

Play and Art
Therapy

A Year of
TeenHelp

2010 Olympic
Games

Cover photo
by Mel

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Avatar

How will you remember the 00s?
That's "two thousands'" or "oh oh zies", if you like.



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Your valuable contributions are what make Avatar so unique. Please submit us your content, whether it be an article, poem, joke, game, photo, drawing or anything else you have to share!

Submission form: www.teenhelp.org/avatar/submit
Email: avatar@teenhelp.org



Letter from the Editors and acknowledgments.

Letter from the Editors

Happy New Year, TeenHelp, we hope you enjoy this issue!

It's hard to believe that it's 2010 already! A new year, a new decade, and a fresh start is here. And let's not forget that TeenHelp has been back online for a year on January 5. In honor of so many notable events, we have a very special issue for you this month!

We'd like to start off this issue (and this year!) with a **special note**, a tribute TeenHelp's one year rebirthday. Check out "A Year in the Eyes of TeenHelp" for a look at some of the most notable events of the past year on TeenHelp.

In other news, check out the **TeenHelp Times**, where you will find a heartfelt article on Holocaust Memorial Day, as well as an insightful look at the past decade in "How Will You Remember the 00s?" Also featured this month is the March of Dimes, TeenHelp's **Cause of the Month!**

In **Mind & Body**, this month, is an educational piece on alcoholism, as well as an interesting read on play and art therapies. In the **Lifestyle** section, read up on how to stay active this winter in a piece on the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, and in honor of International Creativity Month you will find a motivating piece on unleashing your imagination!

Be sure to check out advice from the Editors in **Dear Avatar**, TeenHelp's advice column, and don't forget about the **Fun & Games** section, where you can try your hand at trivia, read a comic, and more! And last, but certainly not least, be sure to read this month's **Self Expression** and your January **Horoscopes**, appropriately geared towards New Year's resolutions!

We hope to see you in February!
The Avatar Editors.

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The Avatar Editors would like to thank the following TeenHelp users for their valuable contributions published in this month's magazine.

Contributions from readers like you are what make Avatar so unique and wonderful. Please consider submitting content, whether it be an article, poem, photograph, or anything else.

www.teenhelp.org/avatar/submit or
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Looking back at TeenHelp in 2009.

A Year in the Eyes of TeenHelp

by Jessie (Asylum)

The now-infamous “TeenHelp data loss” of December 2008 seems like ancient history to many of us. And to countless TeenHelp users it is something they have only heard about, mentioned in passing or found hidden on the TeenHelp History page, lost among happier landmarks, like reaching 5,000 members and new systems opening. But rewriting a decade of scripts and rules, rebuilding years of lost resources, and reaching 100,000 posts (for not the first time) isn’t something that happens overnight.

A year later, some of our most notable milestones, like reaching 1,000,000 posts, have yet to be met again. January 5, 2010, will mark the one year anniversary of the rebirth of TeenHelp. But what has happened in the past year, besides business as usual? What does it take to rebuild a community as unique as ours?

The first order of business was to replace as much of what was lost as possible, and so the start of 2009 brought us the short-lived, yet significant, Working Groups. From articles to videos, Terms of Service, rules, and Staff Training Manuals, a few dozen of TeenHelp’s dedicated users lent their time and hands in rewriting lost data and resources.

Some minor, but notable, changes occurred within Staff this past year also. Talent Officers became the Talent Committee, officially becoming TeenHelp’s fourth committee, and Avatar expanded to include three new Editor positions, bringing the total to a record nine Avatar Editorial Staff.

Other changes and additions took place this year. 2009 saw the introduction of new forums, and the rebranding of others. Drugs and Alcohol became Substance Use, and Addictive Behaviours was added. Other new forums include Arts and Literature, Disabilities, Food and Recipes, Goals and Ambitions, and Pets. Forums that were renamed include Education and Careers (formerly Schools and Careers) and Peer Pressure and Bullying (formerly Bullying).

Weekly Facilitated Chat Room Discussions were introduced in late August, allowing members to gather in the Chat Room to share their thoughts, experiences, and advice with one another. And we wouldn’t want to forget that, as of December, users can now change their usernames once every six months! It can be confusing, but it’s fun and exciting for our names to change with us as we grow.



Photograph by Mel

As we celebrate, we must remember that some things we had are lost forever. Memories of those who are no longer with us in life, and those who have moved on for (what we hope to be) greener pastures, are now just that—memories. Our posts, journals and blogs, and those of some of our greatest friends, have been lost with time. And although we breathe a collective sigh of relief over some of our posts being gone (not all of them were our best moments, yeah?) for everyone “pre-reset,” it is undeniable that we have lost something.

Today, things may actually be back to business as usual. HelpLINK and Live Help are up and running, the Article and Video sections no longer look bare, and in many ways we have advanced beyond where we were before. Above all, it is important to look back and recognize these changes as positive ones. But it’s important, also, to remember all of the time and effort it takes to sustain and advance our community, and to also appreciate how far we have come in just one year.

Happy Rebirthday, TeenHelp, and Happy New Year.



Holocaust Memorial Day

by Casey (Cas*)

We see it even today, over sixty years later, in diaries, in newspaper articles, in memorials, and in novels. We see references to it in plays, in Broadway shows, in dances, and in songs. We talk to our grandparents and great-grandparents to hear their take on the situation happening at large in their own youth. Whether or not this terrifying situation, this Holocaust, as it is now referred to by a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire," actually happened has been debated since it's terrible prime in the 1940s. Unfortunately, it did happen, and over six million Jews, Gypsies, LGBT individuals, and many others lost their lives in concentration camps.

