgery, you may also need to make sure you make your points clearly and concisely, as you might not have very much time.

Step 5: Be polite and informative

Introduce yourself and show why you care about the issue so the MP knows why it matters to you. Do thank them for taking the time to meet you!

The key to successful influencing is **building relationships** with the people you are trying to influence; if you are getting on with them, they are more likely to listen to what you have to say.

Because MPs work on lots of different issues, you will probably know more about the issue than them, so don't worry about being asked lots of difficult questions, but do make sure you are prepared. Your arguments will have the credibility and the conviction that they need to persuade the MP to take action and our campaigns and public affairs team will always be happy to follow up with the MP after your meeting.

MPs are always keen to know about how the issue you are talking about affects people in their local area, so local examples can help show that it's an issue that should concern them. We can provide you with local figures, and with campaign summaries, so all the information should be at your fingertips.

Step 6: Feedback and follow up

Once you have had your meeting, please let us know how it went. It is important that we know if MPs are supportive and have committed to doing what you asked, if they had questions we need to answer, or disagreed with points.

It is a good idea to follow up with a letter or a card, thanking your MP for taking the time to meet with you, and reminding them what they agreed to do.