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly designated January 27 as the annual international Holocaust remembrance day. Though this group of countries was not collectively directly related to the Holocaust, the United Nations felt obligated to honour the Holocaust victims in hopes to restore even a piece of the hope taken away by many in the era of the Holocaust. Furthermore, this group recognized the importance of educating our own generation around the world in order to take extreme measures to ensure that the Holocaust will never repeat itself.

...in order to take extreme measures to ensure that the Holocaust will never repeat itself.

What's the significance of January 27th, exactly, and why was this day chosen? On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz, three of the largest concentration camps (areas in which mass amounts of mistreated minorities were kept and often killed), were liberated by soldiers of the Soviet Union, or so it seemed. Although Auschwitz is the most well known concentration camp and by far the one that held the most prisoners, it was not the first camp to be liberated. On January 18th, the Germans marched from those three camps and gave the prisoners the option of marching to the border of the the German Reich, going to camps in Germany, or staying where they were and waiting for the Soviets to arrive. After 'liberating' the camps, the Soviets left the prisoners to care for themselves, and to find their own way home. It was

even said that the people liberated themselves, and that the Soviets just marched through.

As we approach this day in 2010, it is extremely important for our generation, truly the leaders of tomorrow, to be mindful of the horrible events that took places in the lives of our own parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, and to take steps to make sure that this will never happen again. Though this task may seem daunting, we can start by being tolerant of other religions, ethnicities, sexualities, and races, and keeping an open mind and an open heart about the positive differences we, as individuals, have the capacity and capability of making on the world. ■



Photograph by Stephanie (Konstantine)



How Will You Remember the 00s?

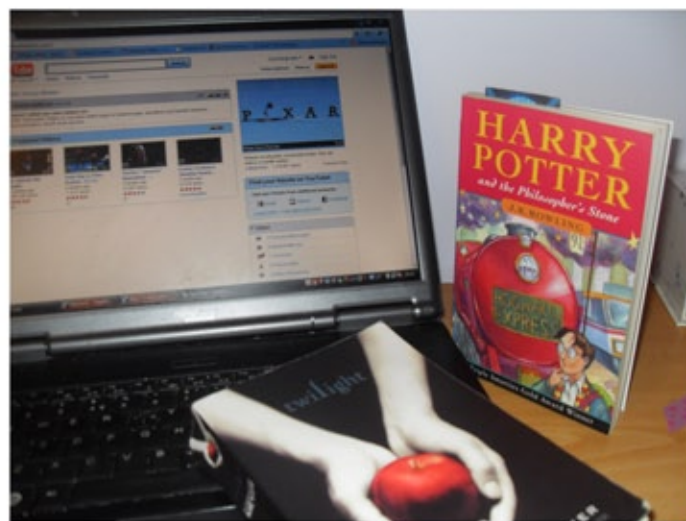
by Rob

(That's "two thousands" or "oh oh zies", if you like.)

This year is a special one because it marks the start of a new decade, something that many of us have not seen before – or in the very least cannot remember much about. A lot of the time we hear elder people talking about what happened in a certain decade. The 70s brought us hippies, the 80s cheesy horror, the 90s pop bands, and now at the dawn of the 10s ("tensies") what can we do but look back and ask, "What have we left behind?"

Are the 00s the years of the Internet? The Internet existed long before the millennium of course, but for consumers the speeds were slow, the websites were boring, and the applications were majorly undeveloped, leading to a rather poor experience overall. The last decade has seen massive developments in the Internet and the material that forms it. It has seen the rise of a global media phenomena that includes the likes of Wikipedia and YouTube, as well as the advent of social networking (such as Facebook and MySpace), and the rapid spread of instant messaging (such as MSN messenger). The Internet has become a platform for collaboration and expression that has led to a truly open media that has been both a blessing and a curse – a way to reveal many of the most talented people in the world, but also a way to reveal some of the most horrific ways that people can treat one another. On the other hand, the Internet has brought with it some much less constructive uses, such as the wide spread appeal of memes, which to many are an annoyance. It has also brought with it a massive deterioration in the quality of language, in the form of text speak ("wut u up 2?") and the ambitious introduction of a few too many acronyms ("lol"). The anonymity of the Internet has also led to the troll culture, where by groups of people intentionally bother others for the sake of it, and not to mention the constant spam we all receive through email and other routes. The Internet has also seen a generation of young people turn to criminal behaviour, with the advent of P2P and torrent-based file sharing, which in some countries has led to prosecutions. The Internet has had a profound impact on the way we live our lives, and as technology continues to change and spread to more remote regions of the World, it is likely it will continue to play an important role in our daily lives, media, and culture.

Are the 00s the years of Harry Potter? I've never read Harry Potter myself so I can't really go



Photograph by Nicola

into much detail, but apparently there's a wizard, and he does some pretty cool things, and then a whole generation of young people decided to adore him. Pretty neat. The last decade has seen many different media sensations surface – from literature to film and television – each with their own, respective, cult followings. It has seen the dawn of the Twilight saga, the growing popularity and diversity of reality television such as Big Brother, Pokemon (from the late nineties, strictly speaking), High School Musical, Scrubs, and many more works that are sure to leave a cultural impact for decades to come.

Are the 00s the years of terrorism? The last decade has seen the development of crises in the Middle East, ranging from Iraq, to Afghanistan and Israel. It has seen terrorist attacks in New York, London, Madrid and Moscow, among many others. It has also seen sharp rises in Islamophobia and a misunderstanding of eastern cultures, leading to violent outbreaks across the developed world. This has led to a rise of far right political and religious organisations, who have used these kinds of incidents to further their agendas. For many, the decade has also seen a downward trend in human rights, for example the use of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, and the general political climate of fear that has been heavily felt since the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. Despite some recent developments including withdrawing (some) military forces from Asia, setting up new governments in Iraq, and more liberal governments in the USA, it is likely that terrorism will continue to be a part of our world for many years to come.

(Continued on page 7.)



Connecting the world to you.

Are the 00s the years of recession? The last few years have seen the world economy collapse in one of the greatest economic contractions since the 1930s. While many countries have begun to leave recession, it has left the economic climate devastated, with thousands out of work, and many international corporations finding themselves bankrupt from their debts. When the world emerges from the crisis, the economic scene will be radically changed, and one would hope various measures will be implemented to protect the economies of the future.

Are the 00s the years of global warming? The last decade has seen the rise in political activism on a range of issues, from global warming to vegetarianism and more. Aided in part by a global culture, and free media inspired by the Internet, it has brought us to a higher level of understanding of our world and those within it. Recent years have seen the introduction of civil liberties for LGBT people and the first black president of the United States, which may suggest a future of progress and change in the world that will benefit all of us.



Photograph by Jessie (Asylum)

All in all, as we ask ourselves what we have left for future generations, and what we will face in the coming decade, we remember the 00s. Not just as the first decade of a new millennium, nor as the rise of technology, but also as the decade of great change. ■

Want more from the 00s?

Want to read more on news and events from the 2000s? Check out these articles in past issues of Avatar.

"2007 at a Glance" page 1 of the January 2009 (Volume 1, Issue 8) release of Avatar.

"When Nature Fights Back" in Volume 2, Issues 1, 3, and 4.

"A Sea of Green: Violence in Iran" page 4 of the August 2009 (Volume 3, Issue 2) release.

"Neda: A Symbol of Freedom" page 4 of the July 2009 (Volume 3, Issue 1) release.

"Universal Health Care" page 4 of the October 2009 (Volume 3, Issue 4) release.

Also, "Months in Review" can be found in many releases of Avatar! Be sure to check them out.

Contact us!

Do you have any comments or feedback on any of our featured news and debates articles? Would you like to see one of your articles here or do you have any suggestions on what you'd like to see in future editions of Avatar? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

Form: www.teenhelp.org/avatar/submit
Email: avatar@teenhelp.org



Alcoholism

by Maria (Gidig)

Alcoholism is a disease that can easily affect anyone and everyone, regardless if you're the one drinking or not. How are we supposed to handle this along with the struggles of everyday life? Perhaps you or a loved one thinks you have a problem with drinking. You are not alone.

Alcoholism is a more common problem than you think. It's also known as alcohol dependency, and it really is just that, being dependant on alcohol. There are four 'symptoms' of alcoholism that are generally recognized:

Cravings, or the need or urge to drink. This could happen all the time for no reason, or something could trigger the alcoholic. This is much more than a simple desire. The urge can make one do things you wouldn't expect just to get their next sip of alcohol. **Loss of control** or not being able to resist the urge to drink. When it's all you can think about, and alcohol has taken over your life. **Physical dependence**, literally when your body needs alcohol to function, is also a symptom. When you have a physical dependence, to stop drinking suddenly can result in withdrawal symptoms that can sometimes be deadly. **Tolerance**, or being able to drink more without feeling the normal effects of the alcohol. This can cause someone to drink a lot of alcohol, trying to get the normal drunk that some people feel just after a night at the bar.

One out of every twelve adults abuse alcohol or is alcohol dependent, this is about 17.6 million people, just in the United States!

Causes and treatment.

Alcoholism doesn't necessarily 'come from' anywhere in particular. Mental disease is often a common factor amongst alcoholics, though you can still suffer from alcoholism even if you do not have a mental illness.

It's a disease, even though you can't 'catch' it from someone. It affects both your body and mind in ways you wouldn't even think about. Like any other disease, it has symptoms and usually follows a very predictable course.

There are studies saying that children of alcoholics are four times as likely as others to become an alcoholic themselves, but this does not mean you're doomed to a life of alcoholism! It may be genetic, but lifestyle also greatly affects how prone you are to becoming an alcoholic.

The other things that play a huge role in alcoholism are your friends, your family, the amount of stress in your life, and how much access you have to alcohol. So just because no one in your family has become an alcoholic, does not mean you will not be! Hopefully you won't, but you have to be just as careful as everyone else about watching your alcohol consumption. You are at a higher risk for becoming alcohol dependent if you start drinking at a younger age.

Whilst there is no set cure, there is treatment out there for people who need it. There are a variety of options, but the alcoholic will have hard days up ahead. These are in no way meant to deter you from getting help, but are a general idea about what to expect and why not to get caught up in this vicious disease. There are two main types of treatment, inpatient and outpatient.

Inpatient is for those who feel they don't have the support they need through family or friends, have tried to quit drinking before, have had serious alcohol problems for many years, or just want the extra support and care. Usually you go and stay at a center, and they equip you with life skills to help you keep sober, and help you through times where you have a lot of trouble not drinking. They can also administer medication to keep withdrawal symptoms under control.

Outpatient treatment is better for those who have a lesser problem with drinking problems, as in aren't drinking too much, or have only been drinking for a few years. People will also choose outpatient programs when they don't have the time to stay in an inpatient facility, or feel that they have all the right tools to get better right around them.

No matter your choice, either of these can be beneficial, depending on the person you are, and the severity of your problem. Call ahead to treatment centers, ask around for recommendations, and visit the facility before you decide where you'd like to go. Look at statistics; the ones who have the most people stay sober are going to be the best ones. Picking the right treatment and treatment center is important, but don't take your time in deciding if you feel you need help immediately. The sooner you get in, the better.



Detoxing, which comes for the physical dependency that many people get, is probably one of the worst parts of battling alcoholism. This means getting rid of the effects of the alcohol and is normally the first step in working to get through any kind of drug addiction, including alcoholism.

Detoxing from alcohol has some of the most extreme, possibly fatalistic symptoms out there. This is the dangerous part of trying to stop on your own. If following up with a doctor either at an inpatient or outpatient facility, you can get proper medical care, and sometimes even medication to help get you through the days of symptoms.

What symptoms you'll get, and how bad they will be, all depends on your body, the severity of the alcoholism, and how long you've been drinking. Alcohol detoxification can last anywhere from three to ten days on average.

Alcoholics have to work hard for themselves to be able to overcome this in order to lessen the chances of relapse. However, as long as the alcoholic tries really hard, keeps their support system up, and asks for help when they need it, they can keep sober.

I think my friend/family member/I have a problem with alcohol abuse, what should I do?

Some questions you should ask yourself are: Have you or anyone else felt that this person should cut down on their drinking? Does this person get annoyed when someone approaches them about their drinking habits? Has this person ever had a drink in the morning to calm nerves or cover a hangover?

If you answer yes to any of these, now is the time to look into help and see what your options are. Now may be a good time to speak to a professional as there are multiple long and short term effects of drinking.

Short term effects include loss of inhibitions, blurry vision, trouble speaking, loss of muscle coordination, coma, and possibly even death, to name some. **Long term effects** include impaired mental functioning, liver disorders, gastrointestinal problems, heart disease, stroke, lung disorders, cancer, and skin, muscle and bone disorders, among others

Is it ever okay to drink? While it's socially acceptable once you are of age, it is your choice. Anyone pregnant or trying to become pregnant, planning to drive or do something requiring alertness, taking certain medications, recovering from an alcohol addiction, or younger than the legal drinking age should not be drinking at all. However, please keep in mind that these are only a few guidelines. If you are unsure or are on any prescription drugs, you should ask your doctor before drinking. ■

Seeking help.

Alcoholism is a disease that you can find so much for. Though it may be hard to deal with now, you don't have to live with it forever. Please reach out and get help for this. You are not alone.

There are many places you look for information about alcoholism and support for it. Here are just a few:

Al-Anon/Alateen: www.al-anon.alateen.org – A support group for family and friends of alcoholics, using the same twelve step program adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org – A support group using a twelve step program for recovering alcoholics.

NCADI: ncadi.samhsa.gov – Information about drugs and alcohol.

Also check out www.teenhelp.org/hotlines for various hotlines that may be of assistance to you.

Contact us!

Do you have any comments or feedback on any of our featured Mind and Body articles? Would you like to see one of your articles here or do you have any suggestions on what you'd like to see in future editions of Avatar? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

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Email: avatar@teenhelp.org



Art and Play Therapy

by Maria (Gidig)

Expressive therapy. Doesn't that sound odd? But expressive therapies such as art and play therapy can be extremely helpful to anyone involved. We've heard of art and play therapy, but truly, what are they? Is it something that could benefit you? So many questions revolve around these therapies!

What is art therapy? Art therapy is a form of psychological help involving craft tools like chalk, paint, crayons, markers, clay, and whatever else you can imagine. They have found that there are many psychological aspects of the entire process of art making, and it has been found that this can actually help you throughout your life in a psychological way. It mimics the same benefits as talk therapy. It helps improve or maintain positive thinking and emotions. Art therapy is all about symbols – what are you drawing, and why? What does it mean that you drew your brother twice as big as you?

Many people are unaware of how to, or are not able to verbalize their emotions and feelings as you need to do in the common practice of therapy.

How does it work? Many people are unaware of how to, or are not able to verbalize their emotions and feelings as you need to do in the common practice of therapy. Essentially your subconscious can come through without you even realizing it until it's pointed out to you. At least, that's the theory behind it. Then, after you have created a piece or two of art, you and your therapist sit down and look at what you have drawn and talk about it as well as emotions you felt while working. In this way you can work on moving forward in a comfortable manner.

Who can benefit from art therapy? While art therapy is more commonly used with children, teenagers and adults can benefit from art therapy as well. Basically, anyone is able to try art therapy. If you feel you need help in your life, and art therapy sparks your interest, go ahead and give it a try!

What is play therapy? Play therapy is when you set up items such as dolls to help in a therapeutic way. Then you can work on resolving issues through



Photograph by Jessie (Asylum)

playing them out. It is especially used to diagnose where a certain behavior or emotion has come from. For example, if every time someone sets up a stage, they put their father by a beer bottle, their sadness and anger may come from their father's alcoholism. Play therapy is as much about metaphors and symbols as art therapy is.

How does it work? Play therapy works quite similarly to art therapy, where you physically show things going on in your head instead of verbalizing them, as especially children have trouble doing sometimes. Then, as you do with art therapy, you sit down with your therapist and talk through what they noticed and where to go with the information you have gathered. Without a therapist who understands what symbols stand for, and where you're using metaphors, play therapy would not be helpful.

Who can benefit from play therapy? Typically younger children use play therapy, but anyone has the potential to benefit from it. To see if you could benefit from play therapy, call someone who specializes with play therapy and tell them your situation. Most of them would be happy to tell you if play therapy is worth your time.

I want to try it, what now? Now you need to work to find someone who specializes in art or play therapy who you feel comfortable enough to open up to and speak about your feelings with. It's just like finding a therapist who specializes with grief depression or something similar. Ask around, use Google, even check out your local yellow pages. Art and play therapists can work at hospitals, private practices, and just about anywhere! ■



TeenHelp's Cause of the Month: The March of Dimes

by Katrina

January, the start of the new year, is Birth Defects month. In lieu of this, we have chosen The March of Dimes as our January Cause of the Month. The March of Dimes, an organization that has made many notable accomplishments since its founding, fights to prevent and raise awareness about three main things: birth defects, premature births, and infant mortality. The March of Dimes actually began in 1916 with the great polio epidemic that swept the United States in the beginning years of the Great Depression. Franklin Roosevelt became a victim of this crippling illness in 1921. Polio has been defeated, but the March of Dimes lives on. Today, because the amount of premature babies born topples numbers even as high as 525,000, the March of Dimes continues to support research to stop premature birth and works to educate future mothers and fathers about the importance of striving to take steps to a healthy pregnancy.

...the March of Dimes recognizes the inability of far too many parents to pay for proper health-care of their children.

In terms of research done, the March of Dimes has funded research conducted specifically on gene therapy that was used to treat hemophilia successfully for the first time. Though there have been many more amazing feats made through research funded by the March of Dimes, the treatment of hemophilia was definitely a shining moment in the history of the March of Dimes.

As mentioned, the March of Dimes also puts forth immense efforts to educate parents about the importance of doing what's best for the baby during the nine months before the baby is born. They actually have their own website, the Pregnancy and Newborn Health Education Center, which can be found at www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec. This contains a plethora of very helpful articles on any pregnancy and childcare related topics from birth defects to the importance of good nutrition during and before pregnancy. This organization also provides pregnant women and future fathers with an email

service, which can be found at their website, staffed by various health care professionals.

Finally, the March of Dimes recognizes the inability of far too many parents to pay for proper health care of their children, so, they fund a number of people in the United States and are working to get health insurance and proper health care for all infants whose parents are unable to afford the care that is so vital at the beginning of life.

For more information on the fantastic work that the March of Dimes is doing today and to find out how you can help, please visit:

www.marchofdimes.com



Photograph by Casey (Cas*)

Contact us!

Do you have any comments or feedback on TeenHelp's Cause of the Month? Do you have suggestions for a cause you would like to see featured in future editions of Avatar? If so, we'd love to hear from you.

Form:

www.teenhelp.org/avatar/submit

Email:

avatar@teenhelp.org



A unique way of seeking help.

What are the procedures for breaking up with someone who is not officially a boyfriend or girlfriend? For example, if I went on just one date and didn't like the person, I just wouldn't reply to their messages any more. But when you get into 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc dates, what are you supposed to do? What is the etiquette here?

Hey there, I think the best thing to do here is to be honest, and to make sure you do this sooner rather than later. The longer you wait to tell someone you're not really interested, the harder it's going to be on you (who, in the end, still has to end up saying it) and for the other person (who will continue to invest their feelings in you and try to figure out if you're reciprocating those feelings).

I have to be honest and say that I don't know any unwritten "dating rules" or etiquette that says what exactly to do in this situation, so I'm just going to give it my best guess based on my own experiences and past dating situations. If I were you, I'd say something along the lines of, "Hey, I had a lot of fun hanging out with you, but I just don't feel like I'm really able to 'click' with you, and I just don't think it's there at this point." And then politely, but firmly, break it off, in a way.

Take good care of yourself; you'll have to let us know how it goes.

These are probably stupid questions, but... how do you know if you're depressed? And how do you know if it's time to see a doctor about it?

Hi there! Well I think I should start with those are not stupid questions at all. They're very important especially if you feel you may be depressed. Obviously if you think you may have depression you are feeling pretty down sometimes. However there's a difference between being sad and suffering from depression. People who suffer from depression let that "down" feeling take over a lot of their life. You may find you're isolating yourself from everyone else, not wanting to do things you previously enjoyed, extremely tired and worn out almost all of the time, and you might have thoughts of harming yourself or worse, suicide. Of course there are many other symptoms that can easily be found online. When depression gets to the point where you feel it may be starting to control you you should reach out for professional help, professionals can work wonders. Good luck.

I go to school online and am required to complete my courses by mid-January. I asked my parents if I could stay home while they visited family for Thanksgiving. My dad said they wouldn't ask anything else of me this year if I would go. I ended up going, which put me behind in schoolwork that I was already behind in. For my birthday, my sister bought me tickets to a concert five hours away. We're going there for a few days and I still haven't caught up on the schoolwork. My plan is to complete my classes in the remaining three weeks. but my parents are now asking me to go on vacation with them. If I go, we won't be back until January, which gives me nowhere near enough time to finish. They told me that I can do it at my grandparent's house but honestly, I've tried to do schoolwork on vacation before. It doesn't happen. No one reminds me and all they do is complain when I tell them I can't spend time with them. How do I get my parents to agree and let me stay home?

I think what it all boils down to is having an honest talk with your parents. If you have a lot of work to do and know you won't be able to finish it, clearly express to them why you feel like it just wouldn't work out. Give them examples of times where you have been in the situation and didn't have a good outcome so that they can see the point you're trying to make. If you have a working plan that you have to finish in a certain amount of time, show your parents all of the work as well. Let them know an estimate of how long each thing takes to do, along with the details of what it is that you have to do. Once they see how much there is to do in how little time, they may be more reasonable with you.

I'd say something like this: "I understand that the holidays are important, mom (or dad). I really do enjoy spending the time with you guys, but I have a lot of work to do and when we discussed my work at Thanksgiving, we did agree that I could spend this time now doing it. If I go now, I won't be able to focus on my studies and get things done. It didn't work out when we did _____ last time. I ended up doing _____ instead. Can I show you what I need to do within the next few days (or weeks)? I'd really appreciate it if you did consider leaving me stay home. This is very important to me."

Hopefully by doing so, they'll let you stay and do your work. Best of luck!



A unique way of seeking help.

I'm a first year in University and I am bisexual. Last year I came out to some of my close high school friends, I did not come out to my family. I chose not to immediately come out to my friends at school. The problem is that now I am interested in a lesbian girl at school. I can't pursue anything with her until I come out. I'm afraid for all the reasons anyone is ever afraid to come out. I'm also quite afraid that it would come between how close my roommate and I have gotten (I have no sexual interest in my roommate) I don't even know if the girl I like would be interested in me and I'm afraid of putting myself out on that ledge. I don't know, I feel like I should

Hi there. I have a question for you; have you heard of the song "Never Say Never" by The Fray? I recently learned a dance to this song, and I must say that the way I interpret this song is so similar to the situation that you're in. To me, it's about whether you should stay in the situation you're currently in, the one where you're probably more comfortable, or whether you should reach to the next level and take a leap of faith. They say that the biggest risk is not taking one at all, so I suppose that's about where I stand on the situation. I think that once you establish yourself as who YOU truly are and who you feel comfortable as, you're going to feel a lot more comfortable around just everyone. You'll also be able to find out who your true friends are, I guess? Yeah, it's definitely going to be difficult, but I think it would be worth it. As long as you make it clear early on in the coming out conversation to your room mate that you're interested in someone else (who doesn't necessarily have to be named at the time), I don't think she's going to be weirded out or anything. I mean, you guys are old enough and mature enough, I feel like, to be able to handle these sorts of things. Nonetheless, that's just my take on the situation. As for whether you should actually talk to the girl you have feelings for and get things started with her, I think you should first try to find out of her sexuality. You're not going to be able to change someone's sexuality, I don't think, but if she's attracted to females, then you could by all means go for it. That just happens to be something that's a very important first piece of information to find out.

I hope things work out! Take good care of yourself.

I'm trying to write a story again. But, I seem to have writers block. I'm trying to think of a story that relates to real life, but I have not been out there much because I have been very protected. I need some story ideas/plots/titles if possible. Can you help a fellow writer out?

Writers block can definitely be a very tough thing to break through. I admit, I've been there many times before. I do happen to think, though, that every person has a unique and intricate story to tell. Even if you haven't lived through certain things, there are other things you have been through which I'm sure would make for a great story. Some people may not be able to relate to some of the issues you've been through, but this is why sharing and helping others to understand can be a wonderful thing. To be more specific, I think that sharing your story on living in a very protected environment and the different struggles, disadvantages and advantages you've come about due to it would be a great topic. It's real, it's a part of your life, and I'm sure it's something you can put your heart and soul into writing about.

When you go to write, if you do decide on the suggested topic, there are some things that can help you to get started. My one personal favorite is to find something that inspires you to write. Whether it's going to a certain quiet place that sparks up your creative side or putting on some quiet music and having some time to relax your mind - think about what it is that gets you in the mood. Be creative and try different things until you've found it. When you are ready to write, brainstorm. Think about things that stand out the most to you and write them down in point form. Try to get as many as you can. Write down brief thoughts you had in each situation that you can expand on later also. If you would like to use character names other than your own, decide on those as well. Be creative with names and pick some of the less common ones. After you have your ideas, organize them. Decide which would be great to come first, and then work from there. Once you have all of details ironed out and organized, writing can be done with much more ease. I've always found that selecting a title of a story or book has been the most difficult part, so if you're not sure what you want to name it, leave it until the end and make it to be something that reflects your story as a whole. It can relate to the feelings of the story, the "protected" idea or even just some thoughts. Whatever you do, though, be sure to have fun writing and to take breaks when necessary. Good luck!



Kicking off your month with pizzazz.

2010 Olympic Winter Games

by Nat (Strider)

The New Year is a time for setting goals and creating opportunities, whether they are about staying active, doing homework, or winning gold medals. It is a time for reaching potential, and striving to have fun along the way. The 2010 Olympic Winter Games is the perfect inspiration for doing something incredible in the New Year, and finding exciting activities to take part in outdoors.

The Winter Games are taking place in Vancouver, British Columbia, and are the third Olympic Games to be hosted by Canada. A number of venues have been built specifically for the Games, including the Richmond Olympic Oval, which is one of the few buildings in the history of the Winter Games to be built at sea level. There will be eighty-six sporting events taking part in the Games, falling under the categories of ice sports, alpine sports, and Nordic sports.

These are some sports in the 2010 Winter Olympics and ways you could try them out yourself:

Alpine Skiing: Also known as 'downhill skiing', is a sport that was named after the European Alps in the 1880s. In this sport, a person skis down a hill on two skis with fixed heel bindings. This differs from Nordic skiing, which uses skis with free heel bindings. The two types of competition are racing and freestyle. In a racing competition, the goal of the skier is to weave through a downhill course in the fastest time possible, whereas a freestyle competition focuses on aerial moves and the use of jumps and half-pipes.

Alpine skiing is a popular recreational winter sport, and is offered at any ski resort. To try it, check to see if there is a ski hill near you.

Bobsleigh, Luge, and Skeleton: These are sports in which one or more people go down an ice track on a fast, and often tiny, metal sleigh. In bobsleigh, the teams consist of either two or four people who each have a specific job. In a two person team, there is a pilot and a brakeman, and in a four person team, there is the addition of two pushers. Luge can have a team of up to two, who slide down the track on the sled feet first. Skeleton is an individual sport, and features a rider sliding headfirst down the ice track.

A common activity similar to bobsleigh, luge, and skeleton is tobogganing, or 'sledding'. This can be done recreationally at some ski hills, as well as at unregulated hills.



Figure Skating and Speed Skating: This is a very disciplined sport that focuses on the artistic movements or speed of the competitors. Figure skating can be done as an individual sport, or in pairs or groups. The skaters go through a series of jumps, lifts, spirals, and other moves during their performance that will be rated afterwards. In speed skating, the participant races against other competitors to try to get the fastest time.

Skating is a fun activity that can be done at indoor or outdoor rinks. Find out if there is a rink near you!

Ice Hockey: The goal of this sport is for each team to get the puck into the opposing team's net. The players use many pieces of equipment, such as skates and a stick, as well as padding and a helmet, as the sport is often very physical. The teams consist of five players and one goaltender, who work together to get the puck out of their side of the rink and into the other team's net.

Ice hockey is a fun sport to play with a group of friends, and outdoor rinks are often the best venues. Signing up with a recreational team in your area is the best way to play competitively and at indoor rinks.

Winter sports are a lot of fun, and are a great way to get outside and get active when it's cold outside. Many can be done recreationally, and there are opportunities to try even the most uncommon ones. Find out if there is a ski hill near you and what activities are available. Just remember to stay safe and make sure you have all of the proper equipment. Maybe someday you will want to compete for the gold medal! ■



Kicking off your month with pizzazz.

International Creativity Month

by Stephanie (Konstantine)

January is International Creativity Month, so what better way to start the month and new year off than with an open and imaginative mind? Since there are many ways to use your imagination and be creative, why not start exploring now?

Creativity is important and it's all around you. It allows you to explore your own unique ideas and thoughts through various methods. It's not just through 'conventional' art that you express yourself, but through everyday actions as well, such as the way you style your hair or through the clothes that you wear. It's a personal thing that you can share with others or keep to yourself.

Exploration is a vital part to becoming more creative and indulging in or finding new talent, and creativity can be a wonderful outlet for emotions, whether they are happy, sad, angry or anything else. Take the time to try out new ways of expression by using new methods of expression. Try out a new fine art form such as painting or writing, or a performing art, such as music or dance. All of these activities can be fun, therapeutic and a good way to meet new people.

Sometimes it may be a little difficult trying to find some inspiration and you may be stuck for ideas of where to start. If you are, here are some tips to get you started:

Think creatively! This may sound obvious, but it's an important thing to remember! You are expressing yourself, not anybody else, so what you're doing and what you classify art as is up to you. If you're struggling with one idea, try and think outside of the box.

Get inspired! A very popular idea is to carry a notebook around with you and to jot down anything that sparks your imagination. If you're a visual artist, carrying your camera around with you can also help. Go to new places and try out new things. Looking at other people's work can also be a great source for inspiration.

Go for it! Try not to worry about what you're doing or what others may think. Don't over-think your ideas, either. Instead, take a leap and see how things turn out - they could go fantastically. Think positively about things!

Most importantly, remember to have fun with what you're doing and take time to enjoy yourself! ■



Photograph by Jessie (Asylum)



Photograph by Stephanie (Konstantine)



When life gives you lemons, make a smoothie!



Mango-Peach Smoothie:

- 1 cup of diced mangos (peeled)
- 1 cup of diced peaches
- 2 cups of mango sherbet
- 1/2 cup of orange juice
- 3/4 cup of ice

Blend until smooth!!

The First Movies of 2010:

1. Case 39 (January 1)
2. Crazy on the Outside (January 8)
3. Leap Year (January 8)
4. Youth in Revolt (January 8)
5. The Spy Next Door (January 15)
6. Tooth Fairy (January 22)
7. When in Rome (January 29)

How do you say it?

Happy - English	Feliz - Spanish
Contento - Italian	Froh - Deutsch
довольный - Russian	Bra - Swedish

Try This out!

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uin-
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wlohe.

Try making one up yourself and seeing if
your parents or friends can read it!



TeenHelp Trivia:

When was the first Avatar issue released?

Name this tune!

"Don't stop come a little closer
As we jam the rythm gets stronger
There's nothing wrong with just a little little fun
We were dancing all night long"

Joke!

How does a Hawaiian baritone laugh?

TeenHelp Trivia: June 3, 2007
Name that Tune: Digital Love by Daft Punk
Joke: A-lo-ha (Aloha)



Expressing life through your fingertips.

The Train to Nowhere

by depressedcatlover

Naia looked behind her at the rusty train tracks. She had just missed the train to the place she was heading, Thunderbird Lake. She knew no other trains would head that way again, so now she was stuck. She settled on a bench and read the train schedule. It said:

1:00 P.M. Train to Thunderbird Lake

1:20 P.M. Train to Helios Peak

1:25 P.M. Train to Nowhere

Train to nowhere... That caught Naia's eye. Where was nowhere, exactly? She checked her watch. It was 1:10 P.M. Only 15 minutes until the train to nowhere came. She decided to wait for it. Could she possibly be worse off there than she was here. Probably not.

The train to Helios Peak came when it said it would, but Naia decided Helios Peak was too dangerous for her liking. She just waited for the train to nowhere.

The train to nowhere was scarlet, rich ruby red. It huffed and puffed and moved very slowly down the tracks. Naia jumped off her small wooden bench. She boarded the train as soon as it came to a halt. It was empty, there were but a few passengers. She could have had her own compartment, but she chose to sit in the same one as a friendly looking elderly man with a full, white beard.

"Sir, could you please tell me where nowhere is?"

"Depends on how you see it. Some say it is the end of the world, others the beginning, so say it is not even on our planet at all, but somewhere else in the vast universe of ours."

"Oh." Naia folded her hands over her lap. After time she fell asleep, and some while later the elderly gentleman woke her. "We're in nowhere, miss."

Naia left the train quicker than the others, she had no luggage. She stepped off the train and found she was standing on a platform that seemed to be made of a rainbow. Around her there was nothing. She suddenly wanted to go back. She turned, but the train was already leaving the station.

I should have just gone to Helios Peak, she thought to herself. But now, she had made the mistake of coming here, to nowhere.

"Hello, Miss!" called the elderly gentleman. "Do you want to venture farther into the land of nowhere?" Naia nodded. "Then come with me, by all means, come with me."

As to be expected, there wasn't much to see in nowhere. There were no objects to look at - nothing existed. And there weren't many people either.

At the end of the day, Naia returned to her platform. She didn't know if the train was ever coming back to nowhere, but because it was her last sliver of hope she just sat and waited for a train that, though she did not know it, would never come.

Tracks by Stephanie (Konstantine)



Hedon Train Station by Adam



And a happy New Year!

by Casey (Cas*) and Katrina

This month's sign: Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

Capricorn, happy birthday! I hope that as you head on in to 2010, you go in with a bang and with a great birthday - there's nothing like starting off a new calendar year with being another year older. You may wish to think outside the box a little when making New Year's Resolutions this month. Who knows? The perfect one could be right under your nose.

Strength: You are very hard working and reliable. Your loyalty to your friends will not betray you; your friends can count on you in a pinch.

Possible Weakness: If you're not careful, your hot temper may get you into a bit of trouble!

Famous Capricorns: Denzel Washington, Elvis Presley, Mel Gibson, Marilyn Manson, Martin Luther King Jr, Orlando Bloom, Jim Carrey, and Rod Stewart

Aquarius

(January 20 - February 19)

Aquarius, it seems as though, in the past, you've never really made serious New Year's Resolutions. I've got news for you, though! Even though it's past the beginning of the new year, and even if you're in your twenties or older, it's not too late and you're not too old to start making those resolutions now!

Pisces

(February 20 - March 19)

Hey Pisces. I think I've got a bit of good advice for you this month. As you make your New Years Resolutions, just try to truly believe in yourself - you have so much more potential than you can even see in yourself right now. It may be time to resolve to try to be a bit more flexible with your control over your life. Just go with the flow this month.

Aries

(March 20 - April 19)

Ah, hello there, Aries. This month looks like it's going to be a great start to a great year. That's always good news, right? However, as you likely well know, your impulsive nature makes it hard for you to keep resolutions. This year, though, is going to be different if you can keep your cool. That temper of yours often gets out of hand, so work on reigning it in this year.

Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

Taurus, this month, it's important for you to try not to focus on the material things you have or don't have. Whether you have a house full of expensive items or just one single prized possession, none of it matters this month. Instead of focusing so much on material items, resolve to nurture your body and mind this year.

Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Hey Gemini! Year after year you resolve to be on time, or to think of others first. In some years, it has worked. In recent years, though you've found that it's not worked out so well. This year, though, I foresee you actually managing it, if you try hard enough! So, draw motivation from somewhere; otherwise you might very well find difficulties with school or work places. I hope that things work out!



And a happy New Year!

by Casey (Cas*) and Katrina

Cancer

(June 21 - July 22)

Hey there, Cancer. You've always been pretty consistent in making your New Year's Resolutions, but you've found that sometimes, you don't know where to pull the motivation from to keep them. It's so fantastic that you're always so ambitious in your resolutions, and sometimes, you have to remember that in order to keep the bigger ones, you're going to have to take baby steps. Good luck with all of it.

Scorpio

(October 23 - November 20)

Oh, Scorpio! Always fun to research your horoscopes, I must say. This month, while you have some time off from school or work, I would really take advantage of any alone time you may have and just really put in some quality time to evaluate your life and the direction it's heading. This isn't to say that you're not on the right path, but if you're not, there's never a better time to set yourself straight than now.

From the editors: Hi readers! If there's one thing important to know about this set of Avatar horoscopes, it directly relates to the fact that I'm a huge fan of New Year's Resolutions. In lieu of this and the publication date of this issue of Avatar (January 1, 2010), each of your horoscopes will in some way or another relate to the importance of making and keeping New Year's Resolutions and a good area of your life to focus on particularly.

Leo

(July 23 - August 22)

Leo, they say you always like to be in the spotlight, but sometimes I wonder if it's true. Are you really putting your TRUE self out there for other people to enjoy? If not, maybe it's time to start. You have to realize that the majority of people really are going to like who you are inside, so perhaps you could resolve to just let people in a little more; it's never a bad thing to talk about how you're feeling.

Virgo

(August 23 - September 22)

Have you been feeling a little down in the dumps financially lately? If so, now is the time to start working out those saving versus spending habits. A very wise woman once told me that no matter what amount you make, whether it's two of something, or two thousand of something, you should always put ten percent of it, at the very least, into savings. If you've been wondering where you're going to turn to when you truly do need to dig into savings, you'd better start working on those habits now!

Libra

(September 23 - October 22)

Yo, Libra. This is a new year, and it's definitely looking like it's going to be a great one for you (especially in relationships - with friends, with family, and even with a sweet significant other). This year, you're going to need to make a decision--a resolution--and stick to it. No time for indecisiveness now!

Sagittarius

(November 21 - December 21)

Hello. Did you have a good birthday month? I certainly hope so. This month, maybe you should consider making some resolutions pertaining to relationships. Practically everyone that knows you loves you, but nonetheless, it's never a bad thing to improve personal relations with others. Whether they're friendly relationships or something more is irrelevant, but you should perhaps think about somehow just establishing an open line of com-



Acknowledgements

Image sources

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Comic strip: www.xkcd.com

Fun and Games: appleandspice.blogspot.com

Star signs: www.grafamania.net

Articles

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Cause of the Month: The March of Dimes: www.marchofdimes.com

Holocaust Memorial Day: www.scrapbookpages.com; www.ushmm.org

Play and Art Therapy: en.wikipedia.org; members.optusnet.com.au

Thanks for reading!

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of Avatar! Any comments, questions, suggestions or criticisms can be directed towards the editorial team. You can also send us any submissions you have for Avatar, which are a really important part of keeping Avatar alive. We appreciate any submissions that are made to us. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you enjoy the next edition of Avatar!

The Avatar Editors.

Please visit us at the Avatar page, www.teenhelp.org/avatar, or email us at avatar@teenhelp.org.